

## ELIAS CANETTI: DISCUSSION WITH THEODOR W. ADORNO

**Adorno:** I know that in many respects you differ strongly from Freud and are very critical toward him. In one methodological respect, however, you are surely in agreement with what he often emphasized, above all when psychoanalysis was still in its formative stage and had not yet become something completely reified, that he had no intention of rejecting or disputing the results of other established sciences but wanted to add what they had neglected. This neglect and its causes he considered extremely essential, since it possesses a crucial character for human life together, just as is the case for you. You could, I believe, elucidate this best through the central importance that the question of death plays in your work, as it does also for many, in the widest sense, anthropological works today. Precisely in relation to this death complex—if I can speak in such a pompous way of this most elementary fact—you could give our listeners an idea, a model of what this neglected dimension actually is, and what aspects in the experience of death for instance have special value for you, so that we can gain insight into the fruitfulness of your method and recognize that it is not only a question of things which are scarcely reflected but of the dangers of their self-evident acceptance, which you want to bring to consciousness and defuse in the spirit of enlightenment.

**Canetti:** It is, I think, completely correct that the consideration of death plays a major role in my investigation. If I am to give an example of what you referred to, then it would be the question of survival, which in my opinion has been far too little considered. The moment in which a human being survives another is a *concrete* moment, and I believe that the experience of this moment has very grave consequences. I think that this experience is covered up by convention, by what one *should* be feeling when the death of another human being is experienced, but behind this a certain feeling of satisfaction lies hidden and from this feeling of satisfaction, which can even be triumph—as in the case of a combat—something very dangerous can come, if it occurs more frequently and accumulates. This dangerously accumulated experience of the death of another human being is, I believe, a very essential germ of power. I give this example only abruptly and without going into it more closely. As you speak of Freud—I am the first to admit that the innovative way in which Freud approached things, without allowing himself to be distracted or frightened, made a deep impression on me in my formative period. It is certainly the case that I am now no

longer convinced of some of his results and must oppose some of his special theories. But for the way he tackled things, I still have the deepest respect.

**Adorno:** Precisely at this point which you just raised, I would like to register that there is a very strong contact between us. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and I analyzed the problem of self-preservation, of self-preserving reason and discovered in the process that this principle of self-preservation which finds its first classic formulation in the philosophy of Spinoza, and which you call in your terminology the moment of survival, that is, the situation of survival in the exact sense that this motif of self-preservation, when it becomes as it were “wild”, when it loses any relation to others, is transformed into a destructive force. You did not know our work and we did not know yours. I believe that our agreement here is not by chance but points to what has become acute in the crisis of the contemporary situation, which is after all the very crisis of a wild self-preservation, a wild survival.

**Canetti:** I am pleased to hear that your own thinking has led to similar results and that the fact of our independence adds to their cogency.

**Adorno:** I think so too. On the other hand, however, there is a methodological problem which is important for our intention of determining the place of your thinking. For a thinker like myself, whether he calls himself a philosopher or a sociologist, what strikes me first of all about your book, and what is—if I may say so openly—something of a scandal, is what I would call the subjectivity of your approach. By subjectivity I do not mean the subjectivity of thought, the subjectivity of the author—on the contrary: precisely the freedom of a subjectivity, which does not tie thinking in advance to the approved rules of the sciences and does not respect the boundaries imposed by the division of labour, is enormously sympathetic to me—but I mean by subjectivity the point of departure from the subjects under investigation, put more sharply, the point of departure from forms of representation (*Vorstellungsweisen*). I am very conscious that you derive, moreover, not so very differently from Freud, the basic concepts you employ—crowds and power—ultimately from real conditions, just as I would, that is, from real crowds and real powers, from experiences of the real. Nevertheless, the reader cannot quite shake off the feeling that in the development of your book the imagination—the representation of these concepts or facts, the two go together—is in fact of a greater significance than they are themselves: for instance, the concept of invisible crowds, which plays a major role for you, points to this. And I would like to put the really simple question to you to give our listeners a clearer idea of what is actually involved—how do evaluate the real significance of crowds and of power or the bearers of power in relation to the inner representation, in relation to the images, analysis would say, the *imagines* of the crowd and power, with which you are concerned?

