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Dialectics of Cultural Criticism

Adorno's Confrontation with Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages in the *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*

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To the Memory of Professor Georg Bollenbeck

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CHAPTER I.
Intellectual History and Discursive Context

1.1. *Kulturkritik*: a Discursive Typology and its History in Modern Germany

The goal of the present study is to provide a reading of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung* against the intellectual and discursive background of anti-modernist *Kulturkritik* in early 20th-century and Weimar Germany. Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter, as much as *Dialektik der Aufklärung* as a whole, is a cultural critical work in its own right – indeed, arguably *the* classic German work of cultural criticism – and has been treated as such throughout the history of its reception. What has *not* been brought into focus so far in the vast critical literature on Adorno-Horkheimer's seminal work is that the famous 'excursus' on the *Odyssey*, the second chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, is the outcome of Adorno's productive confrontation with the Neo-Romantic *Kultur*- and *Zivilisationskritik* of two German conservative intellectuals of the interwar period, whose names are comparatively little known today: the poet Rudolf Borchardt and the philosopher Ludwig Klages. I contend that this confrontation plays a fundamental role in Adorno's discourse on civilization in the *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, as it structures – though in a rather subterranean way – his famous allegorical interpretation of the Homeric epic.

In order to demonstrate this, in the present study I will provide a close, both *textual* and *contextual* analysis of the early version of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter, published in 1998 in the *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter*. Based on such analysis, I will attempt to show how Adorno's work is not just a philosophical dissertation on the concept of enlightenment, nor simply a lamentation of the dire condition of Western civilization in the early 40s, but also a *polemical text and a syncretistic piece of writing*, situated in a specific discursive and intellectual context, on which it heavily draws and to which it constantly – though often tacitly – refers. Adorno's critical diagnosis of modern civilization in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* does not stand alone, as the product of the author's lonely mind during his American exile,

but rather interacts with the dynamic 'archive' (Foucault) or 'synchronic system' (Deleuze) of cultural critical discourses of modernity in Germany in the interwar period.

Since my reading of Adorno's work will be grounded on some basic assumptions regarding *Kulturkritik*, it is necessary to clarify how I understand this term. For this purpose, in the present section I will provide a twofold introduction into the 'complex' of cultural criticism: a brief discourse-typological introduction and a more extensive historical one. Accordingly, I will firstly conceptually contour the discourse of cultural criticism, and then provide a summary overview of the development of this discourse in modern German intellectual history. In doing so, I will rely on some standard works on the topic, particularly those of Georg Bollenbeck, who is the author of a number of valuable and comprehensive studies on the history of cultural criticism in Germany.

'*Kulturkritik*' is not a very popular word in the German language today. It is often associated with an attitude of biased criticism or even rejection of present cultural phenomena, and seen as a symptom of either backward conservatism or intellectual rebelliousness, elitism or anarchism, pessimism or radicalism: in brief, the opposite of what is generally associated with intellectual moderation and reasonable critique. Furthermore, *Kulturkritik* (or 'cultural criticism'[1]) is such a semantically inclusive term in German that it could mean everything and nothing. It is usually understood as referring to a number of critical discourses about such disparate topics as the flaws of contemporary capitalism, the anarchy of the global market and finance, the stupefying power of the media and pop culture, the overgrowth of technological apparatuses and their encroachment upon human lives, the industrial destruction of the environment, and more. Given this broad semantic spectrum and vague conceptual content, it is understandable that many people turn skeptical when it comes to dealing with the topic of 'cultural criticism' today.

A conceptual definition of *Kulturkritik* is also made difficult by the fact that it constitutes neither a discipline, nor a method or 'subject' of knowledge (Bollenbeck 2007, 8). As Konersmann suggests, the term rather functions as a

> Sammelbegriff für die zahllosen Kommentare, mit denen die Intellektuellen von jeher das Geschehen ihrer Zeit begleitet haben – für jene Traditionen des Einspruches und der scharfsinnigen Analyse, die über spezielle Zustände hinausgreifen und aufs *Ganze* gehen: auf die Stillschweigende Übereinkünfte, auf die *Grundsätze* und

[1] Although 'cultural criticism' in English does not have exactly the same connotation as *Kulturkritik*, I will use them as synonyms in this study, preferring the latter when I intend to stress the specific German tradition of cultural criticism.

> Regeln, die dem menschlichen Zusammenleben Form und Gestalt geben. (Konersmann 2001, 9)

Konersmann mentions three constitutive aspects of cultural criticism, namely: 1) its orientation towards the present; 2) its claim to a comprehensive interpretation of reality; 3) its aprioristic approach, that is to say its focus on the determining, *structural* conditions of human life in society. The latter is indeed the point of departure for cultural criticism, yet it is *not* its object (otherwise one would speak of 'social criticism' or *Gesellschaftskritik*). The focus of cultural criticism is rather on the *effects* of the state of socialization on individual life, which is to say on 'culture' as a medium of subjective experience and as an object of reflective judgment.

From the perspective of intellectual history, *Kulturkritik* can be defined as both a *mode of critical reflection* and a *discursive typology* that "sich mit der 'evolutiven Moderne' ausbildet und dessen Wertungs- und Ordnungsschemata gegenüber den Zumutungen der Moderne sensibilisieren" (Bollenbeck 2007, 10-11). The 'evolutionary' modernity mentioned by Bollenbeck is that originating in the far-reaching cultural movement of the Enlightenment. *Kulturkritik* in its modern form emerged in Europe in the second half of the 18th century, when the criticism exerted (on dogmas and traditions) *by* the Enlightenment turned into a criticism addressed *to* the Enlightenment, particularly its progressive philosophy of history, optimistic anthropology and pragmatic-utilitarian vision of life in society. Significantly, however, the early 'fathers' of European cultural criticism, Jean Jacques Rousseau (*Discours sur les sciences et les arts,* 1750; *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes,* 1755), and Friedrich Schiller (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, 1795) did not break with the emancipatory premises and optimistic anthropology of the Enlightenment. They instead appealed to the new, enlightened ideas of rational self-determination and intermundane self-realization, and played them against the contemporary state of society[2].

In his study on the history of cultural criticism in Germany, Georg Bollenbeck differentiates between the "*motivierende Ausgangslage* des kulturkritischen Denkens" and its "*allgemeine Problemkonfiguration*" (ibid. 11; italics in original). The point of departure of cultural critical discourses in post-Enlightenment modernity is "eine geschichtsphilosophisch

[2] As Bollenbeck contends, cultural criticism in the 18th century "entsteht in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Aufklärung, vor allem mit ihrer Anthropologie und Geschichtsphilosophie. Es hinterfragt die Fortschrittstheorie der Aufklärung, den Glauben an die vernunftgeleitete lineare Perfektionierung der Welt. Es nimmt deren emanzipatorische Verheißungen ernst und es präsentiert Verlustgeschichten. Man könnte auch sagen, *erst die Verheißungen der Aufklärung rufen Kulturkritiker auf den Plan*" (Bollenbeck 2007, 11; my italics).

nicht mehr vermittelbare Diskrepanz zwischen hochgestimmten *Erwartungen* und ernüchternden *Erfahrungen*" (11; my italics). These expectations ("Erwartungen"), first raised by the cultural revolution of the Enlightenment, are those of individual emancipation and rational self-determination within an open social structure. The problematic configuration ("Problemkonfiguration") resulting from the disillusionment with such expectations is, as Bollenbeck further notes, "die Entfremdung von sich selbst wie von der Gesellschaft und die schwierige Vermittlung von Individuum und Gesellschaft" (ibid. 11). Enlightened claims to individuation elicit awareness of the discrepancy between personal expectations and socio-cultural conditions. Based on such unsatisfying relationships between the individual and society, *Kulturkritiker* typically project models of felicitous harmony both at the individual (the '*Gesamtperson*') and the collective level (the '*Gemeinschaft*' as a model of intact and cohesive community; see Bollenbeck 2007, 9). They usually do so by imagining an alternative – either 'real' or fictitious, past or future – cultural condition, in which the modern promises of emancipation and self-realization already *have been or will have been* realized: the state of nature in Rousseau, the aesthetic state in Schiller, the *Übermensch* in Nietzsche, just to name a few prominent examples.

In this sense, cultural critical discourses usually have an implicit normative presupposition, which determines their line of argument and semantic intention. Bollenbeck for this reason defines *Kulturkritik* as "ein normativ aufgeladener Reflexionsmodus" (ibid. 10). Cultural criticism is not simply criticism of culture, but rather "Kritik der Kultur im Namen der Kultur" (Konersmann 2001, 33). An assumption of what culture is – or rather *should* be – always tacitly directs the discourse of cultural criticism. However, this normative character does not necessarily imply a systematic theorization: "Kulturkritik steht zwar immer auch in einem theoriegeschichtlichen Traditionsbezug, aber sie bietet kein immanente Entfaltung einer Theorie" (Bollenbeck 2007, 8). Major cultural critics of modernity – from Jean Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Schiller, to Friedrich Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler, to Theodor W. Adorno and Günther Anders – are not 'pure' philosophers or systematic theoreticians, but rather multi-talented intellectuals, highly idiosyncratic thinkers or "Dichterphilosophen" (ibid. 12) at the crossroads between different disciplines (literature, philosophy, anthropology, sociology). They incarnate what Claude Lévi-Strauss called a *pensée sauvage*, which provokes common sense and breaks disciplinary boundaries in order to open eccentric perspectives on the present.

