

12. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), I, 4–5.
13. *Ibid.*, I, 72.
14. Goethe, "Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst," in *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, ed. E. Beutler (Zurich: Artemis, 1954), XIII, 124.
15. Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), in *S. T. Coleridge: Collected Works*, ed. R. J. White (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), VI, 30.
16. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, I, 9.
17. *Ibid.*, I, 10.
18. *Adorno-Benjamin Briefwechsel*, pp. 418–19.
19. Benjamin, *Briefe*, II, 849.
20. I have dealt with this issue in detail in *On Voluntary Servitude*, especially in chapter 6.

3 The dialectic of enlightenment

Horkheimer and Adorno's book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was written in the concluding months of the Second World War. It is comparable with contemporaneous works by other exiled German-speaking philosophers, notably Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* and Lukács's *The Destruction of Reason*, in being what Popper himself described as his "contribution to the war effort." Comparisons are instructive.

Karl Popper was a philosopher of science and a resident of London. *The Open Society* traces – from the vantage point of western democracy – the way in which a certain kind of intolerant (and hence "unscientific") thinking reproduces itself in totalitarian political philosophies: Plato is the ancient representative of this tradition, while its modern representatives Hegel and Marx are discerned, despite their superficial political differences, as the authors of twentieth-century dictatorships of all colors. Györky Lukács, by contrast, wrote as a resident of the Soviet Union and as a metaphysician committed to socialism. For him, Marx, and to a substantial extent Hegel as well, were the fountainheads of an enlightened and humane political system. The strength of "scientific socialism" lay precisely in its incorporation of the insights of dialectical philosophy. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* differs from the other two works in that it reckons up not merely with philosophy under the Nazis, but also with the unashamed free market capitalism of its authors' temporary home, the United States. 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. This is not to say that it is politically tainted. Of the three books mentioned, however, it offers the least clear alternative to the errors it castigates.

Despite this, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has probably had a greater effect than either of the other two manifestos. Lukács's book commits itself in a verbose way to a socialism that was deeply compromised even then. Popper, however competent as a philosopher of science and despite his skill as a stylist, is out of his depth in the history of philosophy. Horkheimer and Adorno, by contrast, are argumentatively rigorous, systematically well founded, and draw judiciously on wide empirical knowledge.

Because of its conservatism, however, the book only achieved its impact long after the war had finished. It was "discovered" by the German student movement in the late sixties, when the original edition was handed round in innumerable bootleg reprints. At this point, in the middle of the Vietnam War, the book's anti-American sentiments had become acceptable in a way that would not have been the case in 1947, when it first appeared. For the authors themselves, who had now for many years been comfortably established in philosophical chairs in Frankfurt, this sudden revolutionary notoriety was, if anything, an embarrassment and led to bitter confrontations with radical students intent on holding them to commitments they believed were now being betrayed. These conflicts undoubtedly hastened Adorno's early death in 1969.

I now look in detail at what these commitments were and then consider the extent to which they can profitably be incorporated into a view of the contemporary scene.

CRITICAL IMPETUS OF THE DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Dialectic of Enlightenment is directed above all against the "barbarity" of Nazi Germany (DE 1). The critique takes its cue from the oppression and physical atrocities perpetrated by the regime and seeks to explain these in terms of the wider philosophical background.

The particular ills identified by Horkheimer and Adorno include the "mythification" of philosophy by thinkers such as Borchardt, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, and Klages, and the use of Nietzsche to justify the Nazis' moral nihilism. In addition to this, the authors' criticism broadens to include features of American capitalism, notably racketeering and other monopolistic abuses, on the one hand, and

"amusement" – that is, the ideological dumbing-down of culture perpetrated by Hollywood and the entertainment industry – on the other. The authors combat these trends in two ways. One is, as the title of the book indicates, a critical investigation of the notion of "enlightenment." This discussion, which embraces a general analysis of the dangers implicit in enlightenment and specific investigations of two of the fields where enlightenment fails, namely the "culture industry" and anti-Semitism, is the thematic mainstay of the book. But in some ways the most striking measures, even though they are described as "excursions," are two adverse readings of classic cultural resources, namely of the *Odyssey* and of de Sade. The *Odyssey* is used to demonstrate that, contrary to German attempts to assimilate heroic culture to myth and legend, the emergence of social actors, of market exchange, and of *homo oeconomicus* is a conscious concern of pre-Hellenic culture, depicted with skill and subtlety by Homer in the *Odyssey*. The essay on de Sade is concerned with the collapse of morality under the impact of enlightenment. The authors seek to demonstrate that the formalized "I" envisaged by Kantian epistemology reduces to a procedural and ultimately vacuous concept of right action.

