

Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*¹

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The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (DoE) counts as one of the most important philosophical works of the 20th century.² It is the most celebrated text of the Frankfurt School, a kind of 'Ur'-text of Critical Theory, and the text on which each subsequent generation of aspirant 'critical theorists' feels the need to cut its teeth anew.³ It starts with the much-quoted line: „... we had

1 University of Melbourne, 3 April 2007.

2 1944: mimeographed version *Philosophische Fragmente*; 1947: iQuerido Amsterdam; 1969: Fischer Verlag; 1972: first English translation by John Cumming (Herder and Herder, New York); 2002: new translation by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford UP.)

3 Albrecht Wellmer: „Das Buch ist das Gründungsdokument der späteren sogenannten Frankfurter Schule der Kritischen Theorie“. (in: „Adorno: Anwalt des Nicht-Identischen.“) The popular wikipedia calls it „the pivotal, fundamental textbook of Freud-Marxist Critical Theory explaining the socio-psychological status quo that had been responsible for, what the Frankfurt School considered, the failure of the Enlightenment, a defeat represented most dramatically by the events of the Holocaust. ... It has had a major effect on 20th century philosophy, sociology, culture, and politics, inspiring especially the 1960s counter-culture.“ The 1976 Continuum pb version calls it, on its cover, – quoting a *TLS* review – „a monument of classic German progressive social theory“, and „worth reading as an introduction to the peculiar synthesis of Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and Heidegger commonly associated with the name of Herbert Marcuse.“ (What the two authors would have thought of one day being billed as an 'introduction' to Herbert Marcuse we can only speculate upon.) The pb version of the new Stanford translation places it prominently under a new series title – added by the editors – of „Cultural Memory in the Present“, which rather neatly reverses the original meaning. It also includes a typical '68' appendix, in which the expurgation of Marxist terminology in the 1969 Fischer edition is held up as a shameful betrayal, by the authors, of their original commitment to the Marxism of their younger years, a kind of apostasy: „The Disappearance of Class History in *DoE*: A Commentary on the Textual variants (1944 and 1947) by Willen van Reijen and Jan Bransen“.

set ourselves nothing less than the discovery of why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism."⁴ In post-war Europe, as people surveyed the ruins, this resonated, once it got a hearing, like nothing else. Not inconceivable that the reason it is now finding a renewed readership in the English-speaking world is that the effects upon the West itself of the wars now unleashed in the Middle East – social, economic, intellectual – are beginning to show some similarities to what many in Europe had gone through in the thirties.

Stanford UP at any rate, publishers of the new Edmund Jephcott translation, now based on the definitive text from the Max Horkheimer archive, has this two-liner on its website that could be interpreted in this way:

„*DoE* ... endeavours to answer why modernity, instead of fulfilling the promises of the Enlightenment (e.g. progress, reason, order) has sunk into a new barbarism. Drawing on their own work on the ‘culture industry’, as well as the ideas of the key thinkers of the Enlightenment project, (Descartes, Newton, Kant) Horkheimer and Adorno explain how the Enlightenment’s orientation towards rational calculability and man’s domination of a disenchanted nature evinces a reversion to myth, and is responsible for the reified structures of modern administered society, which has grown to resemble a new enslavement.“

The treatment it received at the hands of the recent Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory⁵ on the other hand is much more the traditional – distanced – ‘history of ideas’ approach, much more concerned to integrate this indigestible text into the Anglophone mainstream.⁶

The unusual publication history of the *DoE* has been described often enough for me to be able to tell the tale briefly.⁷ Originally circulated, under the title *Philosophische Fragmente* [„Philosophical Fragments“] amongst the inner circle of the Institute members in Los Angeles and New York towards the end of the war – in mimeographed form – it was first pub-