The 'surplus value' of cultural criticism with respect to traditional academic discourses resides indeed in its 'authorial' character. Cultural critics give voice to their

personal experiences, and consequently attach "eine Art 'Symbolische Prägnanz'" to singular phenomena (ibid. 8). *Kulturkritik* thus is not only a normative, but also an 'affective' mode of reflection on the present (see ibid. 19). In this sense it is always also *Zeitkritik*, a "Denken mit Weltdeutungsanspruch, das vom Zeitgeist lebt, wenngleich es sich gegen die eigene Zeit wendet" (ibid. 11). 'Time' should be understood in this context as the socio-cultural complex to which the critic himself belongs, and which he evaluates from a comparative temporal perspective. Cultural critical discourses typically present "Verlustgeschichten und Pathologiebefunde, die sich gegen die eigene Zeit unter Berufung auf *bessere Zeiten* richten" (Bollenbeck 2007, 7; my italics). Rather than as actually historical, however, these 'better times' ought to be understood as meta- or ahistorical thought-fictions, serving as counter-projections to present culture.

In a cultural critical perspective, modernity not only provides individuals with all sorts of material benefits and practical comforts, but also determines a deep 'discontent' (Freud) with the state of civilization. The modern condition brings with it predicaments and grievances that putatively were not there in the pre-modern past, and may no longer be there in a better future: the fragmentation of life into autonomous spheres of thought and action, the lack of binding values capable of regulating the antagonistic tendencies of society, and the dissolution of community bonds and shared beliefs. From the late 18th century onwards, cultural critical discourses lament the combined action of "Rationalisms und Materialisms, Verstand und Nutzen. ... Ihre Herrschaft führt zur Entfremdung des Menschen im Produktions- und Distributionsprozess und zum Zerfall der Gemeinschaft aufgrund der Spezialisierung und des eigennützigen Individualismus" (Merlio 2000, 20). 'Civilized' life furthermore subjects individuals to different forms of physical as well as psychic imbalance, self-sacrifice and abnegation, amputation of personal talents and expectations, subtle forms of coercion and exploitation. The culture of modernity is marked from a cultural critical perspective by multiple alienations: social, due to the increasing specialization and division of labor in modern capitalist society; material, due to the industrial proliferation and unequal distribution of goods and riches; and technological, due to the encroachment of technical means and mechanical apparatuses in the vital sphere (*Lebenswelt*) of man.

So far I have referred to 'modernity' as a notion essential to understanding the cultural critical mode of reflection and discursive typology. Yet *Kulturkritik* should be more properly regarded as an intellectual response to the *process of modernization* that took place in Europe throughout the 19th century. The task of cultural criticism since the late 18th century has been "die aufklärerisch beschleunigten Veränderungen des Wissens und, in deren Gefolge, die

Modernisierungseffekte in der sozialen Welt am Maßstab der Zuträglichkeit für diejenigen zu messen, die diesen Veränderungen ausgesetzt sind" (Konersmann 2001, 26; my italics). A definition of the concept of 'modernization' is therefore essential to the comprehension of the phenomenon of cultural criticism in modern European thought. Based on the study of the Dutch sociologists Hans van der Loo and Willem van Reijen, I propose to define the 'modernization' through four notions, namely *differentiation*, *individuation*, *rationalization* and *domestication*, pertaining to four respective areas: society, person, culture and nature (see Loo/Reijen 1992). The process of European modernization throughout the 19th and 20th century can be broken down to the above-mentioned transformative notions, which also constitute the basic conceptual pillars of modernity's self-narrative for more than 200 years. At a 'structural' level, one witnesses in the 19th century a growing differentiation of roles and tasks within an increasingly complex social and economic structure. At a personal level, these socio-economic dynamics result in an increasing emancipation of individuals from traditional bonds and relational networks (village, close community, family, church), allowing them more possibilities for personal choice and self-determination. At a cultural level, the process of modernization entails a 'rationalization' of the life-world (as '*Lebenswelt*'), which is to say an orientation of both thought and action towards such parameters as calculability, efficiency and productivity. Finally, modernity is marked in its self-understanding by increasing human knowledge and control of nature and its 'resources'. Modernization goes hand in hand with scientific and technological advancements, which allow man to overcome his 'natural' limits and transform himself as well as his environment with ever-accelerating rapidity.

Cultural criticism in modernity sets out to expose the 'paradoxes' resulting from these transformative dynamics that characterize the process of European modernization. For each of the above notions, related critical arguments emerge beginning in the later part of the 18th century, which will accompany 'progressive' modernity throughout the 19th century and beyond. I propose to sum up the gist of these recurring arguments through four terms: *instrumentalism*, *alienation*, *intellectualism* and *artificiality*. As far as the process of social *differentiation* is concerned, the criticism of modernity is usually directed at the fragmentation of human activity and the resulting reduction of the individual to a mere *instrument* or function within a inscrutable system of relationships, an opaque 'mechanism' that consumes those who take part in it. The growing *individuation* brought about by the process of cultural modernization, on the other hand, is submitted to a criticism of the isolation and reciprocal *alienation* of individuals in modern society. Its members are no longer part of a community (*Gemeinschaft*) of values and beliefs, but rather of utilitarian means and interests. Impersonal

relationships and anonymous interactions – instead of a shared world-view and life-style, habits and mentality – lead to solitude, disorientation, loss of meaning and unstable identity in the rapidly expanding urban contexts of European modernity. The *rationalization* of culture leads to abstract thinking, and constrains individuals to preformed patterns of thought and an instrumental approach to others. In other words, the criticism of rationalization is directed at the intrinsic *intellectualism* of modern life. Finally, the *domestication* of nature in a cultural critical perspective implies an estrangement of man from the 'organic' basis of life. Through increasing technical appropriation and control of nature, men shake off their dependence on the environment, yet in so doing they become increasingly dependent on their own manmade arrangements and apparatuses. The modern domestication of nature thus determines an increasing *artificiality* of human life in the technological 'regime' of modernity.

We will encounter the above-mentioned critical arguments in different forms in the course of the present study, while dealing with Adorno's relation to the anti-modernist cultural criticism of Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. For the moment, it is important to bear in mind that, while such critical arguments already emerged in the first, post-Enlightenment phase of European modernity – i.e., in the Romantic Era – they assumed a new intensity and scope towards the end of the 19th century. This was particularly the case in Germany, where the process of modernization had evolved in the second half of the century with a magnitude and rapidity that found no equal in the rest of Europe. If cultural criticism can be seen as the expression of a "discontent with disenchanted modernity ... historically this discontent found its sharpest and most sustained articulation in Germany" (Murphy-Roberts 2004, X). Here, *Kulturkritik* accompanied the country's modernization as a sort of ongoing intellectual commentary after the national unification (see Bollenbeck 2007, 199 ff.), reaching its peak during the first decades of the 20th century (see Merlio-Raulet 2005, 7). From the turn of the century onwards, Germany became the indisputable homeland of cultural criticism, which was raised to philosophical dignity by such thinkers as Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and popularized (indeed vulgarized) by such 'minor' philosophers as Paul de Lagarde (1827-1891), Julius Langbehn (1851-1907) and, later, Oswald Spengler (1880-1936).

The reasons for the specificity of the German tradition of *Kulturkritik* are complex. From a sociological perspective, cultural critical discourses originate in Germany in the milieu of the educated bourgeoisie (the so-called *Bildungsbürgertum*) as an intellectual reaction to the challenges posed to traditional – i.e., 19th-century – bourgeois culture and its

bearers (the *Bildungsbürger*[3]) by the sweeping dynamics of modernization that rapidly transformed the country into an advanced industrial society in the aftermath of the *Reichsgründung*[4]. Certainly such dynamics were not specifically German, as they reflect the far-reaching changes that Western European societies underwent during the Second Industrial Revolution. However, not only the scope of these changes, but also the magnitude and intensity of the reactions that they provoked were greater in Germany than in any other European country. A possible explanation for the *cultural specificity* of the German discourses on modernity has been suggested by Stefan Breuer, amongst others. According to Breuer, this specificity is due to the overlapping in Germany of two different modernizing phases, namely the 'simple' (liberal and progressive) and the 'reflective' (skeptical and disillusioned) one. As Breuer explains,

> Die einfache Modernisierung hatte die klassische bürgerliche Marktgesellschaft geschaffen, die zwar im Verhältnis zur *societas civilis* [the *Ancient Régime*, A/N] eine umfassende Freisetzung bislang gebundener Elemente bedeutete, diese aber zugleich limitierte und auf eine neue Synthesis verpflichtete: die Arbeitskraft konnte nun frei zirkulieren, doch wurde die 'Vollvermarktung' durch die verstärkte Bindung der Frauen an Hausarbeit und Kindererziehung blockiert; die politische Willensbildung wurde ebenfalls freigegeben, zugleich aber durch eine Beschränkung des Wahlrechts auf die 'Selbständigen' begrenzt; allenthalben stand die Emanzipation des einzelnen unter dem Vorbehalt seiner Einfügung in ein als harmonische gedachtes Ganzes, das als Schutz vor Chaos, Willkür und Fragmentierung gedacht war. ...
>
> Das Reflexivwerden der Modernisierung hingegen bedeutete, dass die Vorbehalte und Limitationen der klassischen bürgerlichen Gesellschaft ausgehöhlt und aufgezehrt wurden. ... Wurden im 18. Jh. ständische Privilegien und religiöse Weltbilder durch die sich autonom setzende Vernunft entzaubert, so wurde in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jh. diese Vernunft ihrerseits entzaubert und mit ihr das gesamte Institutionsgefüge der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Der Staat galt nicht länger als historische Inkarnation des Allgemeinen, sondern als bloße Maschine, die bestimmte Aufgaben zu erfüllen hatte; die bürgerliche Gesellschaft nicht mehr als 'Erscheinungswelt des Sittlichen', sondern als höchst unsittliche Welt der Krisen und Zusammenbrüche, deren Einheit sich stets nur in gewaltsamer, katastrophalster Form geltend machte. Die Moral erschien als ein Symptom der Dekadenz (Nietzsche); die bürgerliche Kleinfamilie mit ihrer starren Geschlechtsrollenzuweisung als ein Instrument zur Versklavung der Frau. Die Prämissen der bürgerlichen Industriegesellschaft gerieten ins Wanken; und wenn sie sich auch noch bis weit ins

[3] In the German language "the concept of *Bildungsbürger* is strongly linked to a traditional, nineteenth-century bourgeois culture and relates to those groups who achieved their middle-class status primarily through *Bildung*, through education: lawyers, doctors, teachers, professors, and to some degree the technical elite, such as engineers. The notion of *Bildungsbürger* is often used to differentiate this group from another pillar of the German bourgeoisie, the *Wirtschaftsbürger*, who gained their status primarily through success in business-related activities" (Widdig 2001, 178).