The essay which, apart from a collection of aphorisms, concludes the book is "Elements of Antisemitism. The Frontiers of Enlightenment." In this essay the authors attempt an ambitious psychotherapeutic derivation of the repressive consciousness they hold ultimately responsible for the many horrors of contemporary history. The book is described as "Philosophical Fragments," and is aphoristic rather than systematic in construction. The picture that emerges from it, however, is coherent and precise.

ALIENATION

The *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* underlying theme is that of alienation. Alienation is the Marxist, psychotherapeutic, or indeed romantic notion that humankind is *estranged* from the natural world. Something does not fit; human beings are doing violence to nature, and ultimately to themselves. Workers spend their lives trapped in occupations they hate, creating products nobody needs and which destroy the environment they live in, engaged in futile and enervating conflicts with their families, their neighbors, other

social groups, and nations. They are enslaved in orders of work and mindless hierarchies that prevent them from ever fulfilling themselves or pursuing their own ideas and creativity. They are torn out of the beauty of the countryside and cut off from the inspirations of culture and art. Human value is reduced to the values of the marketplace: you are what you earn. The supposed "liberation" represented by the modern epoch boils down to a change from one kind of slavery (being owned by the feudal lord) to another (being enslaved to the need to earn a wage). The consequences of this alienation are self-consuming: the more human beings struggle to maintain their artificial hell, the more they are beset by problems engendered by the struggle itself. Alienation is not merely the symptom of something seriously amiss in the world created by human beings, it is a fault that will lead, eventually, to a terminal implosion of the entire system. The beginnings of this catastrophe are visible in the horrors visited upon the world by fascism and Nazism. But they also appear in the miseries of dysfunctional sexuality and blunted sentiment evident at an individual level throughout the modern capitalist world – including, conspicuously, the United States.

THE *HIC ET NUNC*

Adorno and Horkheimer see the opposite of alienation in what they call the "sacredness of the *hic et nunc*" (DE 6; HGS v, 32). The here and now is the element from which alienation estranges us. It is the inability to see or feel what is here, now, in front of us that characterizes our inability to come to terms with our existence. Existence, ultimately, takes place now. As human beings, we have the capacity to think about our future and to incorporate the present and the past into schemes of life. However, our existence is only ever here and now. It can and does draw on the past, which is the sequence of heres and nows in which we have previously found ourselves. We are, with justification, reasonably confident that our existence will continue beyond this passing moment, and that this continuation will only cease at a boundary whose coming we can anticipate. Nonetheless, the "future" is an illusion based on the generalization of our memories of the past. To commit ourselves unreflectingly to this illusion is to give up our lives to a specter.

We spend so much time worrying about the future and about the web of plans and purposes in which we hope to ensnare it that we

become unable to enjoy the only genuine reality we have – namely the moment of our existence right here and now. The character of this genuine reality, in the view of Horkheimer and Adorno, is intensely somatic. We "are" most adequately in the unmediated richness of sense. A particularly poignant example of this is the olfactory sense. When we smell, we are in a preconceptual realm of pleasure and pain. The most direct and powerful organs of sexual perception are smell and touch. And smell – as Marcel experienced with the *madeleines* – heralds contentments that do not recede into the abstract future of deferred gratification, but are located in and recoverable from a genuine past.¹

Our relations with this genuine reality, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, are characterized not by striving and the achievement of purposes, but by "reconciliation." Human beings *are* purposeful; they are full of guile and scheming. They also constantly engage in struggles for power. These features, moreover, clearly can make the material circumstances of life more secure and more agreeable. But they represent a hubris which eternally calls for a return to the nature that has been ungraciously spurned and left behind. Human beings *must* be bodies as well as intellects, simple enjoyers as well as purposeful doers. If they define themselves as intellects alone, they condemn themselves to unhappiness and the perpetual risk of self-destruction.