4 online version: x

5 Fred Rush (ed.) (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, CUP.

6 Julian Roberts: „The *DoE*“ in: Fred Rush, op. cit., p. 57 pp.

7 James Schmidt (1998): „Language, Mythology and Enlightenment – Historical Notes on Horkheimer and Adorno’s Dialectical of Enlightenment“ in: *Social Research*, vol. 65, nr. 4, p. 807.

lished in Amsterdam in 1947, acquiring a readership only by degrees.⁸ Its eventual reputation, in Germany, did not really set in until Horkheimer reluctantly agreed – after students had widely circulated a bootleg version – to a new edition in 1969, and then, internationally, from the time of the first English edition in 1972 onwards. How powerful its influence became, after that – on many aspects of intellectual life in Europe and beyond – can be seen from the countless conferences, public events, book titles that have been devoted to it ever since.⁹ The fiftieth commemoration of the publication of the book, in 1997, was itself – an irony that did not go unrecorded at the time¹⁰ – a ‘media event’ in its own right, with considerable coverage on radio and television¹¹. There’s even a film now on the Frankfurt School, and the city of Frankfurt has built an ‘Adorno’-monument, boasting a replica of his desk and metronome.¹²

So what is this book all about? That’s easier in the asking than in the answering.

I assume that I don’t have to say much about the way the book is built up. The central thesis – enlightenment is reverting to myth, while myth was already enlightenment – is both expanded upon and illustrated with two ‘excurses’, the first one on the figure of Ulysses/Odysseus in the Homeric epic, the other on the fate of morality, under capitalist conditions, exemplified in the work of the Marquis de Sade. The rest are aphoristic passages, including a somewhat longer one on anti-Semitism as an expression of the limits of enlightenment.

What’s the core theme of the book? While casting about for way to introduce this I chanced upon two quotations, in themselves unrelated to the book, which nevertheless illustrate its central thesis.

The first quote that I’d like to read is from a recent New York Times op-ed, devoted to the question: „Are we aware what lies at the end of the road opened up by the normalization of torture?“¹³ It points to something

8 Leo Löwenthal deadpanned: „Huxley doesn’t read German, and Joyce is dead.“ – related in James Schmidt.

9 Die Kritische Theorie hatte grossen Einfluss gehabt in viele Einzeldebatten hinein, von der Neue Musik bis in der Aussenpolitik. Das Verhaeltnis zum Nahen Osten ist in Deutschland bis heute gepraegt von einem Bewusstsein fuer geschichtliche Zusammenhaenge und moralische Verantwortlichkeit: auch in der Aussenpolitik also ein Bruch mit der Adenauerzeit. Staatsraeson.

10 Robert Hullot-Kentor: „Adorno without quotation“ reprinted in: *Things beyond resemblance. Collected essays on Theodor W. Adorno*, Columbia U.P. 2006.

11 Radio Bremen. ref.

12 Horkheimer is commemorated with a modest bust in the University library.

13 Slavoj Zizek: „Knight of the Living Dead“, *NYT* 24.3.2007.

most of us are vaguely aware of but prefer to ignore: that those who support part or all of what in the media is called the ‘war on terror’ (and who amongst us could not possibly ‘be against terrorism’?) implicitly or explicitly are also forced, it seems, to accept what now seems to have become a kind of institutionalised concomitant of this ‘war’¹⁴, namely the establishment of a shadowy and illegal system of detention and interrogation centers, in which martial law is applied on the basis of confessions extracted under torture.

„It is“ – I quote here from the op-ed –

„as if not only the terrorists themselves, but also the fight against them, now has to proceed in a grey zone of legality. We thus have de facto ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ criminals: those who are to be treated with legal procedures (using lawyers and the like), and those who are outside legality, subject to military tribunals or seemingly endless incarceration.“

There is now a category of person that the

„... Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls ‘homo sacer’: a creature legally dead while biologically still alive. ... The American authorities who deal with detainees have become a sort of counterpart to homo sacer: acting as a legal power, they operate in an empty space that is sustained by the law and yet not regulated by the rule of law.“

That’s the first quote.