[4] For an overview of the socio-historical conditions of turn-of-the-century *Kulturkritik* see Bollenbeck 1994 (277 ff.), Bollenbeck 2007 (199 ff.), Breuer, 1996 (184 ff.), and Luhr 2002 (149 ff.).

> 20. Jh. hinein zu behaupten vermochten, so sahen sie sich doch einem Druck ausgesetzt, der im gleichen Masse mächtiger wurde, wie die Logik der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft selbst zu einer *industriellen Massengesellschaft* hindrängte. (Breuer 1993, 15-16; my italics)

It is true that these perceptions of change were also common in other industrial nations around the turn of the 20th century. Yet due to the 'belated' national unification (see Plessner 1959), in Germany, the 'first' and 'second' phases of modernization occurred almost simultaneously: "In Deutschland ... setzte sich die einfache Modernisierung erst zu einem Zeitpunkt durch, als von technisch-organisatorischer Seite her bereits der Übergang zur reflexiven Modernisierung auf der Tagesordnung stand" (Breuer 1993, 17). This compressed modernization was perceived and reflected with particular acuity by the *Bildungsbürgertum*, that sector of the bourgeoisie whose identity was defined by individual cultivation (*Bildung*), knowledge (*Wissen*) and personal merit (*Leistung*), and which had heavily contributed to the cultural modernization of the German states in the course of the 19th century (see Jarausch 1989). For the *Bildungsbürgertum*

> War das Reflexivwerden der Modernisierung ein mehrfacher Schock. Es mußte zum einen registrieren, daß der Wunsch, nicht im bloßen Brotberuf aufzugehen, unerfüllbar wurde bzw. nur mehr um den Preis eines Absinkens in eine höchst prekäre und sozial wenig respektable Boheme-Existenz zu haben war. Es mußte zum anderen erkennen, daß Individualisierung im Sinne der reflexiven Modernisierung genau das Gegenteil von dem bedeutete, was es unter Individualität verstand, nämlich Atomisierung, Diskontinuität, Selbstverlust. (Breuer 1993, 19)

Consequently, it was the *bildungsbürgerliche* intelligentsia that gave voice in Germany, from the late 19th century on, to the perceived 'diseases' of modern civilization and to the contradictions and 'paradoxes' of modernity (see Loo/Reijen 1992). The unique path (or *Sonderweg*[5]) of German *Kulturkritik* is grounded on the cultural self-understanding and sensibility of the educated middle class, as well as on its normative understanding of '*Kultur*'. As Bollenbeck notes, "Kulturkritik in einem spezifisch deutschen Sinne operiert mit einem

[5] A term that some German historians (such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler) have used to indicate the path of Germany towards modernity, as measured against the putatively 'normal' development of other Western European countries, such as France and England, regarded as the cradle of the founding 'revolutions' of modernity (respectively, socio-political and industrial-economic). Helmuth Plessner's notion of Germany as the 'belated' nation of European modernity for instance implicitly operates within the *Sonderweg* paradigm (see Plessner 1959). For the cultural (and therefore cultural critical) implications of this paradigm of historical interpretation see Bollenbeck 1994, 129 and 154 ff.

engen, normativen Kulturbegriff, der als kontrastiver Bezugspunkt das Krisenbewusstsein lenkt" (Bollenbeck 2007, 14). This normative notion or ideal informs virtually all critical discourses and reflections on culture in turn-of-the-century Germany. Prominent cultural critical philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Georg Simmel, Georg Lukács and Max Weber (as well as Theodor W. Adorno and the other thinkers of the *Frankfurter Schule* in their wake) in effect all root their arguments in the German *bildungsbürgerliche* tradition, and operate with a corresponding understanding of *Kultur*. For this reason, it is necessary to dwell for a moment on the historical semantics of this term, to see how it determines the specificity of German *Kulturkritik* in modernity.

As a modern notion, the word *Kultur* in German is a product of the Age of the Enlightenment, when it referred – broadly speaking – to the overall development of society. As such, the term often recurred in combination with other quintessentially modern notions such as 'progress' ('*Fortschritt*') and 'history' ('*Geschichte*') (see Koselleck 1990, 15 ff.), which are equally the product of the terminological 'breeding ground' of Enlightenment culture. *Kultur* is thus essentially a modern word, expressing a new epistemology and view of the world, emphasizing its knowability, changeability and indeed perfectibility. Up to the early 1800s, the German word *Kultur* could refer to such disparate fields as: 1) commerce and industry, along with the comforts that result from them; 2) knowledge, science and technology; 3) forms of government, politics, institutions; 4) habits, customs and mentality; 5) arts and religion (see Bollenbeck 1994, 93). In this sense, *Kultur* corresponded to similar terms in the other European languages ('*culture*', '*cultura*' etc.), and was synonymous with the term '*Zivilisation*' (from Latin '*civilis*', meaning relating to the habits and lifestyle of the citizen, as opposed to '*rusticus*', indicating the raw manners and mentality of the peasant). At the turn of the 19th century, both *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* belonged "zum 'geistigen Erfahrungskapital' der europäischen Intelligenz" (ibid.), and Germany made no exception in this sense[6].

Starting with Romanticism and the European Restoration (i.e., from around 1815), however, the notion of *Kultur* undergoes a slow semantic change in the German language. Its semantic field is gradually reduced to the creative *products* of the human 'spirit', and to the *process* (or condition) of individual cultivation (*Bildung*) through these products: "Als

[6] As Bollenbeck notes, "nicht die Wortkörper sind entscheidend, sondern die gemeinsame europäische Semantik. Beide Aufdrücke erhalten ihren begrifflichen Status mit den Verbesserungserfahrungen, mit jenem 'Commerz-, Finanz- und Bildungsgeist', der ein neues bürgerliches Selbstbewußtsein und eine neue Sicht auf Geschichte und Gesellschaft betreibt. Sie beziehen ihre beschreibbare Besttätigung aus den Fortschritten der Technik und der Ökonomie, der Wissenschaften und des Erziehungswesens, und sie können damit zu Bewertungsmaßstab des 'Fortschritts' geraten" (Bollenbeck 1994, 93).

‘Kultur’ in einem normativen Sinne kann nur Geltung beanspruchen, was der Steigerung der Individualität dient. Sprache, Philosophie und Kunst bilden deren Zentrum” (Bollenbeck 1994, 154). The term *Kultur* thus becomes “idealistisch imprägniert” and will carry this connotation amongst the German educated class throughout the 19th and well into the 20th century, due to the enormous influence in *Gymnasia* and universities of philosophically educated pedagogues, school teachers and university professors trained in the tradition of Neo-Humanism inspired by such figures as Friedrich Schiller and Wilhelm von Humboldt (cf. Bollenbeck 1994, 133)[7].

The semantic transformation of the term *Kultur* in early 19th century Germany reflects the new values hierarchy of the emerging *Bildungsbürgertum*. *Kultur*, as a medium of spiritual self-formation (i.e., of *Bildung* as the expression of a ‘*innerweltliche Weltfrömmigkeit*’; see Plessner 1959, 37), was contrasted to the shallow forms, restraints and conventions of ‘civil’ – i.e., social – life[8]. Furthermore, this emphatic meaning of ‘culture’ was conceptually separated from the traditional realms of bourgeois self-realization: economy, politics and, increasingly, science and technology. Although these fields were still seen as pertaining to *Kultur*, they came to be ever more frequently subsumed under the common denominator of *Zivilisation*, which in its turn did not cover the fields of art, literature and the creative products of the human spirit (a notion that acquired a particular significance in German intellectual discourses with Idealist philosophy)[9]. The semantic as well as conceptual bifurcation between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* has no parallel in the other European

[7] In the1930s the sociologist Helmuth Plessner could still write: “Kultur, der deutsche Inbegriff für geistige Tätigkeit und ihren Ertrag im weltlichen Felde, ist ein schwer zu übersetzendes Wort. Es deckt sich nicht mit Zivilisation, mit Kultiviertheit und Bildung oder gar Arbeit. Alle diese Begriffe sind zu nüchtern oder zu flach, zu formal, bzw. ‘westlich’ oder an eine andere Sphäre gebunden. Ihnen fehlt das Schwere, die trächtige Fülle, das seelenhafte Pathos, das sich im deutschen Bewußtsein des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts mit diesem Wort verbindet und seine oft empathische Verwendung verständlich macht” (Plessner 1959, 65).

