



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

The Invisible Activism

Author: Thomas Tiller

Published: April 17th, 2020, Integrale Perspektiven, Nr. 52, in German

Original German article: <https://www.integralesforum.org/bibliothek/medien/integrale-perspektiven/52-eine-welt-haelt-den-atem-an/der-unsichtbare-aktivismus-von-tom-tiller/>

(Translated by Claude AI, some post editing by Thomas Tiller)

Reference to this article: https://www.tomtiller.de/en/Thoughts/The_Invisible_Activism.pdf

If you ask me whether I believe there is something to be done in the world as I currently experience it, my instinctive answer is: yes, absolutely. And every time I speak with activists, I receive a similar answer without hesitation. It makes no difference whether they are people who have founded NGOs to build schools in India, people who travel to crisis regions as Clowns Without Borders, people who give up their free time to tutor unaccompanied underage refugees, or people who have been attending the Fridays for Future demonstrations for weeks.

I say this at the outset because in the text that follows, I am going to raise a few questions and name a few things that might give the impression I do not believe in the effectiveness of activism, or that I would even advise against it. That is not the case. Quite the opposite. And yet I cannot help but ask these questions and name the corresponding aspects, even when they are uncomfortable at times. Uncomfortable for me, when I face them. But also uncomfortable for others, whom I confront with these questions. I notice it in the way that interest in such a conversation quickly wanes, and how very often the counter-question follows: am I trying to stop the other person from taking the very actions with which they hope to make the situation in the world better?

Of course I am not. And yet I notice that within the particular 'we' of many activist circles there are one or more unspoken – and often unconscious – agreements and assumptions about the world, and that taboos arise from them. One taboo, for example, is to ask whether the people who become active have engaged sufficiently with the situation they are addressing through their activism in order to make the world better. Another example of such a taboo is the question of the evaluative criteria that are applied when it comes to 'improvement'. It becomes even more difficult when I ask what the motives might be of those who do 'bad' things or create situations in the world that lead to suffering. A dialogue about activism becomes practically impossible when one asks in what form, exactly, those who are meant to experience an improvement have, indeed, asked for it. I am putting this somewhat simply here, but I think the principle becomes clear.

Certain currents, all of which are grouped together under the name 'new activism', appear to have answers to at least some of the questions I am going to raise here. Often, however, this turns out to be nothing more than 'classical' activism, which either uses a spiritual dimension as justification for its actions or does the 'right' thing on the basis of ostensibly humanist or progressive value systems – as opposed to those who 'simply haven't understood it yet'. Deep-ecology approaches are one example of this. Or, say, people who meditate and justify it on the grounds that more



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

consciousness will save the world.

A reminder again at this point: I am saying neither that these movements are bad, nor that they achieve nothing. Quite the opposite. But I do ask from which inner place – both in the individuals and in the particular ‘we’ – the corresponding actions take shape. And even here I am not passing judgement. For what is there to be said against a change that helps people, even if it arises from a motivation rooted, for example, in a lack of awareness and clarity, or even in egoistic motives? That, however, is a moral or at least an ethical question, and it is not the one I am concerned with here. Many people have already grappled with this and similar questions, and there is a long list of answers available.

I want to approach a few delicate topics here, which are delicate precisely because they appear to question things held to be valid. Not to cast doubt, but rather to raise awareness for the source of activism, as it will be engrained in all the actions taken. That distinction matters to me. Facing the questions and topics I am going to raise here might be bound up with the worry, or the realisation, that one’s own activism was, in the end, no more than what is contained in the word ‘own’: something one did for oneself. Yet that is precisely what I am aiming at: Inner activism. The work on oneself. The invisible part of activism, which happens one way or another. What makes the difference here – this is my thesis and my own experience, as well as my experience from working with and counselling people – is the degree of awareness, of willingness to face inner conflict, and of readiness to recognise and acknowledge one’s own hidden motives. But in a postmodern world, personal motives have at times fallen into disrepute as egoistic – one of those taboos of the postmodern, Western ‘we’ mentioned above.

I am fully aware that the work on oneself – on all those inner crisis regions, conflicts and under-served areas – costs at least as much time as the work on the ‘grievances’ out in the world. And of course, in all circles where people are active out in the world in order to make it better, there is one shared agreement: that something must be done. Doing nothing often is a further taboo within a ‘we’ that defines itself through activism. It makes no difference whether that is a large network such as Avaaz.org (which I wholeheartedly support) or small associations and private initiatives that concern themselves with discontentment with situations in the world.