The second one is from a book on Australian aboriginal culture, that I chanced upon in the Melbourne Museum:

„Economic specialisation in traditional aboriginal communities was minimal. Most adults were able to perform any of the subsistence tasks done by others in the group. Division of labour was primarily based on gender: men hunted large game; women gathered small ground reptiles and other animals as well as vegetables. In coastal and riverine areas both men and women fished and gathered shellfish. For technological reasons, extensive food storage was not possible, which meant that most food, once obtained, had to be consumed immediately. Because of this and because of the nature of aboriginal kinship obligations, sharing was a major and defining ethos of the culture. To be human was to share.“¹⁵

It was that last line that caught my attention – „To be human was to share“. Past tense.

14 The quotes are there not to question the reality of terrorism but to remind that there are a number of different ways of interpreting what has happened.

15 Peter Sutton, Christopher Anderson (1989): „Introduction“ in: (ibid.)(Eds.) *Dreamings – the art of aboriginal Australia*, p. 7.

There's not much that gets to the heart of the *DoE* quite as well as this simple juxtaposition – long before we even begin to discuss the comparative merits of Continental versus other forms of Philosophy. This modernised, high-tech, globalised, mobile, postmodern, jaded, skeptical culture in which we are all imbedded – like journalists on their way to the next battle – is in the process of abrogating what the combative 'Radical Enlightenment' philosophers of the 17th and 18th century only managed to achieve after a bitter, 200-year struggle against feudal absolutism: democracy and the rule of law.¹⁶ Individual rights, due process, public and open trials, equality before the law, an impartial judiciary pronouncing judgment on the basis of laws promulgated by a democratically elected legislature. Not for nothing that the French Revolution is dated from the storming of a prison, which to this day is celebrated every years on „Bastille day“.¹⁷ No legal imprisonment without these entrenched clauses, „no cruel and unusual punishments“, in the sonorous words of the 8th Amendment to the American Constitution.¹⁸

And then what the anthropologists used to hold up as the most primitive of Stone Age cultures, a hunter-gatherer form of life innocent of agriculture, animal husbandry, metal smelting, the wheel, an alphabet. The very epitome of backwardness and primitivism, we used to believe. „To be human was to share“.

How do these two quotes fit together? That's the theme of the book, the 'dialectic' between humanity's victory over 'outer nature', juxtaposed to that steady withering away of 'inner nature' and the 'objective spirit' – that slide back into the pagan mythologies of the 'culture industry'. That exuberant celebration of trivia, profit, propaganda, blood-lust and eroticism so characteristic of so much of the contemporary media. „The fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant“¹⁹, we read in the *DoE*.

16 Jonathan Israel: *The Radical Enlightenment*.

17 14th of July, 1989.

18 For the authors of the 8th Amendment torture was so obviously beyond the pale that it's not even mentioned. That it may have been a wise precaution to formulate the 8th amendment in such a way that future US administrations could not use torture as a policy instrument seems not to have even crossed their minds.

19 *DoE* xx.

I would like to dwell on two aspects of the book. The first one – the culture industry chapter – is ‘objective’ in the sense it deals with that part of reality that can be experienced; either by ourselves, or by going to the library to read up on the history of what it is that is described in it. The second aspect is subjective at least in this special sense that it deals with the place of the *DoE* within the history of ideas, within the history of philosophy broadly conceived.

