

## Chapter 6

# Malaise in Society?

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The notion of malaise in human existence reaches as far in the past as reflections on the relation between individuals and society, since individuals strive to comprehend social life but also to understand the reasons why they should resist it or even transcend it. A diachrony of the different analyses of lived experience, which Sartre thought of as 'too much and not enough', remains to be built, across the content of social philosophies, the social sciences or even political pamphlets. Such a project is beyond my scope. This is why I would like to merely regroup here several lines of argument, too familiar to be developed in full, which broaden our view on submission and resistance in contemporary societies.

### **Malaise: history's last word?**

Undeniably, some viewpoints about malaise in contemporary society are familiar and threadbare, for example, the notion that the demise of the so-called socialist or communist regimes, or the Shoah, are what definitively brought individuals to a state of malaise, and made impossible any thinking on transcending established society. Therefore a brighter future is inconceivable, and, consequently, social change impossible. It seems that individuals, for better or worse, are obliged to settle into society. This would explain their malaise. On the other hand, such thinking is as common as the proclamations asserting that 'another world is possible' and that while malaise definitely exists, thanks to voluntary action we are able to move beyond it to create another world, a better world. We must, however, acknowledge the fact that few people take action towards this other world and that individual and collective mobilization rather seeks integration into the social world as it is than reaches beyond it.

To understand malaise in society, a return to classical analyses is in order, for in descriptions and analyses of life within today's capitalist societies, we find statements of fact and notions characterizing our era, things like the individual, malaise or freedom, that have long been developed. The concept of malaise and its ties to the notion of the individual and the idea of freedom have traditionally been a part of social analyses since antiquity. The break with the era of organized capitalism and Adorno's 'administered world' of the twentieth century is so deep that, in the process of the emergence of our era, phenomena that are part of the continuities of social reproduction become explicit in daily life. This demands an

explanation. Social continuities are not relics of a past era or meaningless archaic remainders. The emerging social world is not 'brand new'. It is embedded in the layers of history. Malaise, individualization, the notion of freedom and the demand for it, are parts of that world, as is insecurity, social angst, and the lack of an overarching social project, to mention only a few of the phenomena so readily thought to characterize contemporary society.

Although these phenomena closely resemble phenomena analysed throughout history, particularly by the nascent social sciences in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and by social philosophy, this is not history repeating itself, but a matter of a rather visible continuity that links our societies to those of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Obviously, the empirical shape of these phenomena has often changed considerably. Nonetheless, these continuities merged to give our societies a certain historical depth, even as these societies appear more and more ephemeral in the eyes of their subjects.

'Social insecurity' (Castel 2003) and the 'new social question' (Castel 1995), for example are not simple reproductions of the 'social question' of the late nineteenth century. They are empirical and perceptible forms of society's restructuring which should result in a new social bond between individuals. In both cases social change almost fatalistically imposed itself upon individuals, thus producing both winners and losers.

It is thanks to the continuities that persist within today's societies that we can refer to the analyses of previous eras and better understand our own society. Inversely, we must remain fully aware that these analyses were the product of their own times and that it is impossible to simply transpose them in the present. They can only help us understand the continuities that have existed throughout our societies' history. In doing so, we become aware that very different lines of thinking re-emerge through several arguments that are significant for our analysis.

What changes over historical time is firstly the concrete form and secondly the appearance that these phenomena of continuity have taken. Both aspects are obviously important for the subjects, for it is the conjunction of such concrete forms that comprises their lives. They are essential not only to the subjects' personal experience and worldview but also as a way of understanding societies as such, since concrete, personal experience, and worldviews sustain the constitution of society. Secondly, subjects seek and often find the meaning of social phenomena, their own lives included, in the concrete forms of the social. Thirdly, concrete experience is not some type of dense layer that hides 'true' social relations, i.e. the abstract relations linking individuals. On the contrary, society's most abstract traits combine themselves *inside* concrete experience, although merely describing and systematizing concrete and personal experience is not enough to understand these traits. It is precisely because they do not surface in everyday life that we need to analyse concrete experience. Comprehending and explaining society calls for an analysis of society's abstract characteristics. A critical approach to social phenomena is what unveils them in the analysis. Critique does not denounce anything as if it exposed a scandal; rather it provides an explanation by describing

the negativity residing in each phenomenon. It develops reasoning on the causes that made the analysed phenomena what they are, what they were intended to be or what they pretend to be, as well as on the potential to supersede themselves that these concrete phenomena carry *within* them.