Now, my suggestion is not that one should turn only to oneself and grow and cease to be active in the world. Although I must admit that I personally fully acknowledge such an activism too and regard it as neither better nor worse than an activism in the outside world. But I am writing this text primarily with a current mass phenomenon in mind: people who devote their time and energy first and foremost to actions in the outside world, always with the question of what they can do to make the world better, to halt destruction and to help disadvantaged people. And with ever new ideas about which action might contribute to this. Classical activism, in other words.

Before I turn to some of the more stubborn questions and possible inner conflicts that every form of ‘outer’ activism raises in me, I want to address two more things.



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

The first thing is: what is activism? Answering this question fills books. For the purposes of this text, here is a rough working definition – just to make sure that we are talking about the same thing. If you do not agree with this description, then please adjust my definition to fit your own.

People who become active in the outside world – whether politically, ecologically or socially – generally do so from a single motivation: they want to see an improvement in the world and want to play their part in it. Most of them have some idea of how the world ideally ought to look. With this orientation, they look for things they can do to bring about a change in the world in the corresponding direction. This conscious doing is what I call activism. As a rule, activists refer to a value system that they share with several people. In other words, they refer to a ‘we’. That can be smaller groups, an entire movement, such as anthroposophy or deep ecology, or indeed broad social currents such as postmodernism.

The second thing I want to mention is that I am raising all these questions and naming the traps, or inner conflicts, with the idea of living inner and outer activism simultaneously, in a parallel movement. That is: acting consciously out in the world in order to bring about the desired changes and also facing the at times uncomfortable and insoluble questions within. Within, ideally continuously. Loosely after Rainer Maria Rilke: ‘Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.’ What sounds like a romantic notion is, for me, the very essence of combining inner and outer activism. The continual effort and struggle not to look for solutions, but to make the inner space consciously and deliberately available, so that in these conflicts may show themselves, may unfold, and so that a more conscious and more complex place emerges within, which then becomes the starting point for outer activism. *Enquiring within and remaining curious, rather than falling exclusively for the idea of a solution in the outside world*, is the motto. And what better setting for this exercise than the interaction with the outside world? I will come back to this.

Naturally, the focus of this text lies more on inner activism – if only because the outer, the loud, the combative – the visible – part of activism has so many forums that this imbalance seems both a manifestation of various agreements within the ‘we’ and a thing that supports and consolidates those agreements. One of them is the attitude mentioned above: ‘anything is better than not becoming active at all’. Nevertheless, my point is not to concern oneself solely with oneself and to forget the outside world. That would be a path of personal development that forgets an essential part of it all: the outside world.

The Reduction to the Individual

To address the first aspect, let me take a question of outer activism as my starting point: how – so runs a common question – can complex, stubborn situations be changed at all? One answer, very often, is: by those people changing their minds who are in power of a situation and hence can change it. But the first half of that



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

answer is missing out on something: every situation – however small or insignificant – is always determined both by at least one ‘we’ and by the individuals who represent and carry that ‘we’. The answer given above reduces the actions to the ‘I’ aspect – that is, to the people who help sustain a situation. One reason for this is the fact that most of us cannot imagine a ‘we’, let alone address it or consciously encounter it. Take climate change, for example. How, the tell, do I tell climate change to change direction, or even to stop altogether? Or the flows of refugees: try telling a flow of refugees how it ought to behave better, so that all the receiving countries can do their best and do not end up fighting one another as well. These two examples do not mean that I am not taking these topics seriously. Quite the opposite. It is precisely because I take all of this very seriously that I cannot help but notice the reduction that very frequently occurs in classical activism out of a kind of helplessness.

As when it comes to actions in the outside world, most of us are able above all to do one thing: to make other people, or even ourselves, the target of those actions. That reduces every situation to the individuals who are part of it but leaves out the ‘we’ that determines the situation just as much.

Part of inner activism, then, might be to let a situation that we want to change in the outside world reach us fully; to experience the ‘we’, or the ‘we’ aspects, directly. One path towards this is to make the whole of one’s own inner space available to the situation. Or, indeed, to look for the inner counterpart to the unwanted outside situation. The difficulty? It may bring the realisation that it is an insoluble task to let something completely reach you that is not itself a ‘real’ counterpart, because it has no ‘I’ instance. Or it may happen that the ‘we’ of an unwanted situation reveals itself in its full complexity and beauty, which would throw most people into a state of helplessness, because all the usual evaluative categories blur. As evaluations always proceed from one or more subjects, never from an ‘I’-less ‘we’. And when evaluative criteria do appear, they are usually highly contradictory, or they point to a further ‘we’ of which the ‘we’ under consideration is only a part.