EQUIVALENCE

The achievement of the market economy (this analysis derives from Lukács, at one remove from Marx's analysis of "commodity fetishism") is that it makes possible the organization of unlimited quantities of labor.² It thus enables human beings to carry out projects that would otherwise stretch their productive capacity to the limit. The market achieves this by defining objects (in the first instance) according to their abstract exchange value. Anything that can be sold comes to have a relation to any other sellable object. The question of whether anyone *wants* to acquire or dispose of a particular object becomes irrelevant: the market mechanism makes it possible to define and quantify the value of each object in isolation from its particular circumstances. Production, or the incentive to produce, becomes disengaged from individual desires and inclinations. It ceases to depend on any kind of personal relationship (for

example, that the producer "belongs to" the person for whom he produces). All the manifold rituals attendant on work in any concrete case are reduced by the market to one simple relation: the exchange values of the entities offered by the market participants. This, moreover, embraces *any* tradable entity. It may be an item produced by a craftsman. But it may equally well be space (land) or time (the labor power of a worker). The more open and liquid the market – that is to say, the more participants engaged at any one time – the more efficient the market becomes at determining "correct" prices for the items traded on it. Items traded on a liquid market lose their character as individual entities and become *commodities*. Any one exemplar of a commodity can be directly substituted for another; anything tradable can as such be directly substituted for another commodity without diminishing or adversely affecting the trader's property interests. The commodity trader may trade coffee, wheat, or beef without ever seeing what she trades, and without the least conception of what raising cattle or growing crops might feel like. Some indication of future supply and demand are a useful aid to forming bids and offers, but essentially, commodity trading takes place in isolation from real world situations and needs.

In a modern market economy commodities are not merely physical items but human beings – or, more precisely, segments of human lives. Workers have a constant tendency to become commodities: they are commodities once their qualities (their "qualifications") and all the features that make them interesting to the capitalist who purchases them (especially their youth and fitness), can be determined in accordance with general norms. Capitalism needs predictable human commodities – individuals whose individuality becomes subordinated to the skill-sets specified for the various branches of production. Once individuals have acquired a "trade," they can allow themselves to be exchanged on the employment market just as the objects they produce are traded on commodity markets. Huge productive efforts can be built up, with the consent of all involved, at short notice and with absolute transparency. But this efficiency (say the critics of commodity fetishism) is bought at a high price. The subordination of individuality to market-defined function does not merely facilitate economic organization – it also destroys the identity and happiness of the human beings involved. It is not possible to alienate segments of one's life without also alienating oneself from the

means of self-determination. The humanity that remains after the labor market has exacted its toll is no more than an empty husk.

The organizational techniques of the market are matched by a conceptual one: equivalence (*DE* 4; *HGS* v, 30). In syntactical terms, entities are equivalent if one can be substituted for the other without losing the truth of the statement. In the statement "Frozen rain makes the fields white," "snow" can be substituted for "frozen rain" without affecting the truth-value of the statement. Hence "snow" and "frozen rain" are equivalent. The two expressions say something quite different, their "intentions" are different, but they both enable the statement to perform the same role and to be usable in the same sort of way. This (Leibnizian) step, as Adorno and Horkheimer point out, enables conceptuality to dispense with individuality in favor of the ability to perform a *function* (*DE* 23; *HGS* v, 53) within a system. The function (the statement) is indifferent to the individual characters of the entities that enable it to perform its job. For the function, the only thing that matters is the *system* within which it operates. A system is a network of self-sufficient, preexisting statements. Because of this preexistence, every system is, as Leibniz described it, "windowless." It reaches out to the outside world only through the medium of functionality. This is its strength, from the point of view of instrumental efficacy. But in other respects (as Horkheimer and Adorno argue) it is a profound weakness. As far as the system is concerned, everything is already familiar: there is no real opening for the unique and the individual. The only difference a concrete thing can make, coming from the outside, is to trigger a "yes" or "no" value in some function. The function in the above case is "x makes the fields white." If the individual substituted for the variable x "works" – that is, enables the function to return a positive truth-value – then nobody cares about the specific details. "Snow," "frozen rain," "white paint," "detergent foam" – they are all satisfactory values for this particular "function," however much they may differ in themselves, essentially, or whatever.³