**Canetti:** I would like to take some time to answer this question. You refer to my concept of invisible crowds. Here I would like to say that invisible crowds only appear in the short chapter 14 of my book, which is preceded by 13 other chapters, in which I deal with the real crowd very intensively. The concept of the book is, I believe, as real as it can be. I begin with what I call the fear of being touched. I think that the individual human being feels threatened by others and has for this reason an anxiety about being touched by something unknown, and that he seeks to protect himself by all means from being touched by the unknown by creating distances around himself, by striving not to come into too close contact with other human beings. All human beings have experienced this, that you try not to jostle against others, that you do not like being jostled by others. In spite of all preventative measures human beings never lose completely their fear of being touched. What is remarkable is that this fear disappears completely in the crowd. It is a really important paradox. Human beings only lose their fear of being touched when they stand closely packed together in a crowd, when they are surrounded on all sides by other human beings, so that they no longer know who is pressing against them. At this moment the individual no longer fears contact with others. His fear of being touched reverses into the opposite; I believe that one of the reasons why people like to become a crowd, like to become part of the crowd, is the relief they feel at this reversal of the fear of being touched. I think this is a very concrete approach; it starts from a concrete experience which everybody knows from the crowd. Now, in the following chapters I examine other aspects of the real crowd. I speak of open and closed crowds. I stress that crowds always want to grow, that this compulsion to grow is decisive for them. I talk about the feeling of equality within the crowd and many other things which I do not want to mention now. Then in chapter 14 I come to the concept of invisible crowds, about which I would perhaps like to say something briefly: for anyone who has occupied himself with religions, and especially with primitive religions, it is very striking the extent to which these religions are peopled by crowds, which human beings cannot actually see. We need only think of the spirits which play such a role in primitive religions. There are countless examples of the human belief that the whole air is filled by these spirits, that these spirits occur in massed forms—this carries over into our universal religion. We know the role that the idea of the devil, of angels played in Christendom. There are very many testimonies in the Middle Ages. Devils are thought to occur in endless crowds. A medieval Cistercian abbot, Richelin, stated that when he closed his eyes he sensed devils around him as thick as dust. These invisible crowds play a major role in religions and in the conceptions of believers. I would not for this reason regard them as unreal, since these people do in fact believe in these crowds, for them they are something wholly real. In order to understand this fully, we need only recall that in the modern world we also know such invisible crowds. They are no longer devils, but they are perhaps just as dangerous and aggressive and are feared by us just as much. After all we all believe in the

existence of bacilli. Only very few people have looked in a microscope and actually seen them but we all assume that we are threatened by millions of bacilli, which are always there, which can be everywhere, and our representation of them plays an important role.

These would be invisible crowds, which in a certain sense I would call real; I believe that you would concede that we can speak here of a kind of reality of these invisible crowds.

**Adorno:** Please excuse the pedantry of an epistemologist in my reply. First of all, there is a difference between primitive consciousness, which does not yet distinguish so strictly between reality and representation, and the developed Western consciousness which rests in fact on this separation. The fact that in archaic thinking, in primitive thinking no distinction is yet made between the imagination of such djinns, or whatever spirits it may be, and their real existence does not mean that they have become objectively real. We cannot jump over our own shadow, which tells us in God's name that the world is not peopled by spirits. And for that reason I would say, according to what you have said so far, that a certain primacy of the imaginative, of the transposition into the world of representation is dominant with you in relation to drastic unmediated reality, since I do not believe—this is perhaps not unimportant for clarifying your intentions—I do not believe that you espouse the position represented by Klages on the one hand and by Oskar Goldberg at the other extreme, namely that these images, these *imagines* possess as collective entities a direct reality, comparable for example with the reality of the masses in modern mass society.