1. *The Culture Industry chapter of the DoE*

Adorno did not ever write a book entitled *The Culture Industry*. What Routledge and its editor have recently cobbled together under this title²⁰ is the corresponding chapter from the *DoE*, supplemented with a number of essays from the Adorno collected works, the *Gesammelte Schriften*. But what this opportunistic publishing practice doubtlessly does reflect is that the peculiar hold which the mass media have gained over all of us has in the meantime become so overwhelmingly obvious that this has entered public consciousness as an ominous fact, on a par with global warming and various other unpleasanties.²¹

Let me try to get this into the perspective of the *DoE*. Horkheimer and Adorno watched, during their years of exile in Los Angeles, where they had close contacts with a number of people from the large Hollywood film studios, the beginnings of what in the meantime have become globally operating advertising and mass media, for which they coined the term ‘culture industry’. News, music, entertainment, film, advertising – now supplemented by the internet and the new digital media – have become, for a steadily growing percentage of the human race, the sole source of information, political convictions, moral-ethical ideas, religious guidance, education, role models, gender attitudes, war updates, business practices and

20 T.W. Adorno (2001): *The Culture Industry – Selected essays on mass culture*, ed. by Jay Bernstein.

21 Even the psychologist are beginning to make a stand: „A report of the American Psychological Association (APA) released today found evidence that the proliferation of sexualized images of girls and young women in advertising, merchandising, and media is harmful to girl’s self-image and healthy development.“ www.apa.org/releases/sexualization.html : accessed 1.4.2007.

much else besides. If this now extends to media neither George Orwell nor the authors of the *DoE* knew, this simply means there are angles to all of this the abovementioned authors had not even thought of. Whoever nowadays opens up a newspaper, watches television, opens an e"mail, uses a mobile telephone, downloads an MP3, is automatically thrust into the role of ‘customer’ – a buyer in a new kind of consumer market controlled by a new kind of manufacturer called a ‘provider’. (Increasingly also: an employee.)

What’s so problematic about all this?

To put all this into the context of the FS we need to take a step back, to take in more of the context. For the European intellectuals who came – like the Horkheimer group – from the direction of Marxism and Left Hegelianism, the wars and crises so typical of modernity (the First World War, the Wall Street crash of 1929) were seen as the result of what Hegel had already described a century earlier in his *Philosophy of Right* as the specific ‘problem’ of modernity: that societies based solely on formal rights and ‘the logic of the market’ are in danger of regressing to a kind of Darwinian struggle between what in the language of today would be called ‘global players’ – financial conglomerates, investment consortia, hedge and equity funds, energy giants.²² As long as it is exclusively the market that is the basis for public decision-making, ‘bourgeois’ society is fated to instability and ultimately to war – ‘class war’, according to Marx. If every aspect of our lives is subject to relentless commercialization „“ right down to education, the family, the environment, public order, health care – then rational public policy in these areas becomes impossible. This was the Hegel-Marx background that they shared with Lukács and many others.²³

But there was another aspect of the European experience that found expression in the ‘Culture Industry’ chapter that was directly related to what the authors had seen unfold in the Weimar Republic: an efficient, centrally organised Ministry of Propaganda – equipped with the most modern means of mass communication and dissemination²⁴ – using this power to hammer xenophobic and racist prejudices into the electorate to gain votes. How does one turn an ordinary voter into a maniac shouting for someone else’s blood? The Nazis had shown that it could be done, and this has haunted politics ever since.

22 In Hegel’s terminology: xxxx

23 Hauke quote

24 the ‘Volksempfänger’

It is these two aspects together that give us a clue to what was on their minds, Horkheimer and Adorno, watching the Hollywood studios and the Hollywood films during the war: foreboding that the commercialised mass culture they were seeing in status nascendi could be misused, one day, to drive an entire culture into a variant of the barbarism they had themselves only barely managed to flee.²⁵ Not cheered by the latest discoveries in Psychology – that the human psyche is a lot more malleable to coercion and external pressure than the liberal theories of autonomous individuality were prepared to accept²⁶ – Horkheimer and Adorno set about to paint a gloomy picture of how enlightenment was turning into ‘its other’. It is this that explains the urgency of tone, the quality of a ‘menetekel’, a writing on the wall:

„Advertising becomes art and nothing else, just as Goebbels -“ with foresight – combines them: Part pour Part, advertising for its own sake, a pure representation of social power. In the most influential American magazines, *Life* and *Fortune*, a quick glance can now scarcely distinguish advertising from editorial picture and text. The latter features an enthusiastic and gratuitous account of the great man (with illustrations of his life and grooming habits) which will bring him new fans, while the advertisement pages use so many factual photographs and details that they represent the ideal of information which the editorial part has only begun to try to achieve. The assembly-line character of the culture industry, the synthetic, planned method of turning out its products (factory-like not only in the studio but, more or less, in the compilation of cheap biographies, pseudodocumentary novels, and hit songs) is very suited to advertising: the important individual points, by becoming detachable, interchangeable, and even technically alienated from any connected meaning, lend themselves to ends external to the work. The

25 These parallels that Horkheimer and Adorno were drawing between the Propaganda Ministry in Germany and commercialized mass culture in the US and then globally was not of course anything any of their English-speaking colleagues were prepared to countenance. Conservative German professors with a hankering after ‘Bildung’ should not let the understandable frustrations of their exile irritate them into launching an intellectual broadside against their long-suffering hosts – who were protecting them, after all, from their own countrymen. The tone is still there, sixty years later, in the *Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*. „... in true German conservative manner, the problems of the age are diagnosed as an ‘illness of the spirit’ which, one imagines, the blessings of Bildung are to cure.“ – Roberts, op. cit. p. 72. Elsewhere: „the book is a work of conservative cultural criticism, which, on a conceptual level, is by no means incompatible with work the Nazis were happy to tolerate.“ Bernstein on this: „While Adorno nowhere identifies the culture industry with the political triumph of fascism, he does imply, both directly and indirectly, that the culture industry’s effective integration of society marks an equivalent triumph of repressive unification in liberal democratic states to that which was achieved politically under fascism.“ („Introduction“: *Theodor W. Adorno – The Culture Industry*, 2001.

26 Erich Fromm: „Zum Gefühl der Ohnmacht“ in: *ZfS* 1937.

effect, the trick, the isolated repeatable device, have always been used to exhibit goods for advertising purposes, and today every monster close"up of a star is an advertisement for her name, and every hit song a plug for its tune. Advertising and the culture industry merge technically as well as economically. In both cases the same thing can be seen in innumerable places, and the mechanical repetition of the same culture product has come to be the same as that of the propaganda slogan. In both cases the insistent demand for effectiveness makes technology into psychotechnology, into a procedure for manipulating men. In both cases the standards are the striking yet familiar, the easy yet catchy, the skillful yet simple; the object is to overpower the customer, who is conceived as absent-minded or resistant.

By the language he speaks, he makes his own contribution to culture as publicity. The more completely language is lost in the announcement, the more words are debased as substantial vehicles of meaning and become signs devoid of quality; the more purely and transparently words communicate what is intended, the more impenetrable they become. The demythologization of language, taken as an element of the whole process of enlightenment, is a relapse into magic. Word and essential content were distinct yet inseparable from one another. Concepts like melancholy and history, even life, were recognized in the word, which separated them out and preserved them. Its form simultaneously constituted and reflected them. The absolute separation, which makes the moving accidental and its relation to the object arbitrary, puts an end to the superstitious fusion of word and thing. Anything in a determined literal sequence which goes beyond the correlation to the event is rejected as unclear and as verbal metaphysics. But the result is that the word, which can now be only a sign without any meaning, becomes so fixed to the thing that it is just a petrified formula. This affects language and object alike. Instead of making the object experiential, the purified word treats it as an abstract instance, and everything else (now excluded by the demand for ruthless clarity from expression -" itself now banished) fades away in reality."²⁷

In other words, this approach of Horkheimer and Adorno was the exact opposite of the one taken by Goldhagen and others after the war: anti-Semitism was not some dark blemish on the collective German soul, affecting even 'ordinary men', but explicable on much more rational, if much more unpleasant grounds (unpleasant, i.e. for those on the Anglo side of this divide): proximately the institutions moulding popular opinion, and at a fur-