On the one hand, we see the depth of society, the continuities which re-emerge through history and which the subjects view as destiny or as human and social nature to which they must submit or adapt; in a word, live with. On the other hand, what predominates in an individual's personal experience, is a world view in which society, culture, daily life, etc. undergo rapid, radical change and a generalized 'speeding-up' combined with an 'ever more' attitude. Unrest settles in amongst these demands. As personal experience *must* adapt to these changes, doubts arise about one's *ability* and *necessity* to adapt or risk becoming a loser, and also the question, rare though it is, of whether one even wants to adapt. Subjects experience this as 'too much and not enough', but malaise cannot be explained through a description of lived experience.

Throughout history we have, of course, continually been aware of periods that were not overshadowed by malaise and fatalism, periods when the subjects, or more precisely a few subjects, attempted to make their liberty concrete, to free themselves and live differently among others. Of course these attempts generally resulted in opposite ends, whether it was the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, May 1968, or social movements, to name a few examples that are often mentioned both in literature and in daily life. We are now aware of these movements' definitive failure, the counter-ends they came to and the perversion which they underwent. Revolutions did not result in the freedom of humankind, quite the contrary, they generally led to bloody dictatorships. Great mobilizations against established order often proved to be powerful movements that modernized instead of transcending the societies in which they took place.

Indeed, we must note the split that occurred between the latter part of the 1970's and the end of the 1980's. Without elaborating upon its socio-structural aspects here,<sup>1</sup> let us mention, for example, Communitarian capitalism's slow demise in (West) Germany, the disintegration of the working-class movement and of the working classes in France, Great Britain and Italy as well as the implosion of political regimes to the East which was accompanied or followed by the generalization of 'neo-liberalism', something not only the U.S. experimented with but Chile, as well.

In European countries, these changes were largely experienced as 'freedom' from constraints, such as the traditional constraints that previous social collectivities, the working class for example, imposed upon its members in the form of social, normative, cultural and ideological constraints. The general impression was one of being able to breathe more freely, to choose one's lifestyle, material and immaterial consumption or even one's way of life. Many biographical and professional paths, once well-established and traced out, were shattered or erased to make space for

1 Cf. Spurk 2007.

greater individualization but also weakened individuals who now had to 'go it alone'. Regarding a quest for the future we saw an adhesion, often unenthusiastic and generally passive, to the modernization to capitalism, especially in France, where human rights occupied a central role in forging out a new social project designed to replace the project of the working-class movement. In the 1970s, 'the Solzhenitsyn effect' served as a release mechanism in this direction following the publication of his novel 'The Gulag Archipelago', renowned for its denunciation of Stalinist barbarism. This led to a wave of 'anti-totalitarianism' and support for human rights, covered extensively by mass-media, especially television.

Most former militants were brought to heel. Nonetheless, some of the participants' worldviews can be summarized in German poet Ferdinand Freiligrath's chorus, composed after defeat in the Revolution of 1848: 'Trotz alledem-despite everything' or again in another song of revolt by southern German peasants in the sixteenth century: '... defeated let us return home ... our grandsons will do better – Geschlagen ziehen wir nach Haus ... die Enkel fechten's besser aus'. In short, this is not a recent phenomenon and those who still believe in a 'final struggle' often strike us as pathetic, nostalgic veterans, for whom the war is never lost. In their worldview, they have only lost (many) battles. Although the media and folkloric image would like to limit them to that image and despite the fact that there are so few of them, many represent continuity between different mobilizations. They will always be around when resistance and contestation emerge, participating and conveying their experience to others, not merely the young. It would be a fallacy to consider them as some sort of ambulant *avant-garde* for they often serve as a leavening agent stirring things up during mobilizations. Transmission is also carried out in other contexts, in organizations such as associations and trade unions but also in families, among friends etc. The important point is their stubborn insistence on the view that they 'were right all along'. These subjects have changed throughout history and during the course of their lives. It is their obstinacy and their self-conscience, in the sense of the German word *Eigensinn*, which binds them to the past, spurring them on to participate in future projects. It is, in other words, their capacity and willingness to seek meaning in their lives and the society they live in and in doing so they constitute themselves as 'I'.