**Canetti:** No, I certainly would not say that. Nevertheless, I have arrived at the establishment of a concept, which seems important to me: the concept of crowd symbols. By crowd symbols I understand collective units, which admittedly do not consist of human beings but which are nevertheless felt as crowds. To these units belong representations like fire, the ocean, the forest, wheat, the treasure, heaps of many kinds,—for example, heaps of the harvested. Now these are surely units which actually exist; they are used in the mind of the individual as crowd symbols. It is necessary to explore these individual symbols and show why they have this function and what significance they acquire in this function. In order to give a practical example, I would say that these crowd symbols had decisive importance for the formation of national consciousness. (**Adorno:** Absolutely!) When human beings who identify themselves with a nation at an acute moment of national existence, let us say, define themselves as English or French or German at the beginning of a war, then they think of a crowd or a crowd symbol as that to which they relate. And this has an extremely powerful effect in their minds and is of the greatest importance for their actions. You would, I think, perhaps go this far with me in seeing the undeniable effectivity of such crowd symbols, present in the individual.

**Adorno:** Here I agree with you completely. I think that with your discovery of the forest, for example, as an *imago*, as a crowd symbol you have hit on something really essential. I consider these things eminently fruitful. Compared with the somewhat bare archaic symbols we find in Freud and on the other hand the somewhat arbitrary archetypes of Jung, it seems to me that such categories represent a real advance. But may I also say: even after this explanation, in which the concept of the symbol is not by chance central, it still remains the case that your interest is directed to categories which have already been internalized, already transposed into the imagination. What I would like to ask you is something very simple and straightforward—a question also to be put analogously to psychoanalytically oriented social theory—namely whether you believe that these symbols are really crucial for the problematic of contemporary society, which is your primary concern no less than mine. Or are the real, the actual masses, that is, simply the enormous pressure exerted by the gigantic numbers of human beings (even though the organization of society simultaneously supports and hinders the preservation of life)—is not the pressure of these real masses on political decision-making more important for contemporary society than these imaginary, in a wider sense social-psychological, matters to which you refer? Let us not forget that it turned out that even movements, which were apparently extreme dictatorships without any democratic consideration for popular opinion, such as Fascism and National Socialism, always latently possessed what the sociologist Arkadi Gurland has called a compromise character, that is to say, even in these forms of domination and tyrannization of the masses consideration of the real interest of the masses and of their real existence always asserted itself, even if in a hidden way. What really concerns me—to which you could perhaps reply—is this: how do you actually evaluate, in your conception of society and the crowd, the weight, this real weight of the masses in relation to the whole realm of the symbolic?

**Canetti:** Yes, I would of course say that the value, the significance of the real masses is incomparably greater. I would not hesitate for a moment, I would in fact go as far as to say that the dictatorships we have experienced are made up entirely of crowds, that without the growth of crowds, which is especially important, and without the deliberate artificial excitation of ever larger crowds, the power of dictatorships would be completely unthinkable. This fact is the starting point of my whole investigation. A contemporary of the events of the last 50 years since the outbreak of World War One, who has experienced first wars, then revolutions, inflations and then fascist dictatorship, cannot help feeling the necessity under the pressure of these events of trying to come to terms with the question of crowds. I would be very disappointed if the fact, that in the course of a investigation over many years I had arrived at other aspects of the crowd, should lead anyone to think that the real meaning of crowds is not decisive and above all important for me.

**Adorno:** This seems to me of fundamental importance for a proper understanding of your intention. If I may make a theoretical point, it would be that a kind of mediation, not in the sense of compromise but of the Hegelian concept of mediation, should be assumed: precisely the real pressure, as you quite rightly recognize, of the deeply entwined categories, crowds and power, has increased to such an extent that the resistance, the self-assertion of the individual has become infinitely difficult. The symbolic significance of these categories has thus also increased, such that human beings retreat as it were back into archaic phases of their psychic world, where these internalized categories acquire a bodily meaning and are completely identified with. It is presumably only through the growth of these two correlative categories that human beings have come to resign themselves to their own disempowerment, by giving them meaning as something numinous, perhaps even irrational and therefore holy. To this extent I think there exists a connection between the growing symbolic significance of these things and their reality. However, I would like to stress a nuance: and that is, what then returns under pressure, namely the symbolic and the irrational, is not directly what it once was, but is now, I would say, a kind of result, made up of the real situation of human beings and of the world of images, to which they recur or even regress. It seems to me that the fatal, deadly threatening colouring which concepts like leader or crowd so readily take on today, especially when they are short-circuited, comes from the fact that we are no longer dealing with the original circumstances in which they were effective; now they are invoked as it were, and what is invoked from a distant past no longer possesses any truth but is transformed into a kind of poison through its untruth in the present.