27 p. 163 ff. Horkheimer and Adorno went well beyond Orwell, Huxley, Ortega y Gasset who were saying similar things at the time. This was not just 'culture criticism'. If the 'dialectic' the authors had postulated between a culture industry doing the bidding of multinationals on the one hand, the regression of the collective psyche on the other (the 'end of the subject' theme) really existed, then it must be possible to demonstrate this empirically. That was what Adorno had carried out in *The Authoritarian Personality* – and it is something that makes fascinating reading even today. c.f. my paper: „Psychoanalysis and Politics in the work of Theodor W. Adorno“.

ther remove: the unprecedented centers of power which capital accumulation in the hands of the few, coupled with the seemingly inexorable militarisation of civil society, has created.

This then was the combination of factors and influences that enabled Horkheimer and Adorno, in the middle of the Second World War, to sketch with remarkable clairvoyance the beginnings of a development the full expansion of which we would see only in our own lifetime, long after the deaths of the authors who had seen it coming. Huge international conglomerates subject to not a vestige of democratic control, always able to turn, should the situation demand it, their marketing expertise into well-organised lobby- and election-campaigns for the candidates and parties that protect their special interests.²⁸ Or put differently: education, commerce, technology, information, advertising, and propaganda have become fused in a way that is unprecedented and which is ominous for the future.

Let us at this point catch our breath and recapitulate. I started off in this paper by calling Horkheimer and Adorno's *DoE* a philosophical work, but then ended up in a discussion of the contemporary mass media. In my first paper, the one on the „Concept of Critique“, something similar happened: starting out, quite innocently, from the philosophical question of the meaning of this one word, ‘critique’, but ending up in questions of constitutional law and international relations. This emphasis on the objective side of things is meant to illustrate a central premise of the Frankfurt School, right through to Jürgen Habermas: philosophy once was, and can once again become, a great deal more than an analysis of concepts and methods, and it can become this without that loss of rigor – and without falling into the abyss of ‘relativism’ – that analytic philosophy holds up as the pitfalls for the unwary.

That's not the same as saying that the intellectual and philosophic origins of the *DoE* cannot be analysed and described.

28 Herbert Schiller: „[m]ass communications are now a pillar of the emergent imperial society. Messages ‘made in America’ radiate across the globe and serve as the ganglia of national power and expansionism. The ideological images of ‘have-not’ states are increasingly in the custody of American informational media. National authority over attitude creation and opinion formation has weakened and is being relinquished to powerful external forces. The facilities and hardware of international information control are being grasped by a highly centralized communications complex, centralized in the United States.“ Quoted in Douglas Kellner: *Television and the crisis of Democracy*, 1990.

2. *Philosophical Background of the DoE*

To do this, even in a very summary way, it is necessary to go back to a hyphenated term that I used above, ‘Hegel-Marxism’, and the tensions contained within it. For it is a term that papers over a tension that is at least as old as Marx’s „Theses on Feuerbach“, and one that touches neuralgic points within the history of the Frankfurt School itself. Not dealing with it means not understanding the controversy that would later develop between the followers of Habermas and the followers of Adorno.

Horkheimer and his friends were no orthodox Marxists, but they oriented themselves to Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy* and if they permitted themselves few illusions about what was going on in the Soviet Union²⁹, they had banked on effective working-class and Trade Union opposition to the Nazis – and saw their own work as support of exactly that. Horkheimer’s „Traditional and Critical Theory“ of 1937 was written by an intellectual who saw himself and his work imbedded in a larger struggle for a more just and less exploitative society, and in that struggle the defeat of the NSDAP was an obvious *sine qua non*.