Moreover, for many of us it is something very frightening to come into contact with a ‘we’. We know experience only from within an ‘I’-awareness (or a self-awareness that ‘I’ have). To experience a ‘we’ directly would mean, among other things, letting go – at least temporarily – of our self-awareness, that most fundamental of all security-giving experiences.

To develop and carry out actions out in the world that address the ‘I’ aspects but not the equally potent ‘we’ aspects would mean wanting to change only one side of a situation. The far more stubborn and inert part of the situation – namely the ‘we’ (or the multitude of ‘we’-instances) – would set itself, undetected and thus all the more powerfully, against any change. A short explanation on the subject of ‘I and we’ can be found at the end of the text.

The Battle Against the Enemy

A particular form of reducing a situation to the ‘I’-aspects – that is, to the individuals involved in it – is to create an enemy. A situation is intolerable according to our



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

individual or intersubjective evaluation? We look at who is causing it and turn that person or those people into the enemy we then set out to fight. Nothing unites people more, and drives them further, than a powerful enemy that must be fought.

Now, there is once again a small problem: through our activism we want to reach the people who have the power to change a situation, and to move them to think differently or even to act differently. Yet, unfortunately, these are precisely the people we previously turned into enemies. The villains. The unscrupulous, profit-driven corporate bosses, the smuggling gangs, the tyrants and warlords, the SUV drivers and capitalists, and so on. The very people of whom we say that they are causing the situation that brings bad things into the world. And just as a reminder: in a postmodern world, where everyone is somehow equal, the villains are simply those who have not yet understood that everyone is equal and that equality, the common good and harmony are the supreme values. So, without any basis of relationship: why should they listen?

It is well established that people can be moved to think differently and act differently – if at all – only through honest and accepting contact. Coercion, results in resistance. The moment I turn others into the guilty, into villains or into enemies, I do above all one thing: I place myself and my values above them. And one of the practically inevitable consequences of this devaluation of others is: I am breaking off any contact and any interest in relating. This in turn destroys the only means that can lead to change, if anything can. And with that, as an activist fighting against an enemy, I have actively contributed to the situation hardening or even escalating. For no matter how unconscious or conscious, no matter how far or how little developed a person is, they will most certainly do one thing when they are devalued: they will defend themselves – or at the very least react with defiance.

Just a small side comment: the attitude ‘the other one can’t act or doesn’t know any better’ leads, incidentally, to the same result. It is structurally the same, only more subtle and thus harder to spot – above all in oneself. It is a seemingly benevolent devaluation of the other person. One that makes any correction by that person practically impossible. But who likes to admit to arrogance when, after all, they only want to do good?

If you catch yourself having just turned one or more other people into enemies, then there is a practice at the inner part of activism: fully admit to yourself that, in the situation you want to change, all those involved really are doing the best they can and none of them wants to do harm. That makes it practically impossible to place any of those involved in the categories ‘guilty’, ‘bad’, ‘unconscious’ or ‘evil’. What then might happen is that you must admit to yourself that you are simply one of many, and that your activism is fed from precisely one source: your needs – no matter how many others you share those needs with. And that for every action you initiate out in the world you will have to take full responsibility. Before and inside yourself, at least. You might have to let it completely reach you that you are alone with your personal decision about which actions you launch out in the world, even if ever so many other people launch the same action alongside you. And there is nothing wrong with that. It can become uncomfortable, because every form of ‘being right’ falls away, precisely



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

because there is no longer any objective truth.

And of course, the prevailing (postmodern) value system, which dismisses such self-referentiality as egoism, does its part to prevent one's own individual needs from being recognised and acknowledged as the actual source of action in the outside world. No, it must be worse-off, defenceless, threatened people (or animals, or plants) – or even an entire planet, which apparently cannot save itself – by which one's own action is justified. The subtle judgement and devaluation concealed within this very often causes a hardening of the situation, whose change is, after all, the actual aim of your activism.

If Only Enough People Would...

Another form of reducing a situation to the 'I' aspects is the hope that only enough people need to see, do or change something for a situation to improve. In other words, the idea of the critical mass. 'If only everyone would give up unnecessary flights, then CO2 emissions would fall' is one such current example. And the attempt to reduce flights by means of domestic ticket taxes is nothing else than the implementation of this reductionist hope by an 'outer-we' instance – namely, the state.