**Canetti:** There is much that needs to be said here about the details, where I would correct you in terms of my position. But by and large I would agree with you. I would say perhaps that one of the essential points—a point which always recurs when we consider crowds today—are the archaic elements we find in them. I do not know whether you agree with me that one must pay special attention to these archaic elements as something particularly important. It is not possible to investigate the crowd only as it appears today, even though it appears clearly enough and in multiple form. I believe it is also important to derive it from what has long been there and has often appeared in different forms.

**Adorno:** I would of course agree with you. The archaism, which emerges in crowd formation, has been repeatedly recognized in the tradition of modern social psychology—first of all by Gustave Le Bon in his *Psychology of Crowds*, where he described precisely these archaic, irrational modes of behaviour in crowds and then derived them from the somewhat problematic and vague category of suggestion, and then by Freud, who in his, in my opinion, very significant short work *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego* set out to underpin

Le Bon's description of crowds with a genetic-psychological derivation. Since you stand in dispute with this after all very considerable tradition of social thought—to which the American sociologist McDougall also belongs—it would be good, in the interest of a topological determination of your thinking, if you could indicate the specific differences of your own theory to these authors.

**Canetti:** First of all I would like to go back to the question of the form which the crowd takes in primitive societies, as it is quite clear that primitive societies, which consist of only very few persons, cannot lead to the crowd formations which we know today.

**Adorno:** I have been wanting to raise this very question: can we even speak of crowds in primitive societies, where there were precious few persons? I am glad that you brought this up.

**Canetti:** Here, I think, we need to introduce a new concept. I speak of the pack, and by the pack I mean a small group of human beings in a special state of excitement, which is closely related to the state of excitement of our modern crowds but which is different in that it is limited as opposed to the unlimited growth of our crowds. Packs occur in societies which consist of small groups, some of only 10, 20, 30 human beings, who wander in search of food. The famous models in the ethnological literature for such small groups are the bands of the Australian aborigines. What is striking is that out of these bands, under certain conditions of life, small excited groups form, which have a powerful goal and seek this goal with great energy and in extreme excitement. One kind of these bands is for example the hunting pack. There is a very large animal which individuals cannot master; several must come together in order to hunt down this animal, or the appearance of a large number of animals is involved. They want to hunt down as many as possible, they do not want them to escape, they could disappear again or a time of drought could return and there would be very few animals. For this reason they come together and set out to hunt the one or many animals. The concept of the hunting pack is so evident that we do not need to say much about it. The second pack—which is also obvious—is the one directed against another pack, and this brings us to the war pack. Where there are two packs which threaten each other, then something emerges which we know now from war in sharply increased, indeed enormous dimensions. This situation, however, is already there in early societies: when one pack fights against another. The third form, which is not so evident, is what I have called, perhaps for the first time, a lamenting pack. When a small group loses a member, when a member is torn from them through death, then the group usually comes together to take cognizance in some way of this death. At first they try to hold back, to keep the dying person in the group; when he has died they will turn to some rite, which removes him from the group, which reconciles him

with his fate, which prevents him from becoming a dangerous enemy of the group. There are innumerable very important ceremonies and there is scarcely a people on earth which does not know them. All these connected phenomena I term lamenting packs. Now we come to the fourth form of the pack, which is perhaps the most interesting for us: human beings, who existed in very small numbers, always wanted to be more. If they were more, they could hunt more. If they were more, they could maintain themselves better against another group attacking them. There are innumerable rites and ceremonies which serve increase. Increase does not only mean increase of human beings but also the increase of the animals and plants from which they live. Everything connected with this I term increase packs.