The timely discovery that this was not going to happen had been, for the Horkheimer group, quite literally lifesaving: it meant that, unlike so many other intellectuals during the thirties they were not caught flatfooted by the electoral successes of the NSDAP.³⁰ But it also meant that a reorientation at the level of theory, in the face of both the Fascist and Stalinist terror, had become a project of the utmost urgency.³¹ It was this that found its expression in the *DoE*. If neither Fascism nor Stalinism were any longer explicable in the categories of Marx, then these two demented products of the European Enlightenment must have some hidden source buried deep within the Enlightenment itself.

That is, whereas the Institut für Sozialforschung in its early years could still be understood as standing in a tradition that led directly from Hegel and Marx to the ‘western Marxism’ of Luxemburg, Lukács and Korsch, the

29 c.f. Walter Benjamin: *Moscow Diary*.

30 The only case on record in which opinion polling, and the new techniques of open-ended interviews saved the lives of the investigators. On the basis of the results „we pursued“, in the words of Leo Lowenthal half a century later, with a note of relief, „a very deliberate policy of emigration, several years before anyone else thought about it.“ Leo Lowenthal: „Wir haben nie im Leben diesen Ruhm erwartet“ in: Greffrath (ed.): *Die Zerstörung einer Zukunft*, p. 208, 1979.

31 Honneth, Jaeggi, diss: theory of revolution itself in crisis

DoE is already something else: an attempt at mobilising, for a ‘materialistically’ oriented theory of enlightenment, those very anti-enlightenment ‘culture critics’ whom Marx himself had derided as bourgeois decadents.

One could put it like this. (I’m indebted to a line of reasoning of Albrecht Wellmer here.³²) Horkheimer and Adorno sought to mobilise a strand of enlightenment critique which had been there in the ‘young’ Hegel, that had been there in the ‘early’ Marx, a kind of respectable stream within German romanticism that ran from Goethe to Nietzsche.³³ In terms of the contemporary discussion of the Enlightenment (shaped by the two massive tomes of Jonathan Israel³⁴) one could say: they sought support for the radical enlightenment in the ranks of those who contested it. This they set out to do so by seeking to understand the obvious mismatch between the original goals and the eventual consequences of the Enlightenment. For the Marxist intellectuals this meant that the history of civilization as this had been described by Marx and Engels had to be examined anew – this time to explain why capitalist, market-driven society, instead of leading to a classless one, had instead produced new manifestations of barbarity. ‘Dialectical’ the process of civilization already was in Marx and Engels’ rendition of it in the sense that humanity’s self-constitution, its increasing power over external nature and the environment, was accompanied at each stage by an increase in exploitation and domination of one ‘class’ by another – and eventually of one nation by another. But Marx and Engels were convinced that this would have its end in a future ‘classless’ society in which domination and emancipation had been overcome.³⁵ For Horkheimer and Adorno this ‘dialectic’ of progress and repression was doubtlessly there, in the whole history of the human race, but by that selfsame token equally manifest in the *internal* world, within human subjectivity, within reason itself. Retold from the ‘within’ of things, the *DoE* becomes a history of reason that is ‘dialectical’ in the sense that reason has, as far back as this can be made out in the history of our species, never been anything else but always interwoven, at each stage, with domination and self-preservation – i.e. always at the cost of someone else.

32 Albrecht Wellmer (1984): „Adorno, Anwalt des Nicht-Identischen“, p. 137/8.

33 c.f. Löwith: *From Hegel to Nietzsche*.

34 Jonathan Israel (2001): *Radical Enlightenment – philosophy and the making of modernity 1650-1750*; *ibid.* (2006): *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752*. OUP.

35 Hauke Brunkhorst tells it differently: already the 18th Brumaire was a ‘*DoE*’, and that ‘Marxism’ and what Marx actually wrote are two quite separate things..

The strategy which Horkheimer and Adorno adopt, in the *DoE*, in the telling of the history of reason and domination is complicated, and I shall be saying a great deal more about this in the next paper, devoted to Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. Here a few preliminary remarks.

They read Marx epistemologically, through the eyes of Kant and Nietzsche, and they read Kant materialistically, through the eyes of Marx and Freud.