To approach this reductionism, we would have to examine more closely at what a 'we' is, what an 'I' is, and what the interaction between these two diametrically different manifestations of life looks like. But that would take us too far here. Nevertheless, in what follows, a brief attempt to approach it within such a short a text.

Let us take climate change as an example for this wholly incomplete explanation of the I–we interaction. Climate change no 'I' instance. I cannot sit down at a table with climate change and talk to it. And yet it exists. It is something very real. Some of us feel it more distinctly in daily life, some less. The part of society that is aware of climate change is a further 'we'. And within this 'we' there is an agreement, which runs: we must do something to stop climate change. Note well: 'we'. But how does a 'we' 'act'? Described very incompletely: by the individuals who make themselves available to this 'we', acting in the spirit and in service of the corresponding 'we'. In the end – as already described above – it is nonetheless an individual decision whether I join the solutions that a 'we' develops (in a process involving many individuals and further 'we' forms, such as for example 'the press') and then implement them as an individual. That is, whether I decide, for example, that next year I will not fly to Portugal for that incredibly important specialist conference. As part of the solution to stopping climate change is to give up unnecessary flights. What, however, is necessary or unnecessary lies entirely at the discretion of the individual. This discretion, or this decision, is usually determined by the needs of one or more smaller 'we' forms – for example, the family that has to be fed, the professional career, and so on. The decision, with consequences in a world-centric 'we', is thus necessarily made using the values of a clan- or ethnocentric frame of reference. And suddenly one finds oneself in a pattern of behaviour that supports an 'enemy-we' (world-destroying capitalism, for example) – and even finds justifications for it within one's own frame of reference.



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

As mentioned at the outset: this is an incomplete explanation. But it is worth the attempt. In summary, it means: yes, there are people who decide and act. And even though they always do so as individuals, yet (usually unconsciously and not by their own choosing) they act as 'co-carriers' of one, or generally very many, 'we'-forms. A large part of the decisions is shaped by the 'we' in whose service they have placed themselves (consciously or unconsciously). And it is not even the case that most of us have any choice as to which 'we' forms we act as carriers or representatives of. Into many we are born, or we have grown into them unconsciously. But that is a quite different topic again.

The statement 'if only enough people would ...' assumes a reality that does not exist in that form: namely, the idea that an individual can decide freely and independently of the 'we' forms whose 'carrier' or representative it is. That is not the case. A 'we' that feels its existence threatened by one of its carriers finds a way (again, through other carriers of that 'we') either to discipline or to exclude the 'dangerous' carriers. In the example of the conference in Portugal, that would be: 'If I don't fly there, I'll lose touch with my professional field.' It sounds like an individual decision. The frame of reference, however, is a 'we'. And in no time, I am back in line...

For inner activism, the task might consist in letting it reach you that the idea of the critical mass works only if I found a corresponding new 'we'. That is, if I find or create a meaning- and security-giving frame of reference in which people, as carriers of this 'we', can change their behaviour – and do so without risking existential worries and fears of falling out of the large and small 'we'-forms whose carriers they are, and which give them meaning and security.

That is – if you let it fully reach you – an insoluble task. For the sheer abundance of already existing 'we'-forms, of which one must first become aware, which one must then acknowledge in their beauty, history and complexity (and thus also their power), and whose carriers' needs one must then recognise and understand, in order finally to become active in the outside world with this already unbearable abundance of information, seems practically impossible.

But that is not the aspiration either. The aspiration of an inner activism is to catch oneself as the hope arises that only enough people would have to change their behaviour, and then to take, within, the path described above – as far as that is possible for you. And then not to let oneself be frustrated, but to become active in the outside world nonetheless. For through the inner path the place at which the outer activities take shape has already changed through this inner activism. And with the inner changing so are the outer activities themselves. If in the process you come up against your own shadows? Even better. Working with them is also part of inner activism.

The Trap of Perspective Reduction

If we are to talk about activism at all, or to enter into dialogue about it, then one thing is of indispensable importance: the perspective from which we talk or think about it. There are always at least two perspectives here, though usually more. The two



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

perspectives that are always present are the first-person perspective (I see/experience something, or I act) and the third-person perspective (watching, analysing, and seeing something from the bird's-eye view and talking and thinking *about* something).

From the first-person perspective, and in the statement about oneself and one's own activism, there will be a consensus among the great majority of people – including those against whose attitude or behaviour our activism is directed: 'I want to make the world better and I do so as well as I can, with the means available to me, which I can stand behind.' There is little to be said against that. (And no, this is not going to be a relativist, postmodern chain of argument concluding why actually all people are good. Read on!)