These four forms of the pack seem to me to be firmly established. I think they can be demonstrated in many ways, and it also seems to me that their effect reaches into our time, but it must be added that the first three have a kind of archaic effect. The hunting pack has become the lynch mob in our modern world. We know cases of lynchings, when people suddenly attack a person (**Adorno:** a pogrom pack!). That naturally goes back to the early example of the hunting pack. We know war, it is all too familiar. We know lament, perhaps more from religions than from the very mild form which it now takes socially. It plays an enormous role in Christendom and in other religions. The increase pack, however, has transformed itself. It was of course completely dependent on changes in the relations of production, and when one speaks of the importance of the relations of production, then I believe we think above all of everything which relates to the increase pack. It is not only an archaic form but has undergone qualitative changes, to such an extent that we do not recognize it in our society, where it appears as production. I believe it is important—I do not know how far you would agree—to distinguish sharply the forms of the pack, which have a purely archaic character, from those which have entered modern life and have become a really contemporary part of our life.

**Adorno:** Let me try to express the core of what you said. There is something essential here: for you the concept of the crowd is not a purely quantitative concept, as is often the case today, but determined by a series of qualitative aspects because it is related to the model concept of the pack, such as hunting, war—which is a somewhat more rational, intensified and higher developed stage of hunting—lament and what you call increase. I think it is important to stress this, as it shows how superficial the current phrases about the age of the masses and so on are, as if it were only a matter of numbers. As Stefan George put it in a well known poem: your number is itself sacrilege, whereas the sacrilege does not lie in the number but in these qualitative aspects which you have emphasised. Of these categories of the pack the first three are very clear, although you would surely agree with me that they cannot be statically separated from each other so simply, but that there is an interdependence between them. Hunting pack and war pack merge with each other, even though the more orga-



nized war pack, compared with what we could call the spontaneous hunting pack, represents the negation of the latter's immediacy.

**Canetti:** If I may interject, briefly: I am convinced that the war pack emerged originally from the hunting pack. (**Adorno:** emerged, yes!) It was a question of exacting revenge on a person who had perhaps committed a murder, and so a group formed, set off in order to revenge this murder. If the group, to which the murderer belonged, defended itself, a second pack was formed and we already have the model of the war pack.

**Adorno:** Exactly! This is, I think, the general opinion of ethnology on this point. To be honest, I have a certain difficulty with the concept of the increase pack, as the whole will to increase seems to me a bit problematic. We have to consider that the commandment to increase, which we have in the great religions, above all Judaism and Catholicism, that this commandment occurs precisely in those religions which are distinguished from the mythical or magical natural religions. One has to assume that in primitive stages of the development of humanity—I am thinking for instance of the construction of a stage of heterism—the question of human increase was given no value. I would rather be inclined to say that this commandment to increase is of historical origin and is tied to the category of property, of property which can be handed down. Only when there is something like property, that must be preserved, that is fetishized, inherited—only at this point can it become a commandment to create heirs, who will take over this property. As a result this urge to increase appears as secondary not as primary.

It would be interesting if you could first say something about this. I would then like to say something about what I see as very fruitful in this category of increase.

**Canetti:** Of the great number of examples, which I have collected, I would like to present two: In the Shi-King, the classical songbook of the Chinese, there is a poem about locusts, which equates the number of descendants with the number of locusts as something to be wished. This poem is short. I would like to read it to you: The wings of the locusts say: join, join. O, may your sons and nephews follow in endless line. The wings of the locusts say: unite, unite. O, may your sons and nephews be for ever one. We have here the large number, the continuity of the descendants, unity, that is, three wishes for the descendants. That the locusts are used here as a symbol for the descendants is particularly remarkable, because locusts were of course feared. Nevertheless, the enormity of their number is exactly what one wishes for one's descendants.

**Adorno:** But isn't this a very late stage of an already organized, institutionalized society, of a state and an organized religion as compared with natural conditions?