[8] In his essay *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784) Immanuel Kant already provides a definition of *Kultur* in opposition to *Zivilisation*: “Wir sind im hohen Grade durch Kunst und Wissenschaft *cultivirt*. Wir sind *civilisirt* bis zum Überlästigen, zu allerlei gesellschaftlicher Artigkeit und Anständigkeit. Aber uns für schon *moralisirt* zu halten, daran fehlt noch sehr viel. *Denn die Idee der Moralität gehört noch zur Cultur*; der Gebrauch dieser Idee aber, welcher nur auf das Sittenähnliche in der Ehrliebe und der äußeren Anständigkeit hinausläuft, macht blos die *Civilisirung* aus” (Kant 1971, 26; my italics). Kant, a representative philosopher of the new bourgeois sensibility, links the idea of culture to true morality – which the individual can attain through cultivation in the medium of arts and sciences – and conceptually separates it from *Zivilisation* as mere politesse and social ‘competence’.

[9] This is what Wilhelm von Humboldt says about the interrelated concepts *Kultur*, *Zivilisation* and *Bildung* in 1836: “Die *Zivilisation* ist die Vermenschlichung der Völker in ihren *äußeren Einrichtungen und Gebräuchen* und der darauf Bezug habenden inneren Gesinnung. Die *Kultur* fügt dieser Veredlung des gesellschaftlichen Zustandes *Wissenschaft* und *Kunst* hinzu. Wenn wir aber in unserer Sprache *Bildung* sagen, so meinen wir damit etwas zugleich *Höheres und mehr Innerliches*, nämlich die Sinnesart, die sich aus der Erkenntnis und dem Gefühle des gesamten geistigen und sittliche Strebens harmonisch auf die Empfindung und den Charakter ergießt” (Humboldt 1968, 21-22).

languages, and ideally marks the beginning of the German cultural *Sonderweg* to modernity. As Bollenbeck notes,

> Mit der Aufwertung von 'Bildung' und der Abwertung des umfassenden Kulturbegriffs der Aufklärung beginnt die Geschichte des typisch deutschen Deutungsmusters. Während in Frankreich 'Zivilisation' seinen weiten Bedeutungsumfang behält und eine enge Beziehung mit dem Fortschritt ('progrès') der Menschheit, der Gesellschaft und des Individuums eingeht, erfährt der Kulturbegriff in Deutschland einen markanten Wandel. Sein Bedeutungsumfang schrumpft, während sein Bedeutungsinhalt in Verbindung mit einem emphatischen Bildungsbegriff stärker *philosophisch, ästhetisch und pädagogisch* aufgeladen wird. In Westeuropa verlieren der französische Begriff 'civilisation' und der englische Begriff 'civilization' nicht ihren Bezug zu einer Vorstellung von 'bürgerlicher Gesellschaft', wie sie das 18. Jahrhundert als 'société civile' oder 'civil society' entwickelt hat. Darunter verstehen die Denker der Aufklärung nicht, wie später Hegel oder Marx, die kapitalistische Gesellschaft als historische Gesellschaftsformation, sondern die Gesamtheit der Lebensverhältnisse, der Technik und des Gewerbes, der politischen Verfassung und des Handels, der Wissenschaften und Künste. Dieser Ausgangspunkt von den Lebensverhältnissen und Bewährungsfeldern des Bürgertums wird in der Geschichtswissenschaft des Westens nicht aufgegeben. (Bollenbeck 1994, 98-99)

On the contrary, in Germany one witnesses a separation between the realms of practical and spiritual activity, culture and economy, *within the bourgeoisie* itself: "Innerhalb weniger Jahre wertet die deutsche Intelligenz mit dem Ideal einer zweckfreien geistigen 'Bildung' die Ökonomie und Nützlichkeit, die Berufserziehung und die Technik ab" (ibid. 99). Despite its idealist character, throughout the 19th century the conceptual couple – or 'interpretative pattern' ('*Deutungsmuster*'), as Bollenbeck calls it – '*Kultur und Bildung*' played an integrative function in Germany amongst the forming middle class, providing it with a common background of values and ideals that prepared the ground for the political unification of the German lands: "Lange vor der Reichseinigung 'von oben' kommt es ... zu einer symbolischen Reichseinigung aus der Mitte des Bildungsbürgertums. Der Staatsnation geht die 'Kulturnation' voraus" (ibid. 158). Germany defined itself throughout the 19th century as a cultural nation, and only later as a political one. The 'communicative success' ("kommunikativer Erfolg", ibid. 293) of the normative ideas *Kultur* and *Bildung* was such that the values called forth by it – incarnated by the cultural myth of the *Weimarer Klassik* and its 'heroes', Goethe and Schiller – could be appropriated by vast strata of the German population, well beyond the traditional boundaries of the educated bourgeoisie.

The prestige of the notions *Kultur* and *Bildung* was already established at the time of the formation of the German *Reich*, when it provided a now culturally influential and self-conscious bourgeoisie with a common cultural framework, characterized by a "Zusammenhang von individualistisch konzipierter 'Bildung' und symbolischer Vergesellschaftung" (ibid. 194). This symbolic pattern enabled the educated bourgeoisie to exert its cultural influence at a national level: "Mit der 'Nationalkultur', die von den Vorstellungen des Bildungsbürgertums durchdrungen ist, die dabei aber einen Glanz über dies Schicht hinaus erhält, kann das Bildungsbürgertum seine *kulturelle Hegemonie* befestigen" (ibid. 221; my italics). Both before and after the national unification of 1871, political nationalism was accompanied in Germany by the idea of a 'cultural' mission of the state (the so-called '*kulturstaatliche*' mission), which was to provide its citizens with a general education in the interest of the national community. The educated bourgeoisie was a major protagonist in carrying out this mission, and provided in this sense a valuable ideological service to the national cause.

Overall, the process of social, economic and state modernization throughout the 19th century went hand in hand with the development of the interpretative pattern '*Bildung und Kultur*'. Both were modeled and promoted by a culturally self-conscious, though socially fragmented and politically underrepresented, educated bourgeoisie[10]. While the normative ideas of the *Bildungsbürgertum* were susceptible to different political inflections, their character was fundamentally 'progressive', that is to say trusting in the perfectibility of human life in society, and fundamentally future-oriented[11]. *Kultur* was equated with progress, and regarded as a determining factor of the general wellbeing of society. As such it was to be

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[10] Stefan Breuer describes the particular socio-cultural status and historical function of the *Bildungsbürgertum* in 19th-century Germany in the following terms: "Produkt einer spezifischen Geschichte, die von so unterschiedlichen Faktoren wie dem massiven Einfluß des Staates auf die akademisch gebildete Intelligenz, der von Luther begründeten und durch den Pietismus verstärkten 'schismatischen Introvertiertheit' ... dem gräzisierenden Neuhumanismus und den Bildungsreformen des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts geprägt war, drückte diese Schicht wie keine andere dem Modernisierungsprozeß in Deutschland ihren Stempel auf. Das von ihr geschaffene Gymnasial- und Universitätssystem war, wie in England oder Frankreich, stark auf die Vermittlung des antiken Kulturerbes ausgerichtet, rückte dieses aber zugleich in einen sehr viel schärferen Gegensatz zu der als partikularistische und utilitaristische perhorreszierten Spezialbildung, wie sie das bürgerliche Berufsleben erforderte. Das neuhumanistische Ideal einer Vervollkommnung der Person von innen heraus zielte darauf, das Individuum aus allen praktische-sozialen Bezügen zu lösen und auf eine Entwicklung in 'Einsamkeit und Freiheit' zu verweisen; es förderte damit zwar eine bemerkenswerte Kultivierung des Selbst, zugleich aber eine Neigung zur 'Sozialblindheit', die der Herausbildung einer spezifisch bürgerlichen kollektiven Identität entgegenstand ... und so blieb denn das Bildungsbürgertum eine trotz ihres kulturellen Einflusses nur schwach vergesellschaftete Schicht, die eine starke Fragmentierung nach Herkunft, Heiratsverhalten, Lebensstandard und politischen Einstellungen aufwies" (Breuer 1993, 18).

[11] As Bollenbeck notes, the interpretative pattern '*Kultur und Bildung*' was "politisch offen und anschlußfähig. Weit über 1848 hinaus werden mit ihm antiständische, liberale Positionen verknüpft" (Bollenbeck 1994, 172). Further: "Jedenfalls enthält das Deutungsmuster zunächst keine bestimmte politische Option, wohl aber den *Verweis auf ein modernes politisches Bezugssystem*: die Trennung von Staat und Gesellschaft unter Berufung aus das autonome Individuum" (ibid. 173).

taken care of by the new nation state, and administered by people trained for this task in public institutions such as schools, universities, academies and the like.