On the other hand, the lesson most of the older activists and militants have learned, a lesson which resurges in the media and in the political and cultural sphere as well, is that the consciousness of individuation, the consciousness to be and act as 'I' and their self-conscience (*Selbstbewusstsein*) are not imposed as parts of social and economic 'nature' but, ultimately, as parts of human nature. Such is the outcome of this phenomenon! While this in no way relegates subjects to a simple passive role, it does force them to remain within the 'natural' framework. This framework must be accepted. But accepting it does not necessarily imply violence, in the way that a clumsy winner of a war forces submission on his former adversary. There will always be hate left, bitterness and a desire to resist order and revolt against it. The nightmarish idea of a life or a political and social state imposing itself only through violence does not correspond to social reality; such

an order has never existed. As tyrannical as a system of power and domination might be, it cannot exist without the participation of the dominated. For the social to form, subjects must engage in this order, and obviously, a varying degree of enthusiasm is required. They must reconcile themselves to the fact that this order is (the most) reasonable, that another is not feasible in the short term and it is in their best interest to respect it and participate in it. Nevertheless, the rift remains between passion and interest, between the desire for freedom and the desire for happiness. In a word, malaise remains in society.

### Freud and Fromm

Freud and Fromm, for example, gave two classical interpretations of malaise at the crossroads between psychoanalysis and the social sciences. In his famous essay 'Malaise in culture', Freud (1929/1971) analyses malaise as the confrontation between drives, between the life and the death instinct throughout the course of an individual's lifespan. He presents us with a suffering individual, torn by emptiness, something one can only partially and temporarily bypass. Suffering, however, never completely disappears. An individual never completely rids himself of his 'bad conscience' despite his constantly repeated efforts. For Freud, 'life is too hard' for individuals. The culture in which an individual exists, of which he is a part and where he experiences this malaise, is both a profoundly interiorized social tie and a link of domination. Suffering settles in permanently because the human being is dominated by nature, due to the finitude of life and the caducity of his body. Certainly domination within a given society cannot be reduced to nature's domination over the human being. Freud expressly suggests forms of domination peculiar to state and society. Technology, often thought as a means of overcoming this domination, in fact reinforces it.

Freud's intention is not to establish absolute and eternal truths. He clearly realizes that society develops and changes, it is not caught up in a cycle of identical reproduction or eternal return. Nevertheless, happiness was not established in history's course. While this notion might first appear rather obvious, it calls for an explanation, because it is the individuals themselves who create within their culture the social dynamics by which they try to overcome dissatisfaction and suffering. However, try as they might, they are unable to build happiness. They have a certain idea about happiness, a negative idea according to which happiness is the absence of suffering. Since they are unable to move beyond suffering and in order to accept this, they escape into sublimation, art or religion for example, but also through distractions such as drugs and other destructive activities. The struggle between eros and the death drive, which according to Freud, characterizes culture, also takes place within the individual, thus creating feelings of guilt, bad conscience, the fear of losing the love of others, but also regret. The conjunction of these feelings creates malaise and also explains the importance of a need for

punishment in order to maintain society: punishment allows us to expiate the 'faults' an individual experiences as 'malaise'.