But the subordination of the individual to its functional context, though it may be liberating both in the context of logic and in the context of the labor market, makes humankind blind to the irreducible differences of individuals. The overweening arrogance of a calculus eclipses the genuine qualities of lived existence, and, moreover, it lends itself as instrument to the interests of power and repression.

Enlightenment is as totalitarian as any system can be. It is not, as its Romantic enemies have argued, that its analytical method, its recourse to elements, its dissolution through reflection make it untrue. What makes it untrue is the fact that, as far as Enlightenment is concerned, the trial is over before it starts. When in a mathematical procedure the unknown is converted into the variable of an equation, it is stamped with the character of the old and familiar even before any value has been derived. (DE 18; HGS v, 47)

POWER AND SELF-PRESERVATION

In an obvious sense, the reduction of individuals to their ability transiently to "substitute" for variables in functional contexts represents a radical disempowerment. The capitalist who buys individuals solely in terms of whether they can perform the job momentarily at hand exercises a dominion far more absolute than that of the feudal slave owner. What is less obvious is the consequence of this alienation for the concept of personal identity. Adorno and Horkheimer pursue this theme in their two "excursions" on the *Odyssey* and on de Sade.

The commentary on the *Odyssey*, as I have already noted, is concerned to subvert the sentimental and nationalistic readings of pre-Hellenic Greek culture hawked around by reactionary Germans. The *Odyssey*, according to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is a narrative of incipient modernity. Odysseus struggles with the terrors of undomesticated nature by means of tricks and stratagems. The central one of these are his games with identity. Identity involves, among other things, disengagement from the identity of the primitive or natural self in favor of a conceptual version (the Polyphemus myth; "My name is Nobody"), the foundation of a *historically* based identity to underpin that of the sentient present (the Sirens), and the installation of a repressive superego to enforce order on the newly emerged and unstable self (Calypso, Circe and the various themes of sexual discipline). The result of these maneuvers is an "identical, purposive and masculine character" (DE 26; HGS v, 56).

The comments on the *Odyssey* are basically approving. Among other things, Horkheimer and Adorno insist that the barbarity shown by Odysseus in relation to Melanthius the goatherd and to the maids who had cast themselves on the suitors is untypical and anomalous. Odysseus is a trickster, but he is not the "hard man" urged by

Prussian commentators. Odysseus's aim is to return home, and this "home," in terms of the commentary in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, represents a genuine reconciliation with nature on the basis of unperverted individual identity. Odysseus is not a marauding blond beast, subduing nature and his fellows to some abstract obsession with power; he is a parable of that resourcefulness and cunning which goes just far enough to ward off the perils of natural existence, but no further.

The other source, which does indeed match the calls for moral "hardness" issued by Nietzsche and his followers, is de Sade. Here the perverse "capitalist" form of individual identity comes to full fruition in a cruel and inhuman order of morality.

In the argument of Horkheimer and Adorno, genuine morality is ultimately primitive and individual, not schematic. It articulates itself in emotions that are – from the point of view of any calculus of interests – pointless and futile: for example, in pity or remorse. "It's no use crying over spilt milk," says the "hard" moralist. But, say Horkheimer and Adorno, it precisely is the remorse over damage done to others that characterizes true moral sentiment, however "useless" it may be in any other perspective. Alienated morality, in their view, derives from the "dark thinkers" of the bourgeoisie, especially Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Mandeville (DE 71; HGS v, 113). These philosophers evacuate the natural core of morality and replace it with pure power. Moral content, from then on, is always ultimately arbitrary. *Cuius princeps, eius religio*. Moral rightness is a function of the interests it serves. The only axiomatic principle is self-preservation. The content of the "self" that is thereby preserved is immaterial; whatever it is, it defines itself in terms of power and articulates itself in the implementation of plans.