With the question of what 'making better' means in the statement above, the first- and third-person perspectives become mixed. For unless I have got stuck at a pre-conventional stage of ego development (in which there is not yet even a separation between me and the world, but rather I am the world), then in my experience there is me and there are other people. And an improvement is then not only an improvement for me, but always also a change for others. If, for example, I share the values of the green meme, then in the best case I create an improvement if not for everyone, then at least for those of whom I am convinced that they are worse off and cannot help themselves.

This makes clear that I can become 'active' in a situation only if I have, at least implicitly, an outside view of the situation, because otherwise I am unable to find criteria for an improvement of the situation. So, they are at least intersubjective criteria, which, however, I can only negotiate if I talk and think *about* the values and the situation from the third-person perspective – that is, by looking at them. It makes no difference here whether all of this happens consciously or unconsciously, or whether I regard the criteria I have made my own as intersubjective or even objective – meaning: universally valid.

If I leave out one of the two perspectives, the probability is high that I will no longer become active. Why? Well, without the third-person perspective there is no measure for what improvement means, and thus no 'direction' for my activism. And if I leave out the first-person perspective, the motivation to act at all might be lost. Or the inner 'place' at which the impulses to act for activism arise is gone.

The separation of 'I act' (only ever possible from the first-person perspective) and 'I refer to intersubjective criteria by which I justify my action before myself and others' (only ever possible in the third-person perspective, whether consciously or unconsciously) is an absurdity, as it cannot be resolved. And the trap concealed within it is that of perspective reduction: that is, in one's inner experience simply making both perspectives into one and becoming active with the 'feeling' of doing the right thing, without being aware of where this feeling comes from and that it rests on a polarity of at least two very often contradictory perspectives.

In a parallel movement of inner and outer activism, that would mean: acting out in full



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

awareness that it is an evaluative system that determines my action, and that this evaluative system is always only intersubjective. That could be uncomfortable, because I would have to give up the absolute idea of 'doing the right thing'. If I can 'hold' the two – or indeed more – perspectives within as separate and competing, or as not simultaneously possible, then the secure and absolute framework for justifying my own action does indeed fall away, but a space opens up for views and ideas for action that would not arise in a linear and conflict-free inner space. And once again the aspiration is not to carry this out perfectly, but above all to recognise at all that I am, in that moment, reducing several perspectives to one. At best, then an inner engagement follows, yet without the action in the outside world dissolving. Which brings us to the next question/trap.

The 'If-Then' Trap

The matter is quite simple and straightforward: I (or we) do not like a situation out in the world. We find criteria by which we can tell whether a situation has improved. We analyse the situation we do not like. We gather ideas about which actions might change the situation in the corresponding direction. We decide which action to implement, and then we simply implement it.

That is a very brief, structural description of classical activism. Even if the people concerned are not aware of this sequence (which does not have to run in a linear fashion): the principle remains the same. Of course, you will have noticed immediately that activists are constantly in one perspective – namely the outer view, or third-person perspective. And that is the case, even if all of this arises within a single individual. It remains the third-person perspective. The assumption underlying this is: there is an aim of the activism (object), there is one or more who act (subjects), and there are causal connections (if I do this, then that happens).

Now, unfortunately, the world for the most part does not work like this. If it did, we would need no rules beyond Newton's laws. And even what the cyberneticians did in the 1980s, and the complexity researchers who followed them, does not differ from this structurally. The idea and the hope that continue to lie underneath all that are very often: if only I understand the situation and the connections precisely enough, then I can change something in a targeted way. Another causal connection, in other words. The idea of controllability or achievability.

There are many reasons why this will most probably not work. I will name only one here, and only to show, by way of example, what I might be dealing with within (whether consciously or unconsciously) when I want to become active in the outside world.

It is the matter of subject and object. To change a situation in a targeted way, I need evaluative criteria – if only to be able to check afterwards whether the change achieved anything or not. Many of us, of course, are not so structured in the world as to think this through consciously in this form. And yet the question about one or more actions remains: did that achieve anything? Thing is, the moment I become active in a situation, I make myself part of the situation. I thus turn from subject into part of the



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

object. My original third-person perspective thereby no longer exists. And the moment I am part of the situation I will change along with the situation. I will learn, I will be in contact with others, and my worldview (and thus my inner world) will change. Perhaps only minimally, but it will change. If I afterwards ask whether my action achieved anything, it is no longer the same person asking this question who planned and initiated the action. The probability that my original evaluative criteria have changed along with my inner state is very high. Mostly this happens unconsciously, for the inner process plays, at first, only a subordinate role in a purely outer activism. With that, the idea of 'if..., then...' is of course invalidated, because I have not taken my own inner change into account. That change is, unfortunately, only partially controllable – if at all –, because it stands in a constant, non-linear reciprocal relationship between I and we, and between inner and outer world.