While Freud's analysis was undoubtedly one of the great classical interpretations of 'malaise', it has been strongly criticized. Among these critics, Erich Fromm is of particular interest here. Developed in a lengthy, continual study between the 1920s and the 1940s,<sup>2</sup> culminating in his book 'Fear of Freedom', Fromm soberly points out that 'while Freud's observations are precious to us, his interpretation is flawed' (Fromm 1941/1963: 232). Fromm analyses malaise from the point of view of individualization and its intimate ties to capitalism. He criticizes Freudian analysis for its naturalistic 'biologism' and fatalistic traits, i.e., 'the importance that [Freud] places on instinct and ... the profound conviction he has about human nature's weakness' (op. cit. 234–5) according to which, we might add, the human being is and will always remain under the domination of nature. Fromm refuses to acknowledge a natural order whereby humans would find themselves fatally locked into malaise because of instinct and the struggle against it. Without elaborating on his analysis and his critique of Freudian psychoanalysis, let us retain a few arguments that directly apply to this topic.<sup>3</sup> For Fromm, ideology and culture are the two offspring of the social character, available to mankind throughout different periods of history and the social character '... is the product of the social mode of existence and acts upon evolution in its turn' (op. cit. 236). He categorically refuses the Freudian position according to which culture is born exclusively of psychic factors.<sup>4</sup> In an argument against this psychologism, Fromm insists that social character and in general '... psychological forces [are] modelled after life conditions ... [and that they] also possess a personal dynamism' (op. cit. 237).<sup>5</sup> Fromm explains malaise as a dialectic between individualism and the development of capitalism. Liberally applying Marx's writings and critiquing those of Weber (1920/1988, 1921/1972), Sombart (1913) and numerous other German authors, Fromm characterizes individualization as a particularity of capitalism in addition to being one of its essential phenomena. It results from a twofold freedom: freedom *from* and freedom *to*. In capitalism it is only 'freedom from' that dominates the subject's life. A part of what he calls 'freedom from' is well documented in literature. This is the freedom from constraint and obligation in traditional society (servitude, for example). However, subjects are also freed from the certainties of the old social order, for example the stability of social relations and certainty about life beyond earthly existence. 'Freedom from' is negative freedom in the sense that it refers to a non-freedom that no longer exists. Henceforth 'freed' individuals are alone, they find themselves isolated,

2 See especially Fromm 1941/1963/2008, chaps 1–4, on the subject of 'modern society' pp. 80–162; also, Fromm 1937 and Fromm 1932.

3 For a detailed discussion of Fromm's analysis see Spurk 2007.

4 Op. cit. 235. It is not at all certain of course that Freud would defend such a radical psychologism.

5 See also Horkheimer/Adorno 1947, chapter 7.

powerless and full of angst. Fromm developed on many occasions a diachrony of the relationship between individualization, the 'freedom from', and capitalism, and he noticed that individuals develop a plethora of ways to escape their freedom, especially authoritarianism, destruction and conformism and these feed, among others, the illusion of individuality (op. cit. 175–85). 'Freedom to', on the other hand, is the potential to surpass negative freedom to consciously construct social ties with other individuals, transcending one's isolation, powerlessness and angst. Obviously, 'freedom to' does not exist, but its potential does. Yet this is frightening, frightening because an individual fears losing what she understands to be the relatively solid bases of her existence, i.e. multiple forms of heteronomy. Thus, fear of freedom inhabits and characterizes individuals. It is why they run away from their freedom. This, however, by no means implies that escapism leads to an elimination of either 'freedom to' or 'freedom from'. An individual lives out his or her existence pulled between these dual forms of freedom which are the embodiment of malaise in culture and in modernity.

### Taylor

Analyses of malaise are not exclusive to twentieth-century classics. We also find them in contemporary work. Charles Taylor (2002) for example, opts for a 'malaise' he explicitly situates in modern, contemporary society. While the title of his study 'Malaise in Modernity' reminds us of Freud's essay, he does not refer to Freud in his argumentation. Taylor's argument is of a completely different nature. For Taylor, malaise is a combination of the 'characteristic traits of contemporary culture and society that individuals perceive as being decadent or backwards, despite civilization's 'progress' (Taylor 2002: 9). This approach closely resembles Fromm's, although Taylor does not explicitly refer to Fromm either. According to Taylor, this malaise is a combination of 'loss of meaning ... the final eclipse ... the loss of freedom' (op. cit.: 18). In his own way, of course, and like so many other authors, he insists on the importance of individualism, something he considers as 'the most beautiful attainment of modernity' (op. cit.: 10) and which has greatly strengthened an individual's choice of lifestyle. One can now follow one's convictions, 'master one's destiny' (ibid.). Obviously, compared to the nineteenth century or even the 1980s an individual's freedom of choice concerning modes of consumption and lifestyle for example, has developed considerably. On the other hand, it is questionable whether the potential and capacity to act according to one's convictions and to master one's destiny as put forward by Taylor, refer to visions that individuals hold or they have the real capacity to act according to their convictions. To master their destiny, subjects are required to form their convictions in an autonomous manner; but they live in a profoundly complex heteronomy. Nonetheless, as Taylor points out, today's justice system protects individual rights at least in the sense that in the West individuals can petition for their rights.