Self-preservation, clearly, is one of guileful Odysseus's goals. It is not, however, an end in itself, but merely a way of ensuring some continuity of the material self. It does not exclude the reconciliation of concept and nature at some terminal point. Under the regime of market equivalence, however, human concepts break free and acquire a momentum of their own. The object of the labor market is compelled now to preserve itself in terms of exchangeable attributes. These are a matter of inscrutable and seemingly random mechanisms: one year one needs computer programmers, the next year unemployment among such staff is the highest of any. The anatomical and moral

gymnastics described by de Sade correspond with this view. Goals are, for de Sade, essentially neutral. Right action, or moral "value," resides in the completeness of the calculus that informs action. It does not matter what you do, so long as you do it with the requisite organizational polish. In this respect the sexual practices he describes occupy a point on a continuum from Kant to modern sport. For Kant, the self materializes through its role as center of the categorical system surrounding it (DE 68; HGS v, 109). But it has no role or being apart from that. The self is merely that entity which satisfies the function of accompanying all representations. The specific difference of any individual self is, at most, the "power" with which it engages its activities, or, perhaps, the degree and sophistication of the organization enveloping it. Exactly the same applies to the organized pointlessness of sport:

Sport, like all varieties of mass culture, is governed by concentrated and purposeful activity, even though less informed spectators may be unable to guess the distinction between the various combinations and the significance of the events as they unfold, for these are measured by arbitrarily fixed rules. Like the gymnastic pyramids of de Sade's orgies and the rigid principles of the early bourgeoisie's Masonic lodges – cynically mirrored in the strict regulation of the libertines in *120 Days of Sodom* – the peculiar architectonic structure of the Kantian system announces the fact that the organisation of life has now generally dispensed with substantive goals. (DE 69; HGS v, 111)

MIMESIS AND PROJECTION

Morality, then, has an intuitive basis, and alienation from this basis does not engender autonomy (as Kant would have it), but an abstract game whose only substantial content is power. Analogous arguments apply to knowledge itself.

In the view of Adorno and Horkheimer, knowledge has a "mimetic" origin. Mimesis is the assimilation of consciousness to reality. It does not involve reproduction or apprehension; it is, rather, a matter of unmediated organic intuition. Mimesis is "physical imitation of external nature." As such, it is not an intellectual process. Indeed, it is not even restricted to human beings. Mimesis is the expressive response of created things to their environment, and it acquires its origins with the capacity to *suffer*, which is something

proper to all living beings: "[i]n the simultaneously chaotic and orderly flight responses of lower animals, in the figures created by their milling about, in the convulsive gestures of the tormented, something finds expression which despite everything cannot be quite dominated in poor nature: the mimetic impulse" (DE 151; HGS v, 213). Mimesis extends into the human realm, where it may be found in the impulse to picture and in acting. It is also, say Adorno and Horkheimer, an important component of primitive magic's striving to confront the hostile world of nature (DE 148; HGS v, 210).

The significant aspect of mimesis is its blend of perception and giving. In this respect it has a relation to the senses that differs from that of other forms of knowledge. While seeing, for example, distances the self from the object and leaves it untouched by the object, smell absorbs the self into the perceived object and unites the two:

Of all senses the act of smelling, which is attracted without reifying, bears most pregnant testimony of the urge to lose oneself in the other and to become identical with it. That is why smell, both as perception and as being perceived – both become one in the execution – is more expression than other senses. In sight one remains who one is; in smell one is absorbed. (DE 151; HGS v, 214)

A mode of knowledge which fails to blend the self and the object is one which, ultimately, converts everything into "mere nature" – an outside governed by inaccessible rules. In mimesis, by contrast, the self is carried into the outside and by that very token preserved as a free actor within it. This preservation within and despite the outside is a model of what Adorno and Horkheimer regard as the "reconciliation" of self and nature (DE 153; HGS v, 216).