And even if I experience my own transformation either as part of my activism, or even make it the aim of my activism, nothing changes on a structural level. There is still an third-person perspective, and thus an inner instance having this perspective. The subject therefore remains, and with 'looking at the situation' and the hope for causal connections in the sense of 'if I do this and that, then this and that will happen'. And what remains, silently and undetected, is the hope for 'neutral' evaluative criteria.

Here too, the inner part of activism would consist, for example, in becoming aware of this 'looking at' instead of 'being part of' and of the hope for controllability. You would go a step further if you let the fact reach you that the business of improvement and targeted development is at least a highly 'cloudy' and nebulous one, if not entirely impossible. A further step at this point still would be to turn radically towards yourself and search for the hopes and needs connected with all of this. These can be very different hopes and needs. The wish to belong, the need for security, meaning or efficacy, or the wish to be seen and loved, are only a few among many.

And at this point, once again: all of this happens not *instead of* outer activism, but in a mutually nourishing parallel movement. That, at least, is the idea.

The Tool Trap

One variation of the 'if-then' trap mentioned above is that of analytical tools and solution-tools. Let us take the integral approach as an example. It is superbly suited to recognising situations that need improvement in their full complexity. And, of course, also to developing more fitting approaches to action. There are already, both in the corporate context and in NGO work and individual counselling, countless methods for evaluating and analysing situations by means of the integral approach and for developing new approaches to action. That is wonderful. And it is part of outer activism. (Just as a brief comment: I count all the methods that draw on 'we' processes, on state experiences, on intuition and on all the other aspects that – fortunately – have become respectable over the last twenty years in on those tools. Even when, in applying these methods, the inner world within the 'I' and within the 'we' changes along with them.) Behind all these procedures there still lies the hope of improving a situation in a controlled way by means of the corresponding method (that is, the tool). And this applies even when, in a method, the origin of a possible solution



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

is sought in the truth of the moment and the situation – which some of the approaches do, by having a group place itself in the ‘service’ of the situation. Now, even at the risk of repeating myself: all of this represents helpful developments in outer activism. But all these developments continue to be deployed as ‘tools’ for action in the outer world, no matter how new or even revolutionary they are – very often without the paralleled inner activism.

What does this mean for the inner part of activism? Every approach – and in our example that is the integral one – always also has an I-Inside aspect. And inner activism, in working with such approaches, consists of letting one’s own experience of the situation be expanded by means of the approach and, at best, be transformed. And that in the most radical form, by doing nothing other, in the process, than changing oneself and one’s experience of the world. All that, without using ‘secretly’, using it, in order then to be more effective in the outside world. A further step might be to give oneself over to the idea that all approaches to action and all actions that proceed from an inner world, changed that way, are already integral anyway (or correspond to the approach I have chosen). The idea, then, is, to let oneself be transformed by means of the corresponding approach and thereby to make oneself into the tool. That takes courage, for once again it may be that things arise at this inner space which one cannot ‘argue into’ the world by means of the approach (in our case the integral approach). And it takes the trust that inner activism will radiate out into the world. And all of this, of course, always *in addition* to deploying the corresponding approach as a tool out in the world, *never instead of it*.

State Experiences and Universal Truth

In all the questions and aspects mentioned so far, I have kept to the ‘gross-material’ world – that is, the reality that most of us share in the waking state. And it is there – so I claim – that change takes place, because one, or usually several, people agree that a particular situation is not tolerable as it is. In doing so, they thus rely on an intersubjective evaluation of the situation.

But for many of us the gross-material world is not the only reality in which we exist. There are other states. I want to touch only briefly on one of many dilemmas that might arise from this. First: classical activism takes place in the gross-material world. Otherwise, it would not be ‘classical’ activism. This also includes motivating and bringing people to have experiences in other realities, or in other states. For a setting, that motivates and convinces people to take this path I might create a setting (free retreats, for example). I will, nevertheless, create this setting in the gross-material world, even when the aim of my activism is a different reality, realm of consciousness, or state.

What most of us encounter, when we have direct experiences of other states, is something like ‘universal truth’. I hesitate already simply to call them ‘universal truth’, because precisely in this lies a very great dilemma. What is this dilemma?