Taylor insists on the fact that existing malaise and our attempts to transcend it should not lead us to abandon individualism. 'We have acquired our modern freedom by cutting off ancient moral horizons' (ibid.). But which freedom are we dealing with and who are 'we'? Moreover, severing ties with 'ancient horizons' does not merely refer to morality, it concerns all aspects of existence, i.e. Fromm's 'freedom from'. '... [traditional societies] while limiting us, also gave meaning to the world and to social life ... [for people] their place in the chain of beings gave them meaning' (Taylor 2002: 11). Taylor is right in reminding us that this process was evoked in the literature many different times as 'loss of the heroic dimension in life' (op. cit.: 11) and considered to be a search for 'small and vulgar pleasures' (Tocqueville 1986: 385) or a lack of passion in Kierkegaard's terms or again a 'pitiful comfort' (Nietzsche 1971: 3). As for Taylor himself, he interpreted this split with traditional society as a loss of ideals that led to limiting life. In the vein of traditional Toquevillian analysis of democracy, he underlines that by creating equality between individuals who withdraw into themselves, democracy also creates the 'threat of entirely retreating into the solitude of one's own heart' (Tocqueville 1986: 127). This is for Taylor the 'sombre side of individualism': withdrawal into oneself, a shrunken, flattened life, loss of meaning and a lack of concern for others and society.

Taylor also brings up another well-known argument, which appears in the writings of Weber and the Frankfurt School, for which he gives his own interpretation. The domination of society by instrumental reasoning brings about disillusionment with the world. In this case, instrumental reasoning greatly resembles Weber's 'rationality' (Zweckrationalitat), the evaluation of the 'simplest means to arrive at a given end' (Taylor op. cit.: 12). A disillusioned society is dominated by instrumental reasoning and no longer has a sacred structure at its disposal. This loss is both liberating and, at the same time, a threat to our lives. Taylor thus agrees with Fromm's view, extended in an explicitly Weberian way: the prestige and supremacy of technology narrow and flatten our lives. There reign the ephemeral and impersonal mechanisms, the Weberian 'iron cage' which cripples the human being. On a political level, the domination of instrumental reasoning favours gentle and paternalistic governments, 'the immense tutelary power' (Tocqueville 1986: 385), for introverted subjects no longer wish to participate in public life. This withdrawal into self is the basis for the ideology of total fulfilment that has governed behaviour since the 1960s (Bloom 1987).

'Moral force ... hides behind ideals of self-accomplishment ... many people today feel obligated to do [what must be done], they think they must do it, or else they will be failures or will not succeed in life' (Taylor op. cit.: 24-5). If, as Fromm has written, appropriate social character is the desire to do what is expected of us, it is easy to fathom society's current malaise, wherein we must attain self-fulfilment and have a desire to attain it because that is what is expected of us without our necessarily being able to accomplish this. Taylor sharply criticizes this form of 'culture of authenticity' as he suggests that 'the affirmation that a possibility to choose constitutes something positive in its own right, is a deformation of this

ideal' (ibid. 31), the ideal of authenticity. Intimately tied to individualization since the eighteenth century, authenticity implies that 'I am honest with myself ... true to my own originality ... thus I define myself' (ibid. 37). This is the foundation of our modern ideal of authenticity, our objectives of self-fulfilment and self-actualization. However, subjects have greatly lost sight of their choices. 'The free choice ideal only has meaning if certain criteria count more than others' (ibid. 47). Finally, our societies become fragmented. Taylor shares this idea with many authors, a notion he explains as '... members having an increasingly difficult time identifying with their political collectivity in terms of community' (ibid. 123).