Despite their modernizing function, however, the bourgeois ideals of *Kultur* and *Bildung* were characterized from their early hour by a fundamental ambivalence towards modernity, or, as Bollenbeck puts it, by a "Dialektik von Modernisierungsfunktion und Modernisierungskrise" (ibid. 172). While German bourgeois culture in the 19th century was a progressive factor in the life of the country, it also made its bearers particularly sensitive to the perceivable downsides of the process of modernization. Historically, this sensibility became acute in the aftermath of the national unification, with the sweeping dynamics of industrialization, urbanization and technologization of the life-world that shaped German society in the last decades of the 19th century[12]. Georg Bollenbeck accounts for the resulting exacerbation of the *bildungsbürgerliche* criticism of modernity around the turn of the 20th century in the following terms:

> Solange die 'bürgerliche Gesellschaft' unter Berufung auf das sittliche und selbsttätige Individuum Ziel bleibt, bereitet das für das geistige Erfahrungskapital des Bildungsbürgertums keine Probleme. Deshalb kann das Deutungsmuster seine Modernisierungsfunktion im Übergang von der (alt)ständischen zur bürgerlich-kapitalistischen Gesellschaft entfalten. Deren Realität bedeutet allerdings nicht die Realisierung der Ziele. Damit erhöhen sich die Spannungen zwischen dem Deutungsmuster und dem neuen Wirklichkeiten. Die Verknüpfung zwischen 'Bildung' und 'Kultur' wie die funktionale Abstufung zwischen 'Kultur' und 'Zivilisation' verleiten gegenüber der Industrialisierung und kapitalistische Vergesellschaftung zu Wertungen, die mit Vorstellungen von gestern das Heute ablehnen: *ein regressiver Antikapitalismus* beruft sich auf die 'Kultur', eine forcierte Ablehnung demokratischer Partizipation auf die 'Bildung des Individuums'. Es ist daher kein Zufall, dass gegen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts 'Zivilisation' all dies schlagwortartig bündelt, was den hehren Vorstellungen von 'Bildung' und 'Kultur' nicht entspricht. (ibid. 172-3)

The cultural ideals and normative values of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* do not catch up fully with the rapid social and economic transformations of Wilhelmine society. The growing specialization of knowledge, division of labor and economic rationalization of all spheres of human activity are difficult to reconcile with the classic ideal of *Bildung* as free individual

[12] "Seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts, mit dem Ende der liberalen Ära und einem erfolgreichen Industriekapitalismus werden die Grundlagen dieses Deutungsmusters ['*Bildung und Kultur*', A/N] durch die Anforderung von 'Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft' unterminiert" (Bollenbeck 2007, 15).

cultivation[13]. The educated bourgeoisie of turn-of-the-century Germany is increasingly confronted with the question whether "Individualität, 'Bildung' und 'Kultur' in einer Welt der Spezialisierung und Kommerzialisierung noch möglich sind" (ibid. 279). This question usually finds a negative response[14]. With growing frequency as the 19th century approaches its end, bourgeois intellectuals therefore rise up against modernity, self-staged as proud defenders of the humanistic notion of self-formation (as *Bildung*) that was being effectively undermined by the intrinsic dynamics of modern industrial and mass society. This resentful attitude amongst the educated bourgeoisie paradoxically results in a contrived identification with the German pre-industrial elites (the *Junker*), and more generally in a diffused anti-liberal mindset and aristocratic pose[15], exemplarily embodied by the poet Stefan George and the members of his poetic circle (the so-called George-*Kreis*) around the turn of the 20th century (more on this later).

The increasingly anti-liberal and aristocratic character of German *Kulturkritik* in these years is emblematically incarnated by a single outstanding figure of German intellectual history, namely Friedrich Nietzsche, whose philosophy can be regarded as both the symptom and promoter of the change of mentality of the academically educated bourgeoisie at that time. As Aschheim remarks, "Nietzsche's heritage was integral to its critique of civilization and ongoing quest for personal, political, and cultural recovery. His tensions, categories, and sensibility both prefigured and mirrored central elements of ... [the] postliberal mood" of early 20th-century Germany (Aschheim 1992, 12). Undoubtedly, as Bollenbeck notes,

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[13] "Mit der Akkumulation des Wissens und der Spezialisierung der Wissenschaften verliert das Bildungsbürgertum an Kompetenz, Wissensbestände zu repräsentieren und zu normieren; Wissensbestände, die kollektiv in industrieähnlichen Forschungsinstitutionen entstehen und deren explosionsartige Erweiterung sich nicht mehr an das alte Bildungsideal 'Selbstvervollkommnung der Persönlichkeit' anbinden läßt" (Bollenbeck 1994, 252).

[14] The Neo-Kantian philosopher Wilhelm Windelband reflects the sentiments of the educated class in a lecture held in 1878: "Die Kultur ist *zu breit* geworden, um vom Standpunkt des Individuums aus übersehen zu werden. ... Das Bewußtsein des einheitlichen Zusammenhanges, der alles Kulturleben beherrschen soll, geht Schritt für Schritt verloren und die Gesellschaft droht in Gruppen und Atome zu zerfallen, zwischen denen es nicht mehr das Bindemittel es geistigen Verständnisses, sondern nur noch dasjenige der *äußeren Not und Notwendigkeit* gibt. So wird die moderne Gesellschaft mehr und mehr zu einem *Bilde der Zerrissenheit*, und je schneller dieser Prozeß mit natürlicher Notwendigkeit fortschreitet, um so geringer wird selbstverständlich die Kraft der gesellschaftlichen Ordnung, deren festeste Stütze die Gleichheit des Kulturbewußtseins in den Individuen bildet" (cited in Breuer 1993, 20; my italics).

[15] "Das Ende der liberalen Ära, das Gefühl wachsender Bedrohung durch die Sozialdemokratie, der machtpolitische Glanz des neuen Kaiserreiches ... all dies treibt das Bildungsbürgertum an die Seite vorindustrieller Machteliten ... Die Annäherung zwischen Bürgertum und Adel führt zu einer Prägung des bürgerlichen Verhaltens- und Empfindungskanons mit Wertungen und Haltungen des Adelskanons" (Bollenbeck 1994, 249). In a work written in 1925 Friedrich Meinecke accounts for this approximation between educated bourgeoisie and aristocracy in the following terms: "Das akademisch gebildete Bürgertum, einst in der Offensive gegen die altern herrschenden Schichten, dann zu einer gewissen Mitherrschaft mit ihnen vereinigt und zum Teil verschmolzen, fühlt sich nunmehr in der Defensive gegenüber allen denjenigen Schichte, die durch den Übergang vom Agrarstaat zum Industriestaat entstanden sind – den breiten Massen der Arbeiter und Angestellten" (cited in ibid., 250).

"Nietzsche ist nach Rousseau und Schiller der bedeutendste und wird vor ihnen im 20. Jh der einflussreichste Kulturkritiker" (Bollenbeck 2007, 157). At the same time, however, he marks a break with the humanistic tradition of *Kulturkritik* – initiated in Germany by Friedrich Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795) – as he stretches his criticism of present culture to willfully anti-democratic and indeed anti-humanistic extremes:

> Es ist Nietzsche, der die neue Mentalität der Enttäuschung in ein Denken überführt … das die 'abgeirrte Cultur' der Gegenwart vereint und das zugleich mit seiner Absage an den Humanismus-Kanon einen tiefgreifenden Habituswandel, eine Idealisierung von Härte, Unerbittlichkeit und Herrenmoral, befördert. ... Auch Nietzsches *Kulturkritik* attackiert die moderne Zivilisation, aber sie affirmiert im Unterschied zu Rousseau und Schiller ein Resultat der Zivilisation, nämlich den Zustand sozialer Verhältnisse als Herrschaftsverhältnisse. (ibid. 155-6; my italics)

From this point of view, Nietzsche can be regarded as a major intellectual promoter of the anti-democratic exacerbation and anti-modernist radicalization of the German *bildungsbürgerliche Kulturkritik* of the incipient 20th century. His aristocratic pathos functions as a model and source of inspiration for a number of minor yet successful cultural critical thinkers – such as for instance Julius Langbehn, author of the popular book *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890) – around the turn of the century:

> Nietzsches universaler kulturkritischer Deutungsanspruch, seine Formel vom Übermenschen, sein Ästhetizismus, seine dionysische Bejahung des Lebens und der Kunst als Stimulans des Lebens, seine Kritik an der 'Industrie-Cultur', an der Geldherrschaft, an der Großstadt, am Bildungsphilister, am Liberalismus und an der überständigen Moral gehen in den mentalen Haushalt einer Intelligenz ein, die Distanz zur Welt der bürgerlichen Zweckrationalität wahrt. Deren Unbehagen an der Moderne findet ihren Ausdruck in einer *Kulturkritik*, die sich in einer sich radikalisierenden Steigerungslogik gegen die Aufklärungsideale, die liberale Gesellschaft, die Massenkultur und die sozialistische Utopie wendet. (ibid. 198)

In the wake of Nietzsche, cultural critical works in Germany enjoy growing resonance, reaching a peak of popularity with Spengler's cultural critical magnum opus *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918-1922). This best-selling and widely renowned work – which I will deal with later on in this study – reflects the state of mind of the resentful and embittered educated bourgeoisie after the lost war and the 'humiliation' of the Treaty of Versailles (see ibid. 217). While the killing factories of the war had "devoured constitutions, social orders,

traditions – whole ways of life" (Mulhern 2000, 3) in the whole of Europe, this holds particularly true for defeated Germany,ridden by social turmoil and political instability after the collapse of the Wilhelmine *Reich*. The situation was aggravated for the *Bildungsbürgertum* by an increasing loss of social status and economic security after WWI[16]. This process, which had in fact already begun in the last years of the German *Reich*, drove many bourgeois intellectual to increasingly radical cultural conservative positions. Significantly, "while for some left-wing intellectuals, the economic destruction of the intellectual classes was the logical consequence of the crisis of capitalism", which it was possible to overcome through the construction of a socialist state, "for the majority of intellectuals, especially members of German academia, the frightening compression of income differences between salaried intellectuals and workers was not greeted as a call for solidarity with the working masses against capital, but rather as an 'immoral perversion of conditions'" (Widdig 2001, 181). As a consequence of this, the *Bildungsbürgertum* often held the newborn Republic responsible for its socio-economic degradation, and the visible decline of its cultural capital (see Widdig 2001, 169 ff.). As Bollenbeck argues,