Even if we agree that these universal truths really are universal in the corresponding states where they can be experienced – meaning, that they hold for everyone and



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

everything (which I assume, among other things, on the basis of the writings and reports of mystics) – they are truths experienced in a state that is not the gross-material one. These truths can then indeed be shared and communicated – ‘back’ in the gross-material state – but they are communicated only amongst those who have themselves had such or similar experiences. And with that, a universal truth from some state other than the gross-material one is, unfortunately, nothing other than intersubjective in the gross-material world.

That is bitter! Above all for the gross-material everyday ‘I’, also called the ego, which has indeed had a taste of the absoluteness of the truth. Yet, in its own reality – that is, in gross-materiality – can make nothing of it, precisely because here it is no longer an absolute and hence objective truth.

What a pity, for an objective or even universal truth would of course be the ultimate foundation for every form of activism in the gross-material realm. And precisely in this lie the lure and the trap of experiences of universal truths from states other than the gross-material one. An individual who claims the absolute, objective truth for themselves in the gross-material world is seen by those who have not had that experience first of all as either narcissistic, grandiose, or as an overbearing and presumptuous megalomaniac. Or, indeed, straight away as deluded.

If a spiritual path (and anyone who has read Ken Wilber’s book *Integral Spirituality* knows why I do not like this word but simply have to use it for the sake of comprehensibility) is part of inner activism, then a further step is surely to recognise and when one wants to declare universal truths from other states to be universally valid in the gross-material reality. And a further step would be to admit to oneself that these truths, while they can indeed be a very powerful drive for one’s own activism in the gross-material world, are in that realm nothing but a highly subjective perception. Or, as it is described in the integral approach: every state experience will only ever be interpretable within the framework of one’s own development in the gross-material state.

Evolution and Development

It is much the same with evolution and development. I am a friend of the integral model, and yes, it plays a part in the question of inner activism. So, with everything I have written so far, I cannot help but address, at least briefly, what the consequences of the idea of personal growth are for inner activism.

In short: even if I am ‘further along the development lines’ than others, and even if I am aware that the grievances I want to change are brought about by individuals and ‘we’-forms that are less far developed than I am, this awareness doesn’t change anything at all about the aspects of inner activism already addressed. Worse still: it makes inner activism even more demanding and, at the same time, even more important, because in the outside world I come up against limits even more quickly – not against my own, but against those of the realities of those who are ‘less’ evolved.

To elaborate on this, I must briefly define what ‘further’ evolved and ‘less’ evolved mean for me: Two people experience the world. One describes their worldview to the



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

other or otherwise convey it. If the other can comprehend the one's worldview and find it as integrated part of their own worldview without judging it, then they are either equally far evolved or further. They are further evolved when the whole thing works in the one direction but not in the other. That is: the one's worldview is 'contained' within the other's worldview, but not the other way around. This is a heavily simplified description. So heavily simplified that I already almost find it difficult to describe it in this form. But the principle will, hopefully, be clear. For this view has several consequences at once for inner activism. Two of them follow as a brief sketch:

The actions that the person who is more evolved brings into the world will, for the other person, who is less evolved, not only evoke resistance (which can be the case in both directions), but will be simply not comprehensible for the one who is less evolved. At times the latter will therefore perceive them as hostile, violent or even threatening, even when they are not intended that way. In inner activism this plays an important role, as with the conviction of being further evolved also comes the responsibility that arises from this 'wider worldview' towards the other, who is (apparently) not as evolved. 'Being further evolved' comes at the price of considerably more responsibility – not, however, with the entitlement to decide for others. In inner activism it is above all a matter of recognising and acknowledging precisely this, and the own inner conflict that arises from it.

Moreover, the given description of 'being further evolved' shows that there is no certainty that behind actions of others which one perceives as inappropriate does not lie a way of experiencing the world that is based on a considerably 'wider worldview' than one's own. To question this, without questioning or even doubting or betraying one's own experience and worldview, is part of inner activism. Namely: to do one's best, to assume that the other is also doing their best, and to give up the certainty that one is oneself further evolved than any other and therefore does 'the better thing'. The fact that people can be at different stages in different aspects of their existence (see lines, stages and the integral address) unfortunately, makes the matter even more complex and inner activism even more demanding.