Without lingering on Taylor's arguments, we can conclude that, because on the one hand instrumental reasoning has an important hold on our imaginary and because, on the other hand, our choices for different 'horizons' are gradually slipping away, instrumental choices are increasingly less meaningful for their subjects. We can also conclude that in modernity malaise is, among other things, a situation of uncontested heteronomy, for freedom is lost due to the domination of instrumental reasoning under the influence of a culture of self-fulfilment and authenticity. 'We are free when we redefine the conditions of our proper existence, when we can control what dominates us. This ideal ... tends towards integrating instrumental reasoning into a project of domination rather than towards subordinating it to other ends' (ibid. 107).

### Malaise and fatalism

Malaise in a society can easily evolve into profound fatalism, both in daily life and in social analysis, if subjects consider this malaise to be inevitable and natural. In this case, social change is not foreseeable because it is unthinkable and accordingly impossible. In terms of action, we must adapt and deal with this situation, often at a heavy cost without any guarantee of success. Shortcomings and suffering have to be accepted, limited or mastered. This reasoning is compatible with social analyses which, in the positivist tradition, so dominant in the social sciences, treat the social as fact, to paraphrase Durkheim. In that context, there is a need to describe the social world, order and classify its components and our knowledge about everything social so that we can better learn how this world works and how to master it. In the same tradition, we can look back into the past to see how this world became what it is by constructing a necessity due to which society finds itself in its current condition. Our social world has been produced by what can be described as a fatality.

As diverse as positivist approaches are, they do share the fear and distrust of the concrete human being, women and men acting both consciously, because they have their reasons for acting, and often reasonably, following instrumental reasoning and their own best interests, or more precisely following what they believe to be in their best interest. In that line of analysis, we concern ourselves with the objectification of their action and eliminate their subjectivity. Accordingly,

subjects completely disappear from the analyses or are reduced to the status of agent. Obviously, by eliminating the subject, the conscious human being, we also eliminate our potential to move beyond this world, the world as it is now, for in order to move beyond, subjects must project themselves into a future different from the quasi-automatic extension of our current state. The change that we ascertain, seek, embrace or fear, comes from the outside and imposes itself on the subjects as another fatality crashing down upon them or threatening to do so. In sum, one way or another 'the hand has been played' (Sartre 1947). The circle of submission is closed, thinking or wishing to go beyond it would be pure and naïve prophecy.

On the other hand, an analysis along the lines of socialized subjectivity shows that submission is a possibility of social reproduction. It is doubtless the most frequent in history but resistance is foreseeable, thus possible, and it does exist. Yet, acknowledging this in no way means that a given social condition will necessarily be transcended. Such an idea would be mere nonsense. One can even suggest that the incorporation of practically confirmed resistance has reinforced fatalism even more. Resistance, however, makes transcending a given social condition a possibility.

### Resistance?

The word 'commitment' both in common parlance and in the social sciences means less the way we exist in a situation alongside others and more a conscious commitment, e.g. that of intellectuals or militants, to a cause, an effort to remove oneself from a situation of dissatisfaction and move beyond. It is the main *raison d'être* for intellectuals as well as for a variety of organizations or associations addressing, for example, human rights or the third world.

Understanding malaise involves placing the subject at the centre of the analysis, dealing with the individual who experiences all the paradoxes and contradictions that we have addressed so far. Let us first keep in mind that subjects have always existed in historically constituted, concrete situations, belonging to a certain era. The major transformations of previous decades discussed earlier indicate that the contingencies of individuals in contemporary societies differ from those of the 1960s, for example. We have seen profound breaks with that era; we have also observed continuities linking situations of today to the three 'glorious decades' that started in the 1950s as well as with a much more distant past. Each individual exists alongside others only in concrete situations and in a given, structured world. Let us keep Hegel's view in mind that 'I' is not a choice or a possibility regarding the Other, but a necessity. I see myself in the eyes of the Other and *vice versa*. The Other is who I am not. This means, among other things, that I don't confuse myself with the Other. On the contrary, by recognizing myself in the Other I place myself in a relationship of violence and struggle, the 'struggle for recognition' (Hegel 1807, Honneth 1992) based on the confrontation between the two *Eigensinn*, mine and the Other's.