> Wenn die Weimarer Republik die Macht der alten adligen Eliten einschränkt, erlebt das Bildungsbürgertum diesen Machtverlust nicht als Befreiung von einer 'feudalen' Altlast, sondern als Auflösung des schützenden Machtstaates. Seine soziale Identität zerfällt weiter und immer schneller, weil mit der krisenhaften Instabilität der Republik die Möglichkeit versperrt ist, in jener 'machtgeschützten Innerlichkeit' Zuflucht und Entlastung zu finden. ... So erwiest sich die Republik, gerade indem sie alte Wünsche nach einer Verfassung einlöst, als der befürchtete 'liberale' Staat; denn dieser erscheint, wehrlos und besiegt, als Spielplatz egoistischer Parteiinteressen und ökonomischer Profitinteressen. Ja, mit dessen Existenz wird der Niedergang der eigenen Schicht verbunden. Das bestärkt ... alte Vorbehalte gegen den Westen, gegen Parlamentarismus und Liberalismus, und es stärkt das Verlangen, sich identitätsstiftend auf deutsche 'Kultur' und deutsche 'Bildung' zu berufen. Die verunsicherte Identität läßt die Hoffnung auf einen 'nationalen Aufbruch' und einen

[16] Manfred Gangl and Gérard Raulet summarize the dramatic fall in social status of the educated bourgeoisie after WWI as follows: "Der geistig Gebildete, der Bildungsbürger *repräsentierte* unter dem Reich etwas. Er hatte noch seinen festen Platz in einem Repräsentationssystem, dessen Wurzeln in die prämodernen politischen Verhältnisse reichten. ... [D]ieser Status [entsprach] einer intermediären Entwicklungsstufe des modernen Kapitalismus, die zweifelsohne die gesellschaftlich-ökonomische Grundlage des deutschen 'Sonderwegs' gebildet hat. Insofern als das Reich seinen Anschluss an die wirtschaftliche Modernität um den Preis eines Herrschaftskompromisses mit der Bourgeoisie erkaufte, konnten die geistig Gebildeten im Dienst einer Legitimation des Klassenkompromisses weiterhin die Rolle der Gelehrten spielen ... Dieser Status wurder aber zunächst durch die Beschleunigung der kapitalistischen Entwicklung erschüttert, die sie durch die ihnen zuerteilte Funktion unterschrieben und ermöglicht hatten, er wurde dann durch den Zusammenbruch des Reichs zunichte gemacht und geriet in der Weimarer Republik in äußerste Bedrängnis" (Gangl-Raulet 2007, 12-13; italics in original). For an overview of the precarious economic situation of the academic bourgeoisie in Weimar Germany see Widdig 2001, particularly 169 ff.

> rettenden Führer aufkommen – und das in allen bürgerlichen Parteien. (Bollenbeck 1994, 250-251)

The critical social status, economic precariousness and perceived cultural 'dispossession' (see Langewiesche 1989, 109 ff.) of the educated bourgeoisie in the aftermath of the war explain the spread and radicalization of cultural critical discourses on modernity in the Weimar period. During the time of the short-lived Republic, talk about *Kultur* more often than not turns into a all-encompassing *Kulturkritik*, directed at the putative diseases of modern civilization: depersonalization, atomization, mechanization, alienation, massification. These terms summarize the "fixed perceptions", "standard narratives" and "shared citations of 'the obvious'" (Mulhern 2000, 19) of the "discourse of *Kulturkritik*" (ibid. 21) in those years. By this time at the latest, Germany has become the undisputable "heartland of this discourse" (ibid. XV), which, however, finds successful representatives also in other European countries (José Ortega y Gasset's renowned work *La rebelión de las masas* (1929) should be mentioned here).

Cultural critical works generally focus on the perceived downsides of modernization: the 'massification' of society, the economic cycles of uncontrolled growth and sudden crisis, the pervasive technologization of the life-world and mechanization of human activity, the related automatization of work and industrialization of production and consumption, and the damages inflicted on the environment by mass scale industrialism. The *Kulturkrisis* is often explained by contemporaries through the loss of guiding values in an increasingly secularized society, marked by cultural diversification and rising claims to political participation. This is why *bildungsbürgerliche* cultural critics often regard "modernity as degeneration, as the valorization of the mass, as the paradoxical hyperactivity of essentially inert forces (the 'revolt' of the 'passive' multitude), as the decay or contamination of traditional, normally minoritarian values, as the disintegrative advance of high and vulgar enlightenment" (Mulhern 2000, 19). For the "practitioner of *Kulturkritik*", as Mulhern further notes, "the historic stake was the future of *culture* in the epoch of modernity, whose culminating feature, now manifest, was the rise of *the masses*, the distinctive life-form of *civilization*" (Mulhern 2000, 4 italics in original). This "coming of the masses", however, "did not consist only in the increasing significance of popular mobilization in contemporary politics. ... The real novelty and danger lay in the sheer presence of 'the multitude' in social spaces 'hitherto reserved', and the consequent transformation of collective mentality" (ibid. 13).

The puzzlement elicited amongst academics and the educated class by this situation explains the proliferation in Weimar Germany of works of *Weltanschauungsliteratur* and *Zeitdiagnostik* (see Sloterdijk 1985), two related para-philosophical genres concerned with exposing the failures, drawbacks and grievances of present culture, and aimed at projecting *alternative ways to modernity* (see Bollenbeck 2007, 202)[17]. These quintessentially cultural critical genres reached a comparatively broad audience amongst the educated class in Germany (see Sloterdijk 1985, 322). They usually operated with such popular dichotomies as: *Kultur* vs. *Zivilisation*, *Leben* vs. *Geist*, *Idealismus* vs. *Materialismus*, *Gemeinschaft* vs. *Gesellschaft* (see Bollenbeck 2007, 200). For the most part, these notions were not woven into a rigorous philosophical discourse, but rather used in a polemical manner: "Sie richten sich gegen die 'steuerungslose Eigendynamik des Kapitalismus' ... , gegen die 'Versachlichung', gegen die universelle Vermitteltheit durch abstrakte, verdinglichte Medien wie Recht und Geld, Parlament und Bürokratie" (ibid. 206; my italics). As a contemporary witness, the sociologist Helmuth Plessner noted that the appeal of cultural criticism in those years resided in proposing a "heroische Lebensauffassung", set against "die bürgerliche Welt der *Abstraktionen* und stellvertretenden Mittel ... den *Verlust der Unmittelbarkeit* ... die blutleere *Mechanisiertheit*" (Plessner 2001 41; my italics), all of which were associated with the problematic state of present society.

Amongst the above-mentioned dichotomies, certainly the most popular one was that of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, both of which became popular meta-political catchwords in the intellectual propaganda preceding the Great War in Germany (the so-called *Kulturkrieg*; see Beßlich 2000 and Bollenbeck 1994, 272 ff.). In the interwar period, this conceptual opposition – the history of which can be traced back philosophically as far as Kant – is resumed and

[17] Peter Sloterdijk explains the emergence of this new phenomenon (*Weltanschauungsliteratur*) as follows: "Zum Verständnis der Weimarer Weltbildproduktionen gehört der Einblick in ihre Lage im sozialgeschichtlichen Prozeß: sie treiben aus Denkzwängen hervor, die ein Modernisierungsprozeß von kulturrevolutionären Dimensionen über die zeitgenössischen Intelligenzen verhängte. Dies erklärt zugleich die existentielle Dringlichkeit und die quantitativen Ausmaße des Weimarer Weltanschauungsessayismus. Dieser gibt tausendstimmige Antworten auf den Umbruch zum 20. Jahrhundert: auf Massendemokratie und Weltkriegsshock, auf Urbanisierung, Motorisierung und Informatisierung der Gesellschaft, auf psychohistorische, moralische und ästhetische Erneuerungsschübe. Allenthalben geht es darum, mit Hilfe tradierter und neuentwickelter Denkmuster in der Flut moderner Aktualitäten intellektuelle Fixpunkte aufzurichten, von denen aus Überblick, Verständnis, Widerstand, Kritik möglich würden. Je intensiver die Autoren der Transformation der Wirklichkeit sinnlich ausgeliefert waren, desto mehr mußten sie dem Impuls gehorchen, einer ins Unbegriffene entgleitenden, dynamisierten Realität, durch hektisch angepaßte Gegenwartsdiagnostiken und Zukunftsprognosen auf der Spur zu bleiben. In den Turbulenzen dieses ad hoc entworfenen geschichtsphilosophischen Spekulierens entging kein Autor der Herausforderung der tradierten Denk- und Beschreibungsmittel durch die modernen 'Komplexitäten'. Die Weimarer Weltanschauungsproduktion bedeutet eine intellektuelle Anpassungsleistung größten Ausmaßes, insofern sie auf offenkundige Überlastungen der alten 'Sprachen' durch die neuen Ereignisse und Verhältnisse reagiert. Ob diese Leistung als eine gelungene zu bewerten sei, ist aus historischer Sicht in den meisten Fällen fraglich, in vielen sogar zu verneinen" (Sloterdijk 1985, 310-311).

charged anew with a polemical, anti-modern as well as anti-Western affect[18]. The popularization of this juxtaposition, rooting in the German *Bildungs*-tradition, relies on a vulgarization of Nietzsche's philosophy. As Bollenbeck explains:

> Wenn Nietzsche Zivilisation als Sache der Herdenmenschen und Kultur als Aufgabe der heroischen Menschen bestimmt, dann verstärkt er die bereits kursierende funktionale Herabstufung zwischen beiden Begriffen. Unterschiedliche Köpfe wie Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn, Houston Stuart Chamberlain, Leopold Ziegler, David Koigen, Rudolf Eucken, Walther Rathenau oder Moeller van den Bruck werten Zivilisation ab und Kultur auf ... als das *Geringwertige, Äußerliche, Seelenlose, Mechanische, Nivellierende, Internationale, Gesellschaftliche, bloß Nützliche und Technische*. Die Zivilisation erscheint als Reich der Notwendigkeit, ihr schlägt man die materielle Arbeit, die Naturbeherrschung, das operationale Denken zu. Die Kultur aber wird hochgeschätzt als das *Innerliche, Lebendige, Seelenvolle, Individuelle, Gemeinschaftliche, Nationale, Zweckfreie und Geistige*. Sie erscheint als das Reich der Freiheit, der geistigen Arbeit, des nichtoperationellen Denkens. So wird der Zivilisation zugerechnet, was an der Moderne missfällt. Und dies mit großem Erfolg. (Bollenbeck 2007, 204; my italics)

As suggested by Bollenbeck, the widespread *Kulturkritik* of early 20th-century and Weimar Germany is not a criticism of culture tout court, but rather of modern culture *qua* 'civilization'. German *Kulturkritik* in the 20th century is, strictly speaking, *Zivilisationskritik*, that is, a criticism of the state of 'functional' (or 'instrumental') socialization of the individuals in the cultural regime of capitalist modernity. This criticism is often exerted in the name of 'true' German *Kultur* – whatever the conservative critics understood under this term. "[W]as Kultur genau meint, weiss keiner ... seit dem Neuhumanismus hat der Begriff als Medium der Bildung einen guten Klang" (ibid. 205), and the term can therefore be used as a sort of interpretative master key for an evaluative understanding of the present, as well as for a 'prophetic' anticipation of the future.

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[18] Rolf Peter Sieferle accounts for the lasting force of the polemical opposition between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in post-WWI Germany as follows: "Für die jugendbewegte 'Generation von Langemark' [a Belgian battlefield of WWI, A/N] ging es im Ersten Weltkrieg um den Kampf zwischen der deutschen wertorientierten 'Kultur' und der westliche-modernen 'Zivilisation', zwischen Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, Tiefe und Oberfläche, Idealismus und Materialismus. Der Krieg endete mit einer Niederlage der 'Ideen von 1914'; die westliche Zivilisation behielt die Oberhand; die deutsche Kultur unterlag. Eine Generation Entwurzelter kehrte zurück in ein Land, das sich offenbar auch im Inneren den Prinzipien des Gegners gebeugt hatte. *Ein enormes zivilisationskritisches Potential wurde frei*. Die völkischen Bewegungen in der Republik standen in der Tradition der Zivilisationskritik von 1890 (Langbehn/de Lagarde), waren jedoch weit radikaler. Ihr Ressentiment nährte sich an der nationalen Demütigung, der beschleunigten Rationalisierung, aber auch an der symbolischen Dürftigkeit der Republik, der turbulenten, 'amerikanisierten' kulturellen Szene und der Perspektivlosigkeit de untergehenden Bildungsbürgertums. Eskapismus und Aussteigertum, Siedlungsbewegungen, Reformangebote aller Art, aber auch militanter Aktivismus waren die Antwort" (Sieferle 1984, 209).

It is important to note, however, that cultural critical writers in both pre-WWI and Weimar Germany were not merely embittered scholars, confused bohemians and isolated intellectuals with no prospects for academic careers and worthy occupations in a time of general 'distress' for intellectual workers (as described by Alfred Weber in his university lecture *Die Not der geistigen Arbeiter* of 1922; see Kaes 1983, 71 ff. and Widdig 2001, 182 ff.). Successful cultural critics of the time were also such prominent figures as the industrialist and politician Walther Rathenau (*Zur Kritik der Zeit*, 1912), the popular philosopher and public intellectual Oswald Spengler (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1918-1922; *Der Mensch und die Technik*, 1931), the academic philosopher and major exponent of existentialism Karl Jaspers (*Die geistige Situation der Zeit*, 1931), just to name a few[19].

Furthermore, cultural critical questions, argumentations, topoi and diagnostics of the present inspire and inform virtually all branches of contemporary non-analytic philosophy in Germany – from Neo-Marxism (Georg Lúkacs, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno) and existentialism (Karl Jaspers), to *Lebensphilosophie* (Wilhelm Dilthey, Ludwig Klages) and fundamental ontology (Martin Heidegger) – as well as the newborn discipline of sociology (Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel, Karl Mannheim, Max Weber, Alfred Weber, Werner Sombart, Hans Freyer), psychology (Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung), and, finally, large parts of the essayistic, diaristic and meta-political literature (Theodor Lessing, Friedrich Georg Jünger, Thomas Mann) produced both immediately before and after WWI[20].

This fact, if nothing else, urges one to take the discursive phenomenon of *Kulturkritik* in early 20th-century and Weimar Germany seriously. Cultural criticism cannot be simply dismissed from today's perspective as a bizarre and clumsy intellectual attempt to come to grips with the complex reality of high modernity. The discourse of *Kulturkritik* must rather be regarded as the expression of a widespread sense of *Kulturkrise*, shared by some of the best contemporary German minds. Intellectuals in Germany reacted in different manners to this sense of acute crisis and uprooting transformation, yet they were all lead by similar questions and the imperative to understand as well as find solutions for the present 'discontent' with modernity.

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[19] Other prominent authors and works could be mentioned, both in the German-speaking world (Georg Simmel's *Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur*, 1911; Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, 1918; Sigmund Freud's *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur,* 1930) and in the rest of Europe (José Ortega y Gasset's *La rebelión de las masas*, 1929; Frank Raymond Leavis' *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*, 1930).

[20] For the 'stimulating' influence exerted by cultural criticism on contemporary philosophy see Bollenbeck 2007, 233 ff.; for the central role played by the debate on the *Kulturkrise* in the emerging discipline of sociology see Lichtblau 1996.

1.2. Between '*Konservative Revolution*' and '*Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus*': Versions of German Anti-Modernism in the Interwar Period

In his work on contemporary social radicalism of 1924, entitled *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft*, the philosopher and sociologist Helmuth Plessner describes the pervasive cultural critical mood of Weimar Germany in the following terms:

> Eine gewaltige Opposition gegen alles, was moderne Gesellschaft bedeutet: Stadt, Maschinentum, Industrialismus des ganzen Geistes, eint heute die einander Widerstrebenden vom feudalen Gutsbesitzer bis zum Fabrikarbeiter. Und wer soll gegen diese steigende Flut der *Zivilisationsmüdigkeit* ankämpfen, wenn die geistige Jugend selbst zur Opposition gehört? Hier liegt, in dieser Disparatheit von faktischer Tendenz und ideeller Richtung des Zeitalters, ein geistiger Hauptgrund für den *Niedergang der politischen Haltung*, wenigstens in Deutschland. Der geschichtliche Sinn der modernen Gesellschaft, die Missionsidee der abendländischen Welt: vor keinem äußeren Hindernis zurückschreckende, durch nichts aufzuhaltende Ausdehnung technisch-wissenschaftlicher, auf Dienstbarmachung der Naturkräfte gegründeter *Zivilisation beginnt in Widerspruch zum Kulturbewußtsein* des Abendländers zu geraten. Bedeutende Köpfe, wertvolle Jugend meutern gegen die Konsequenzen der abendländischen Idee, weil sie ihren sozialethischen Prämissen die Anerkennung verweigern. (Plessner 2001, 42-3; my italics)

Plessner's words give an idea of the spread of cultural critical discourses and dispositions in Germany in the interwar period. They also point to the political dangers of the shared attitude of rejection of modern civilization, which lead many of Plessner's contemporaries to look for (and eventually find) ultimate, authoritative solutions for the perceived *Kulturkrise* of the present.

Cultural criticism in Weimar Germany must be thought in connection with the highly politicized and ideologically polarized climate of those years. In particular, a study on German *Kulturkritik* in the interwar period is sooner or later confronted with the task of dealing with that vast cultural and political movement that goes under the name of '*Konservative Revolution*'. While cultural criticism at the time was mostly – though by no means exclusively (see Gangl-Raulet 2007) – the product of conservative-minded intellectuals, it was particularly the new, 'revolutionary' conservatives (or 'conservative-revolutionaries') of this movement – self-defined in opposition to the 'old' conservatives of

the collapsed *Kaiserreich* – who wrote the most acclaimed and influential works of cultural criticism during the Weimar Republic.

The term *Konservative Revolution* does not designate a homogeneous and sharply contoured movement[21]. It rather refers to a congeries of cultural and political positions and programs elaborated and propagated by a number of literary, political and philosophical figures who, with hindsight, can be legitimately regarded as the "intellectual vanguard of the right" during the Weimar Republic (Struve 1960, 248). The *Konservative Revolution* was not just a political, but rather an "intellectual movement which was driven by the interaction of culture and politics, ideas and ideology" (Woods 1996, 5). In other words, it was both a *cultural and political* movement. Some of its major representatives include: Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), Moeller van den Bruck (1876-1925), Edgar Julius Jung (1894-1934), Hans Freyer (1887-1969), Ernst Jünger (1895-1998), Friedrich Georg Jünger (1898-1977), Ernst Niekisch (1889-1967), Wilhelm Stapel (1882-1954) Othmar Spann (1878-1950), Hans Zehrer (1899-1966), Leopold Ziegler (1881-1958). To these figures should be added others whose work and influence went far beyond the conservative-revolutionary movement, such as Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), and even the young Thomas Mann (1875-1955).