**Canetti:** This could perhaps be said. The Shi-King is very old, but ...  
**(Adorno:** All the same, it presumes a highly developed and indeed developed hierarchical society.) That is perhaps true. And that is why I would like to give you another example. This is especially interesting because it concerns totemic myths, which were published only some 15 years ago. The younger Strehlow recorded them among the Aranda. I want to tell one of them. It is about the origin of the bandicoot totem and it says: the ancestor of the bandicoot totem, old Korora, is represented lying at the bottom of a pond in eternal sleep, he has been sleeping for an eternity. One day an enormous number of bandicoots come out of his navel and armpits and he is completely surrounded by them. But he is still asleep. The sun rises. He sits up, gets up, feels hungry, notices that he is surrounded by an enormous number of bandicoots, he grabs in all directions, seizes one of these bandicoots, cooks it in the fierce sun and eats it—eats, that is, one of the creatures which has originated from him. He lies down to sleep and that night a bull roarer falls from his armpit, changes shape and becomes a human being. It is his first son, who grows and is recognized by him as his son the following morning. In the following night more of these sons fall from his armpits. And so it continues every night. Finally 50 sons emerge together from his armpits, and he sends his sons to find bandicoots, which they catch, cook and live from.

We have here a kind of double increase: first he is the ancestor of the bandicoots, which are suddenly generated in gigantic masses, then later a large number of sons are generated from him, the father. One could call him a crowd mother, since he is composed, one could say, of bandicoots and of sons. The relation between these bandicoots and his sons is very interesting. The one feeds on the other. Thus he produced food and also his own sons. He is the ancestral father of the bandicoot totem, and this totem signifies that bandicoots and human beings, who belong to this totem, are related in the closest fashion. The human beings, his human sons, are so to speak the younger brothers of these bandicoots. Many similar traditions could be added to this myth. I believe that we can speak here of a very strong urge to increase.

**Adorno:** I would say here that we are dealing with something very ambivalent—it would take us far afield and I don't think we can discuss this fully here. There is certainly an archaic element which pulls in the direction of the manifold, the amorphous multiplicity of forms. But there is also the opposed element, and it seems to me hardly possible any more to separate the primary and the secondary; and in general it doesn't really help in these questions to ask what is primary and derived. Today at any rate it appears to be the case that the idea of increase—which has of course clear and familiar civilizational and economic grounds—is both desired and feared. This applies to single individuals and families as well as peoples and humanity as a whole, which senses the dan-

ger to its survival in the present forms of organization and beyond that is plagued by the doubt, in part surely imaginary, whether our old earth will be able to feed the measureless increase of humankind.

**Canetti:** If I may add something: this idea of an overfilled earth is also very old and mythical. It already occurs with the ancient Persians and it is also to be found among peoples with a strong tendency to increase, who always emphasized this desire for increase.

**Adorno:** In this ambivalence there is certainly the deep consciousness, on the one hand that all possible life has the right to exist, but on the other hand, given the forms, the institutions in which humanity lived and still lives, that every additional human being on the horizon is at the same time a threat to the survival of the rest. This ambivalence has not only psychological but equally real grounds, however distant. But I would like to broach an issue in your theory of increase which appears very fruitful. You show in one part of your book that production, that is, the increase of goods, has become a kind of self-purpose today or as I would say, it has become fetishized. Now with an economic theory of society one can give rational or pseudo-rational grounds why this has happened, that under present conditions the apparatus of production, and thereby the whole relations of production, can only keep itself going by creating ever new circles of purchasers for its products—a remarkable reversal of the primary and the secondary, with the result that human beings, for whom supposedly this is all there, are in reality dragged along by the machine, which is their own product.

Your theory fills a very good function here. We probably could not understand why this culture of production for the sake of production flourishes everywhere on earth, independent of the different political systems, if it did not appeal so strongly to something in human subjectivity, in the whole unconscious, archaic inheritance we have.

Otherwise how could the simple objection fail to be raised: why should we produce more and more when what is produced in reality has long been sufficient to satisfy our needs. That this question is not asked, seems to me to indicate that this apparatus of production can mobilize enormous libidinal energies in the masses, which it can use for its own constant and ultimately very problematic expansion. That is why I consider your viewpoint altogether productive, even if, like me, one is inclined not to place this urge or will to increase at the beginning, as you do.

May I come back to the question which I put to you earlier and to which you have not as yet responded, that is, the question of the difference between our approach and your theories about the crowd and those of Le Bon and Freud, which are after all well known. In general the fruitfulness of a theory lies to a large extent in the minute differences which separate it from related theories.