The other model, namely a knowledge that insists on distance and the absolute distinction between self and object, is attacked by Adorno and Horkheimer as (false) enlightenment. "Enlightenment" knowledge is characterized by its attempt to thrust all known and knowable objects into the corset of systematic "science." It thus renders itself unable to accommodate the *hic et nunc*. But as the authors argue, the world, and everything in it, is essentially unique. No one thing is the same as another. Individuals truly are individuals, and not exemplars of a species (DE 6f.; HGS v, 32). Classification is no more than a *preparation* for knowledge, never its fulfillment (DE 182; HGS v, 250).

The source of this compulsion to "know everything in advance" (*Vorwegbescheidwissen*) is, according to the authors, partly psychopathic and partly the result of fear (*DE* 18; *HGS* v, 46). The fear is the primitive fear of nature, the hostile other which brings death. The psychopathic element is described as projection. Projection is, as Horkheimer and Adorno put it, an animal attempt to create instruments to master the outside world. It stabilizes what would otherwise be chaotic and formless. In itself, this is legitimate. It ceases to be legitimate at the point where a dogmatic insistence takes over that fixity is not merely a feature of instruments, but is a characteristic of the world in general. This insistence is no longer a particular combative response to the needs of survival; it becomes a generalized pathological response to the subject's sense of powerlessness when faced with a nature it perceives to be irresistible. Pathological – or paranoid – projection is convinced that everything is always the same. Only in this way can it cope with the fear that it is itself, eternally, the victim of omnipotent nature. The paranoid subject projects on to the outside world a conviction that all things circle within a closed system of eternal necessity; only thus can it survive its sense of absolute powerlessness. "The closure of the eternally same becomes a surrogate of omnipotence" (*DE* 157; *HGS* v, 220).

The exclusion of the self from the outside world, however, and the denial that free individuals can intervene to change anything in the circuitous mechanisms of "nature," is an illness. Unfortunately it is one that has extended deep into the thinking of modern cultures. It is particularly evident in the depredations of "science," which has done more than anything else to alienate humankind from nature. The nature depicted by "science" has become the object of a paranoid desire to dominate, and by that token, the human beings ejected from participation in nature really have become its victims. What Adorno and Horkheimer call "absolute realism," indeed, culminates in Fascism: it is "a special case of the paranoid illusion which depopulates nature and eventually the peoples themselves" (*DE* 159; *HGS* v, 223). The specific manner of this "scientific" projection is something I have already noted in the context of the market economy: it involves the evacuation of knowledge's human center in favor of systematic, procedural, and "functional" necessities. The substantive intuitions of true knowledge are replaced by the ghostly compulsions of deduction and all the "logical" hierarchies of systematic knowledge

(*DE* 16; *HGS* v, 44). These compulsions and hierarchies, of course, mirror those of the capitalist world. At the same time they convert material objects into values for functional variables, into elements of unremitting "subsumption" (*DE* 21; *HGS* v, 50).

REFLECTION AND THE EMANCIPATION FROM FALSE ENLIGHTENMENT

The core of the book's resistance to what it decries is the notion of "reflection." The failure of "Enlightenment" lies in its inability to see that the relation between subject and object is one of mutual giving and taking. The model of a *false* Enlightenment is provided, above all, by Kant. In Kant's philosophy, the subjects of knowledge and of morality become extensionless centers, abstract geometrical points of reference in systems where truth and falsity are determined exclusively by formal considerations. For Horkheimer and Adorno, truth involves awareness of the role taken in it by the subject, not as a paranoid tyrant projecting some rigid system on nature and humankind, but as the actor in a dialogical exchange with reconciliation, not dominion, as its goal. Consciousness, accordingly, has a "course" (*DE* 160; *HGS* v, 224). It happens in time, and can vary with the unique events and individuals it engages with. True thinking, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, is recognizable precisely in that it can abandon and supersede any previous convictions and conclusions. It does not stand on its imagined insights, but is essentially *negative* towards its own achievements. Consciousness projects systems, deductions, and conclusions, but reflection is always ready to relativize those conclusions once more. Reflection knows the individuality of the knower and of the known, so it is always ready to revise a standpoint as soon as it has reached it. Anything else is "madness."