Further Aspects of Inner Activism

There are still many further aspects that concern inner activism – that is, the 'struggle' for an inner attitude that reduces as little as possible or creates as few absolute realities as possible. Always with the awareness that every step within makes acting out in the world a little more difficult. By way of suggestion, I want to name a few more examples in the form of questions, without going into more detail. As with the aspects of inner, invisible activism addressed at somewhat greater length above, the same applies here: the idea is not inner activism *instead of* outer activism. The idea is both at the same time. Here are the questions:

When have I grasped the situation sufficiently to have a real chance to bring upon the 'right' change through my actions? Can I live with the consequences if I become active even though I am aware that I have not yet grasped a situation sufficiently, but the feeling of urgency is too great for me to be able to postpone my actions any longer? Are other activists and I talking about the same thing, or am I merely looking



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

for allies and like-minded people because it makes my outer activism easier – at the price that we might be pursuing different aims? What do I do with the experience of failure? Do I acknowledge failure as part of my path in being active, or do I at some point withdraw into pure inner activism? What do I do when, after personal shadow work triggered by inner activism, part of my motivation for outer actions has been reduced or even has evaporated? Whom do I really help with my activism? From whom do I, through my activism and the ‘support’ that comes with it, take away the chance of their own developmental process? Can I live with possibly being met with the attitude ‘you do too little!’ when I increase my inner share of activism and thus have less capacity for outer activism?

And What Does All That Mean in Practice?

To many, all of this may sound very theoretical and top-heavy. To me it is the opposite. The world that always is accessible to me is my inner world. And, whether I like it or not, that is precisely the place at which impulses to act arise, which then have their effect in the outside world. To explore this inner world and to face its uncomfortable sides is, to me, the most practical thing I can imagine. How am I to make a situation better in the outside world if I do not also start with the only aspect over which I (hopefully) have sovereignty? My inner world. My experience. And if I come up against shadows, crisis regions, oppression, injustice, hatred, war, suffering, wounds, pain, needs and insecurity in this inner world: then, what help am I to others in the outside world if I do not recognise, acknowledge and address all of this within? But how am I ever to meet all of this within, if I am not, over and over again, brought up against it through acting in and contacting the outside world, and thereby made aware of all the ‘shadows’ within?

In the end, out in the world it is perhaps a ‘doing it anyway’, as the American teacher Lawrence Noyes calls it. For the path that emerges when one lives activism as a parallel movement of inner and outer activism has, among other consequences, the effect that clear positions blur, that belief in causal connections is lost, and that conscious doing is always already failure too – that is, that all those things, which are actually the preconditions for classical activism are no longer certain. And this path is, most probably, for most of us and above all one thing: not easy. For whenever something like certainty sets in, it could be a mirror reflecting that you are, at that moment, meeting one of the questions and inner conflicts named above (or many more) with an answer or a solution. And that can always only be provisional. In inner activism we meet ourselves – that is, the one from whom doing comes into the world. And we explore and meet the place at which outer activism has its origin, including the actual motivation for our actions in the outside world.

A Small Note at the End

Inner activism will inevitably also bring you to the unloved places within you. If, on your path of inner activism, you reach points at which, for example, you feel alone, frustrated, tired, or have even lost the motivation to become active in the outside world, then within the framework of inner activism there is always the possibility of a next step: to make all of that, once again, the aim and content of inner activism. And



Thomas Tiller

The Invisible Activism

if, for example, you meet yourself with the attitude 'you do too little in the outside world', then you could ask yourself who within you is making this evaluation and what personal need lies behind it; and, of course, whether part of your previous outer activism did not, all along, arise from precisely this, possibly highly personal, need. On this path you meet yourself. But one thing holds in any case, no matter whom or what you may meet on this path: one thing that will grow through inner activism in any case is the degree of freedom to become active in the outside world.

A Note about 'I' and 'We'

To describe it very simply: one way of grasping the idea of a 'we' more easily is to imagine a 'we' as a being with its own character, its own history, its own memory, and its own expression. This being, however, has no 'I'-instance, no 'I'-feeling, and no self-reference. That is precisely what makes it a 'we'. A 'we' can express and act primarily through the individuals who place themselves in the service of this 'we' – that is, who act as 'carriers' of the corresponding 'we'. Without individuals, no 'we'; but without a 'we', likewise no 'I'-feeling for individuals. (So, no causal connection in the interaction between 'I' and 'We', but rather a co-dependent coexistence.) When we interact with a person, that person is always an individual and the carrier of one or more 'we'-instances (also referred to in this text as a 'we'-form or simply a 'we') at the same time. More on this in the corresponding chapter of the book "Am Ende der Machbarkeit" (www.am-ende-der-machbarkeit.de) unfortunately so far only available in German.