What it means to read Marx epistemologically (rather than from the direction of commodity fetishism) one can make clear if one approaches the question of modernity – as Max Weber and Lukács once did – from the perspective of the ‘forms of rationality’ which it embodies and expresses, and especially the relationship between formal and instrumental rationality. If Weber had shown how society, from the 17th and 18th centuries onwards, has been in a ceaseless process of ‘rationalisation’ at all levels (science, technology, commerce and trade, medicine, law, administration, communication, warfare), then this is a ‘reason’ that has been chained from the outset, since times immemorial, to the law of non-contradiction, to the ‘tertium non datur’ [law of the excluded middle], that is, it is itself an expression of man’s innate drive towards exploitations, manipulation.

„In the Enlightenment’s interpretation, thinking is the creation of unified, scientific order and the derivation of factual knowledge from principles, whether the latter are elucidated as arbitrarily postulated axioms, innate ideas, or higher abstractions. Logical laws produce the most general relations within the arrangement, and define them. Unity resides in agreement. The resolution of contradiction is the system in nuce. Knowledge consists of subsumption under principles. Any other than systematically directed thinking is unoriented or authoritarian.“³⁶

In this ‘iron cage’ which the modern world has become, the last vestige of a ‘non-identical’ reason that is not instrumental and not exploitative, embodying the fading hope in a world freed from war and exploitation, is authentic art.

Allow me, by way of conclusion, to return to a stray remark I made at the outset, mentioning that the work of the Frankfurt School, and especially that of Adorno, is receiving more attention now than ever before. Hullot-Kentor, the translator of the *Aesthetic Theory* writes about this in

36 Excursus II, „Juliette or enlightenment and Morality.“

his recently published collection of essays on Adorno, *Things Beyond Resemblance*:

„... part of the reason for the recent interest in Adorno’s work may be in what historians recognise in the recurrently anti-traditional basis of all tradition: that it is always established in adoption from untraditional sources, and this occurs most of all in moments of crisis. And it is in such a moment where all things now stand; indeed they now stand substantially beyond crisis and well into catastrophe. There are two levels of reasons for describing the situation in such strong terms. The close reasons are that Americans during the Bush presidency now find themselves in the midst of experiencing what Germans themselves underwent more than half a century ago: an episode of living in a country that has been seized by a minority that has drawn it into desperate circumstances. This minority has every intention of exploiting these events to assure that the transfer of power it achieved in a dubious election can be made irreversible and on every level. ... One witnesses a country that has become broadly deluded. In the wake of the terrorist attacks, the nation as a whole has suffered a further attack on its sense of reality by the leadership’s own drastically impoverished sense of the world. The situation now has the characteristic of the uncanny where the difference between daily life and what is actually transpiring has steeply intensified to the point that daily conversation has the feel of being unable to address, let alone comprehend, what all are now caught up in. The situations are as distinct as they are related, but to understand – as if in a laboratory – what it really meant for Germans during World War II to claim that they ‘did not know’ it would be possible to study the United States right this moment, September 25, 2003, and find in a substantial majority the prevalence of ideas about the reasons for the invasion of Iraq that bear resemblances to the blindness in broad daylight and phantom reasonings of the earlier situation’s murderous anti-Semitism.“³⁷

That’s a terribly doleful note to close on, so let me do so rather with a passage that I found in a Dutch translation of the *Minima Moralia*, bought in a second-hand bookshop many years ago in Amsterdam, which the previous owner had heavily underlined, and which crops up in the secondary literature quite frequently. In my own copy of the *Minima Moralia* – it was the first book of Adorno that I ever owned, the Jephcott translation of 1974 – it’s the concluding aphorism, entitled „Finale“:

„The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crev-

37 Hullot-Kentor p.155 ff.

ices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without veillity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of its opposite. But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape. The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world. Even its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible. But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.³⁸

38 *MM*, 247.