Whatever the form of that recognition, the Other is and remains the one who I am not. Our relationship will always be violent and more or less barbaric. For this reason we develop different 'master figures' (Enriquez 2007) just as we might develop various 'slave figures'. The individual lives out the paradox of his freedom and the forces and sufferings imposed upon him, such as malaise. On one side, he concretely lives out the pleasures and joys, on the other side the sufferings and needs, for which he must find an explanation in order to exist within society. An individual must create a view of the world, particularly the social world, within which he lives, in which he is integrated and which is ascribed to him thanks to socialization. Individuals must give themselves reasons to act. Often, he makes use of 'ideal models' and these give him the impression that there are definite, eternal references which he can use as bearing points. The world is largely elusive. It controls him, yet he is obliged to act without mastering his destiny. Laws and forces imposed upon him are his second nature. His vision of himself and of the other subjects becomes naturalized, as if they are all obeying 'human nature'. They are object-subjects and their actions are inert. However, neither their lives in general nor their actions in particular have an *a priori* given meaning. They must find this meaning by giving their actions and their lives an end; they are confronted with a search for meaning. Worldviews, reasons to act and ideal models provide subjects with schemas of interpretation of reality enabling them to find meaning in their lives and actions. Weber calls this meaning that the actions have for the subjects 'subjective meaning'.

The explanation and the belief that subjects follow 'human nature' and the laws of a social second nature, economic and cultural, do not prevent them from meeting with resistance in their lives and their acts. They must then either submit themselves to it or transcend it in order to lead their existence. In this manner, they *commit themselves to a future* and this commitment can lean on explicitly developed historicities or reifications imposed on individuals who throw themselves into projects by necessity, desire or intention. 'There can be no *resistance* and, consequently, negative forces, except inside a movement which determines itself *with reference to the future*, i.e. to a certain kind of integration' (Sartre 1960: 198). Resistance is not reducible to heroic or pathetic acts. It can be the relationship between 'I' and a person or a thing posing an obstacle to needs, to Eros or to an individual's will; or it can be the force, belief, will and action of an individual against objectifications or against Others opposing him. In other words, he struggles against domination in all its diverse forms. Resistance always has a dramatic aspect, but it does not automatically lead us to surmount the obstacles encountered. Transcending social conditions is merely a possibility, reproducing them is the rule.

The project of the subject breaking away from his contingency towards a possible and open future involves a developed understanding of resistance. Because the future is open, resistance can take three directions: either it develops into 'malaise' (Freud) or suffering. In this case there is no perspective of transcendence and the future imposes itself upon the subject. Or, the subject understands the situation

(Sartre) and develops, based on this understanding, a reasonable project. This is the long tradition of Enlightenment. Or, again, the subject, with the help of his worldview develops his reasons for acting, without necessarily comprehending the situation. In this case, there are two variants. Either he relinquishes himself to an imposed future, reverting back to the first possibility or he develops an autonomous project resembling the second possibility. Social movements represent this variant.

Three types of theories correspond to these three possible developments: to the first, traditional theory in general, and positivism in particular. To the second, critical theory and to the third, programmatic discourses which, strictly speaking, are not theories.

While situation and individual freedom go hand-in-hand, they are integrated into a social and cultural totality and interpenetrate each other. The reciprocal ascription of the individual in society and society in the individual form what we call socialization. This gives, among other things, birth to the social character and the individual character. The individual must constantly negotiate to exist within society. *A priori*, however, there is no harmony between individuals and society. Socialization is a never-ending process, whose roots, on one side reach far back to the dawn of capitalism and which, on another side, are lived out on a daily basis. The question arises as to whether contemporary subjects can – still – accept what is inauthentic, whether they can – still – accept the fact that their lives and society in general are not what they pretend to be, i.e. free, self-managing and creative, but subtle forms of heteronomy forcing them to commit themselves anew to modern ‘voluntary servitudes’. If this is impossible or no longer possible, resistance can no longer lead to social transcendence. Surrendering to the forces imposed upon the subject is then a real fatality to which one can only adapt.

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