The consequences of a reflective attitude would, it seems, encompass the following elements. First, it would lead to a more healthy sexuality. Sexuality, not least as an aspect of the book's psychotherapeutic perspective, plays a significant part in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. There is a certain, though rather indistinct, critical angle to the comments on sexuality. The Nazis' technicistic attitude, and specifically their replacement of individual discretion with mindless collectivism, it would seem, predisposes them to be homosexuals (*DE* 210; *HGS* v, 285). Hitler himself, however, the

archetypically "unmoved" paranoid, is on that account worshipped by women (DE 157; HGS v, 221). The book's own attitude to women is ambiguous. Although technical reason is spurned as "masculine," it is not necessarily apparent that feminine reason, whatever that might be, is to be preferred. The view that women capitulate too readily to repressive sexuality is prominent (DE 56; HGS v, 95). And moreover, it would seem, women have a pronounced inclination to compensate for this in pursuits even more futile than those of men: "The last female opposition against the spirit of male society peters out in the swamp of small-scale racketeering, of covens and hobbies, it transforms itself into the perverted aggression of social work and theosophical gossip, or the launching of small cabals in charity work and Christian Science" (DE 208; HGS v, 283). True sexuality, it would seem, contains the promise of reconciliation. This is not to be specifically or exclusively mediated by women, however. It is a reconciliation in the same spirit as that heralded by the sense of smell, the recollection of a primary happiness from the mists of time (DE 56; HGS v, 95). In sex, as in the purposeless eating of the lotos, the oldest and remotest happiness "flashes" before consciousness – as the book's Benjaminian phrase would have it (DE 50; HGS v, 87). Good sex as a recipe for political progress, however convincingly the book may present this argument, is not a particularly novel initiative. Indeed, right-wing philosophy of the time was itself not averse to promoting this road to health.

A second, more directly applicable model for practical action is to be found in the comments on justice. The insistence on calculability and on the subsumption of individual cases under general norms is, as Horkheimer and Adorno convincingly show, a feature of much modern justice (DE 4; HGS v, 29). A justice that refuses to look to the individual case is indeed one where, as the authors say, "Justice is swallowed by law" (DE 12; HGS v, 39). In a legal context, the thirst for equality ends in "repression" and ultimately in the promulgation of *injustice* (DE 9; HGS v, 35). The authors attribute this to false bourgeois enlightenment (DE 4; HGS v, 29). It is not clear, however, what they would put in its place. In response one would in any case need to point out that their strictures apply in the first instance not to "bourgeois" justice, but to the *civil law* tradition. The common law does not insist on "subsumption" as the primary act of the judge. On the contrary, common law judges

are – paradigmatically – jurors, who are deliberately chosen from among the laity in order to *avoid* the kind of system-bound, "scientific" thinking promoted by civil law procedure. The jury is intended to have a direct and emotional engagement with the individual case, unclouded by the cynicism of the professionals. The jury, in common law, is the exclusive judge of fact. The professionals judge the law, but only in relation to matters which lay people, the jurors, have consigned to them as findings of fact. This division of responsibility is designed to maintain the supremacy of concrete facts and real particulars, to combat false assumptions of familiarity, and to preserve the courts' awareness that every case, ultimately, is unique. So in effect the American system of justice (which is pure common law, and is well founded in the philosophical debates of the eighteenth century and subsequently) might well have been an example of what Adorno and Horkheimer were searching for, had they but looked in the right direction while they had the opportunity.

The third, and most concrete, application of "reflection," at least for Adorno, lay elsewhere, namely in the field of *art*. False art, as is apparent from the essay on the culture industry, is merely an instrument of ideology, a means of suppressing the critical faculties of the masses. Ideology uses entertainment and "amusement," whose mendacious harmony and shallow humor merely reinforce the "steel rhythm" of industrial production. Genuine art, by contrast, refuses this appeasement. It recognizes humankind's "claim to happiness" (DE 124; HGS v, 181), but it does not celebrate reconciliation, which in this world is never more than a utopian image; on the contrary, proper art marks the "necessary failure" of conciliatory striving (DE 103; HGS v, 155). Art is like reflective thought in that it refuses the affirmative and points up the "negation" of all finite conclusions. Amusement perfidiously seeks to relieve people of this necessary burden (DE 116; HGS v, 170).