**Canetti:** Perhaps you will permit me to stress more the differences between Freud's theory and mine, as I find ...

**Adorno:** Le Bon is not actually a theory, rather a description. A description of a relatively narrow phenomenon. The crowds he describes are really the crowds which arise only in quite specific situations such as conflagrations, theatre fires and similar occasions and which are not prototypical for the concept of the crowd as such. I agree that it would be better to discuss Freud rather than Le Bon.

**Canetti:** In relation to Freud, there are some observations to be made: Freud speaks of two concrete crowds, one is the church and the other the army. That he selects two hierarchically structured—let us call them groups—in order to explain his crowd theory, seems to me very characteristic for him. I do not regard the crowd as hierarchically structured. An army is not a crowd for me. An army is a collection of human beings, who are held together by a specific structure of command in such a way that they *cannot* become a crowd. It is extremely important in an army that five persons can be split off by a command; 300 can be deployed as a unit somewhere else. An army can be split at any time. Sometimes, at certain moments, in the moment of flight or perhaps of a very violent attack, it can become a crowd, but in principle an army is not at all in my sense a crowd. It is thus quite significant that Freud exemplifies his theory through the army. Another aspect, which I would emphasize as an important difference, is that Freud actually only speaks of crowds which have a leader. He always sees a single individual, to whom the crowd relates.

**Adorno:** That of course is connected with the theory of the primal father, the father of the horde.

**Canetti:** There are, however, and here I think you will agree with me, also crowds of quite a different kind: for instance, a flight crowd. People in one place are suddenly threatened by ...

**Adorno:** This he conceives as the decomposition of the crowd, quite consistently from his standpoint.

**Canetti:** No, here I think we must distinguish between a flight crowd and a panic crowd. The flight crowd is still in a crowd state, like a fleeing herd, when they all flee together. Panic is a breaking apart of the crowd when each individual simply wants to save his own life. The flight crowd, which is not yet panic and is still a unity, has no leader. It has a direction. The direction is: away from danger! All the same, it shows quite explicit crowd phenomena, which can be individually explained and which are very important. I believe that the lynching crowd does not always have a leader. You will rightly object that lynching crowds are incited by demagogues ...

**Adorno:** Above all in history it has always been the case that precisely lynching crowds were not spontaneous but manipulated. This was already the case during the pogroms of the Crusades.

**Canetti:** That is certainly correct. Nevertheless, I believe there is a lynching crowd before and beyond these directed, leader-related crowds. There are other examples. You will recall that I also presented the feast crowd. This is an example which has nothing to do with a leader. It is a question of a gathering of people and of a great amount of harvest produce, which they want to enjoy together in a state of joy and excitement. Everything is in commotion; one can't even talk of a direction, let alone a leader. Freud's concept of the crowd is, I believe, too dependent on *Le Bon's*.

**Adorno:** He worked from it. It is actually a commentary or an interpretation, a genetic interpretation of *Le Bon's* phenomenology of the crowd.

**Canetti:** I would also say: even if we take this restricted case of the crowd, which Freud sought to explain according to *Le Bon's* description, there are still further objections. There is above all the question of the concept of identification. I consider this concept to be insufficiently reflected, too imprecise, not really clear. Freud says at many places in his work when talking of identification that it is the question of an exemplary model, of the child for example identifying with his father and wanting to be like his father. The father is the model. Now this is certainly right. But what really happens in this relation to the model has never been shown exactly. You were surely rather surprised that such a large part of my book is devoted to the problems of metamorphosis. The second volume will contain much more on metamorphosis. I have really made it my task to investigate all aspects of metamorphosis completely afresh, in order to be able to determine what a model actually is, and what really occurs between a model and the person who follows a model. Only then perhaps will we be able to have clearer ideas about identification. As long as this is not the case I am inclined to avoid the whole concept of identification. You won't find it in my whole presentation of the crowd. I try to do without identification. I have mentioned only a few points, there are others.

**Adorno:** Your critique seems to me to be extremely fruitful and correct in many points, for the very reason that Freud's basic tendency to replace the theory of society by individual psychology extended to the collectivity, leads him time and again to the invariant fundamental quanta of the unconscious, neglecting essential historical modifications. As a result his social psychology remains somewhat abstract. I fully agree that army and church cannot simply be subsumed under the concept of the crowd, rather they are reactions, reactive formations, in which the archaic crowd aspect, which Freud had in mind is also

present, but essentially negated and contained by hierarchy and a certain kind of rationality. And if we take this further, then we can see that precisely so-called crowd phenomena cannot be conceived simply as primary manifestations of the archaic crowd, as Freud thought during the First World War, but consist of reactive formations, that is, regressions to social stages which are actually no longer compatible with the present.

As far as the feast is concerned, it is certainly quite right that we cannot speak of leadership here. May I draw your attention to a very significant work on the feast by the French cultural anthropologist Roger Caillois, in which he attributes the feast to a reactive formation, to a reversal of hierarchically strict rites within very rigid, barbaric societies. They can only assure their own institutional survival by reversing their rules and by allowing in certain exceptional situations, even making a duty of precisely what is otherwise forbidden. In this sense what you would call the feast crowds would also be an historically dynamic and not a primary phenomenon. If I may say something else, what made the greatest impression on me in your book is something which belongs less to the theory of the crowd than to the theory of power, which is of course the inseparable corollary of the crowd theory, namely your theory of the command, which seems to me to be so eminently enlightening and essential because you spell out—and here I would like to recall our *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—what otherwise largely disappears behind the facade of society. I mean that behind all socially approved and expected forms of behaviour there stands, however distantly, immediate physical violence, the threat of annihilation. I think that only when we are clearly aware that society, and thus the self-preservation of human beings itself, has as part of its substance the threat of death, can we fully grasp the frightful interlocking of survival, as you call it, and of death, in the way that you have formulated it. It would be good if in conclusion if you could say a few words about your theory of the command.

**Canetti:** Willingly, although it can't be condensed to a few words: I derive the command—biologically—from the flight command. I believe that the threat from an animal, which feeds on other animals, leads to their flight. A lion in search of prey announcing itself through its roar causes other animals to flee. This seems to me to be the germ of the command, as it developed later and became a very important institution for us. It is originally a flight command. This is very important, since this model has been employed and has become intrinsic to our society. Commands are conveyed without human beings perhaps being aware that they are also receiving a death threat. However commands are given, the threat of death stands behind them. And through the execution of death sentences, common to most societies, the command always regains its frightfulness. The warning is given, if you do not do what is demanded of you, then what is happening in this execution will happen to you. (**Adorno:** Every execution is directed to those who are not executed). And then, to mention a fur-

ther point, examination of the command led me to see that the command can be divided into what constitutes its propelling force, its motor energy, which leads to its execution, and another part, which I call the sting of command. This sting has exactly the form of the command, its content, and it remains in the person who carries it out. A person who carries out a command is not happy about it. Perhaps he doesn't know it; perhaps he doesn't think about it. However, the sting of this command remains in him and this sting is completely unchanging. That is particularly important. Human beings can store up stings and these may come from commands which they received 20 or 30 years ago. They are all there in them and they all want to come to light again through a kind of reversal. Human beings want to free themselves from these stings, they feel oppressed by these stings, and they often seek situations, which represent an exact reversal of the original situation of command, in order to be able to get rid of their stings. It is obvious to what consequences that leads. It is simply a fact that every human being who lives in society is full of stings of whatever kind. They can amount to so many that the individual is driven to quite monstrous deeds, because he is suffocating from his stings of command.

**Adorno:** This is something extraordinarily thought-provoking, above all because it expresses in a very original and unconventional way that the threat of direct violence lives on in all mediations. Every attempt to extract oneself from this sphere is caught in the spell of this mythical cycle, to do again what has been done to one. Nietzsche's wonderful idea, that human beings must be redeemed from revenge, refers exactly to the state of affairs of which you speak. By naming it, by naming this spell in your book, your book is striving—if I have understood you correctly—to serve this purpose, by naming as it were the magic charm of this spell which has bewitched human beings, so that it might one day be possible to escape from this spell.

*Translated by David Roberts*

This 1962 radio discussion was published in Canetti, *Die gespaltene Zukunft* (Hanser Verlag, 1972). We would like to thank Hanser Verlag and Suhrkamp Verlag for permission to translate.