The theory of art goes further than this, for art is, it would seem, a form of knowledge (DE 25; HGS v, 56). Indeed, art, rather than faith (as Kant had claimed), is the true boundary of purposive knowledge (DE 14; HGS v, 42). Art allows the whole to appear in the part; as an expression of totality, claim the authors, art shares the dignity of the absolute (*ibid.*). Totality is never factually achievable or cognizable, but art gestures towards its place at the same time as it marks the boundary of the merely given. The dignity and worth of art thus

exceeds that of "science," and foreshadows the happiness and freedom which are the birthright of all human beings.

CONCLUSIONS

Dialectic of Enlightenment is a powerful manifesto for the fight against modernist barbarity. It is, however, unclear whether it really overcomes the essential conservatism that characterized so much other German thinking of the time, including that of numerous thinkers appropriated by "barbarity."

The book's resistance to modern Platonism and to the tyranny of deduction is clearly opposed to thinkers such as Frege and Russell, who were in the vanguard of the analytical tradition and explicitly celebrated the possibilities of formal logic. They were not, however, noticeably influential in reactionary political or cultural philosophy (despite Frege's unpleasant anti-Semitism in private). In fact, the most vehement anti-Platonists of the first half of the twentieth century were followers of Nietzsche such as Ludwig Klages and, at a remove, Martin Heidegger – and the attractions of their thought for National Socialism are well documented. Oddly, the most evident alternative contemporary source of non-Platonistic thinking would have been the empiricism flourishing in England and the United States. Adorno and Horkheimer seem, however, to have regarded this as a cynical, "pragmatic" formalism even worse than the Kantian tradition they criticized in detail.

At the same time it is noticeable that – despite the lamentable performance of *all* Germany's intellectual institutions under the Nazis, including the universities, the arts, and the law – Horkheimer and Adorno still hold to the Humboldtian notion that there is merit and moral stability in state-monopolized ideological establishments (this means, presumably, *Bildung* [DE 105; HGS v, 157]). Meanwhile, in true German conservative manner, the problems of the age are diagnosed as an "illness of the spirit" (DE 165; HGS v, 230), which, one imagines, the blessings of *Bildung* are to cure. Yet the prescriptions for a new intellectual initiative, despite its rejection of "official philosophy," seem disappointingly thin, however resoundingly they call for resistance to "the administrators" (DE 201; HGS v, 275). By contrast, Horkheimer and Adorno are fairly curmudgeonly when it comes to American cultural alternatives. Humor in art, which can

have the most powerfully subversive political quality (e.g. Charlie Chaplin) is dismissed as the deception of "amusement": true joy lies in serious matters (*res severa verum gaudium*). Those who see through the falsehood cannot laugh: "Baudelaire is as humorless as otherwise only Hölderlin" (DE 112; HGS v, 166). American music, meanwhile, namely jazz, which is scarcely the kind of dumb amusement peddled by Hollywood, gets very short shrift.

In conclusion, it is difficult not to feel that much of the impetus behind *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, despite its breathtaking theoretical scope, is impatience and resentment at the myriad indignities of exile. The fact is that the English-speaking world did resist Nazism, both abroad and indeed at home, in a far more successful manner than Germany. Part of the reason for this, perhaps, lies in the intellectual institutions and traditions of that English-speaking world. This is not a moral judgment and it may be false anyway. But it is disappointing that two such gifted analysts could not have spent a little more time considering that question and the lessons, if any, that might have been learned from it.

NOTES

1. The emphasis on the here and now, and on the nondiscursive "instant," is classic Existentialism. See my *German Philosophy. An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), pp. 199–202. The same theme is important in the work of Ludwig Klages.
2. See Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, I, 1 §4; Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. R. Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 83–222.
3. The Leibnizian project was carried into the twentieth century by Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell. Adorno and Horkheimer themselves trace its roots back as far as Parmenides (DE 4f.; HGS v, 29). For an assessment of the Leibnizian project in the twentieth century, see my *The Logic of Reflection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).