Although an intellectual elite representing a small percentage of the German population, the *Konservative Revolution* unquestionably "did make its mark on Weimar Germany" (Woods 1996, 3). In Sontheimer's words, "Die Publizisten der Konservativen Revolution sind die Propheten und Deuter der neuen Zeit" (Sontheimer 1962, 14) and are seen as such by many of their contemporaries, both left and right on the political spectrum. The positions of the conservative-revolutionary intellectuals gained resonance due to their

[21] The term started being used in the scientific literature in the 50s, following the publication of Armin Mohler's standard work (see Mohler 2005). As Mohler notes, *Konservative Revolution* "als Bezeichnung für eine klare konturierte politische und intellektuelle Bewegung [hat sich] nur allmählich und niemals vollständig durchgesetzt" (ibid. 93); "Erst in der zweiten Hälfte der zwanziger Jahre ... wurde 'Konservative Revolution' zu einem Leitbegriff, vor allem durch die Wirkung von Moeller van den Brucks 1923 erschienenen Buch *Das dritte Reich* ... und durch einen Vortrag, den Hugo von Hofmannstahl im Jahr 1927 über *Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation* hielt" (ibid. 94). To these figures that of Edgar Julius Jung should be added, who more than anybody else used the term *Konservative Revolution* in his political writings in the late 20s and 30s (see Breuer 1998, 153 ff.). In his comprehensive study Mohler has attempted to consider the *Konservative Revolution* as a unity (see Mohler 2005, 87 ff.). However, this opinion has been recently called into question by other scholars, such as, for instance, Stefan Breuer. More than a cohesive political program and ideological vision, the representative figures of the conservative-revolutionary movements according to Breuer share a common intellectual habitus and mentality (see Breuer 1993, 33). Despite its broad and therefore necessarily vague content, however, it seems almost impossible for a political and intellectual history of Weimar Germany to do away with the notion of *Konservative Revolution* altogether (see ibid. 229). Notwithstanding its lack of conceptual sharpness, the term effectively conveys the gist of a most important phenomenon of the cultural and political life of those years. Scholars today still seem to agree that something like a conservative-revolutionary movement existed in Weimar Germany, and that such a movement was a decisive occurrence in shaping public life in Germany between 1918 and 1933.

influential connections in politics and industry, and particularly through publishing activities "conducted on a massive scale" (Woods 1996, 3) in newspapers and magazines, usually backed up by semi-official cultural-political groupings and associations[22]. The "receptive audience" of conservative-revolutionary writers was "the middle class: small- and medium-scale farmers, artisans, shopkeepers, white-collar workers in big industry and the civil service, and the professional middle class – lawyers, doctors, professors, higher civil servants and engineers" (ibid. 4). Given their strong public presence, the political climate of Weimar Germany was profoundly shaped by their distance from, indeed open hostility towards the Weimar Republic (see Mohler 2005, 91). As Woods point out, the *Konservative Revolution* "was no esoteric affair for an elite group of ideologues, but rather at the productive heart of antidemocratic thought in the Weimar Republic, providing political groups and even the parties they scorned with elements of their ideology" (Woods 1996, 3). This was exemplarily the case with the Nazi party, the political ideology of which was influenced by the writings of the conservative-revolutionary intellectuals, above all by Moeller van den Bruck's *Das Dritte Reich* (1923)[23].

Although they did not share a coherent political program and unified ideological vision, the intellectuals of the *Konservative Revolution* agreed in their radical criticism or rejection of the democratic constitution of Weimar (see Mohler 2005, 90). More generally, their ideology was characterized: 1) politically, by a fundamental hostility towards parliamentary democracy; 2) economically, by a negative stance towards capitalism and market economy; 3) socially, by a radical skepticism or even contempt for the dynamics of modern mass society; and 4) culturally, by a rejection of artistic and literary modernism as well as the avant-gardes, which they regarded as cultural forms characteristic of the much-loathed 'cosmopolitan' civilization of the 'West'. In the vast literature of the *Konservative Revolution,* political notions such as '*Liberalismus*', '*Demokratie*', '*Gleichheit*', '*Parlamentarismus*', '*Partei*', '*Klassenkampf*', economic notions such as '*Kapitalismus*', '*Markt*', '*Zirkulation*', '*Finanz*', '*Profit*', as well as more specifically social- and cultural critical notions such as '*Individualismus*', '*Egoismus*', '*Intellektualismus*' (also '*Geist*' or

[22] The public engagement of the conservative-revolutionary intellectuals was in this sense more ideological than strictly political. Mohler notes: "Seit Beginn der zwanziger Jahre zeichnete sich deutlicher ab, dass neben den Parteien der Rechten Zeitungen und Zeitschriften, Bünde und Gruppen auftraten, deren Ziele nicht taktischer, sondern grundsätzlicher Natur waren. Auch wenn es Berührungspunkte, Kontakte und personelle Verbindungen zu den großen Organisationen gab, standen den tagespolitischen Erwägungen hier die weltanschaulichen Überzeugungen und *meta*politischen Absichten dort gegenüber" (Mohler 2005, 92; italics in original).

[23] The relation between the *Konservative Revolution* and the Nazi movement is a controversial topic in the scholarly literature up to today. For an overview see Breuer 1993, 180 ff., Mohler 2005, 197 ff. and Sontheimer 1962, 357 ff.

'*Kritik*', '*Literatur*' or '*Schriftstellerei*'), '*Mechanisierung*', '*Atomisierung*', '*Nivellierung*' were used as polemical terms, and associated which the unsolved problems and diseases of contemporary Germany[24]. To this negative semantic field the conservative-revolutionary movement opposed a cultural and political vocabulary based on such terms as '*Nation*', '*Volk*', '*Rasse*', '*Reich*', '*Stand*' ('social rank'), but also philosophical and existential catchwords such as '*Leben*', '*Gemeinschaft*', '*Organismus*', '*Entscheidung*', '*Herrschaft*', '*Führerschaft*' (see Breuer 1993, 78 ff., Sontheimer 1962, 307 ff., Bollenbeck 1994, 186). Taken together, these notions constitute the founding mythology of the conservative-revolutionary movement. They served to articulate the project of a new socio-cultural and political-economic order, understood as a German alternative to the Western-European – 'capitalist', 'bourgeois' and 'liberal'– model.

While conservative-revolutionary intellectuals had different opinions as to the path that Germany should take in order to overcome its state of political and cultural crisis, they all agreed in identifying a common enemy in the 'liberal system'. While the latter was not exclusively an object of criticism from the right, but also from the left ("Der Liberalismus war der Prügelknabe der Weimarer Republik, von links wie von rechts", Sontheimer 1962, 181), it was particularly the thinkers of the *Konservative Revolution* who produced a sustained and comprehensive attack on liberalism – and all that they associated with it politically, socially, economically and culturally – between 1918 and 1933[25]. In general terms, liberalism – the political form marking the birth of European modernity – was regarded by the conservative-revolutionary intellectuals as the expression of fundamentally un-German 'individualism' (see Sontheimer 1962, 183), and branded as the principle of anarchy and dissolution of German

[24] As Kur Sontheiemer notes, such terms were "Allgemein-Begriffe, die in der ideologischen Diskussion der zwanziger Jahre eine außerordentliche Rolle spielten, und die aufgrund ihres wenig präzisen Gebrauchs die differenziertesten politischen und soziologischen Gebilde zu decken vermochten. Sie dienten nicht historischer Erkenntnis, sondern waren mit negativen Werturteilen besetzte Schlagworte, die in den Weltanschauungskampf hineingeworfen wurden" (Sontheimer 1962, 183-4). These polemical terms were also common to other right-wing movements in Weimar Germany: "In dieser Hinsicht besteht kaum ein Unterscheid zwischen den geistigen Mentoren der neukonservativen Bewegung und den zahlreichen völkischen Pamphletisten und Artikelschreiber. Der bei allen übliche Gebrauch des Begriffs Liberalismus oder Individualismus, etc. ist ohne jede historische Schärfung und Nuance. Ein Niveaugefälle ist kaum wahrnehmbar, allenfalls im Stil" (Sontheimer 1962, 184.). However, it should be noted that it was the authors of the *Konservative Revolution* that conferred to these ideological catchwords some degree of intellectual dignity, and allowed them an entry in intellectual discourses and educated debates in the Weimar period.

[25] Significantly, their criticism of liberalism was even more aggressive than that of Marxism and socialism. As Breuer notes: "Der vierte Stand galt nicht deshalb als bedrohlich, weil er eine kampfkräftige, Einheit war, die über das liberale System hinausdrängte, sondern im Gegenteil, weil er genau dies nicht war, weil er weder Form noch eigenen Willen besaß und schon bei der ersten Gelegenheit vor dem Liberalismus kapitulierte. Die Furcht galt nicht der Klasse, sondern der Masse, dem identitätslosen Oszillieren, das mit Assoziationen von Auflösung, Desintegration und Fragmentierung besetzt war. Sie entsprang aus der Sorge, die Massen würden nur das potenzieren, was man bereits am Liberalismus bemängelt hatte: den Pluralismus, den Polykratismus, die Anarchie" (Breuer 1993, 51).

society during the Weimar Republic. According to a common opinion, the liberal system had been unnaturally forced upon Germany by the victorious powers of WWI. As such, it incarnated the enemy of the nation, both internally and externally. As Stefan Breuer notes:

> Der Feind ... war ein äußerer Feind – derselbe wie der, gegen den man im Weltkrieg gekämpft hatte: die Entente, die Siegermächte von Versailles und die von ihnen oktroyierte Nachkriegsordnung. Dieser äußere Feind aber war auch im Inneren präsent, in Gestalt des Liberalismus, der gleichsam den *Transmissionsriemen* von der internationalen auf die nationale Ebene bildete. Seine Funktion war es, die Ohnmacht Deutschlands zu zementieren: außenpolitisch, indem er eine Politik der Erfüllung und friedlichen Verständigung garantierte; innenpolitisch, indem er die Nation, das Volk, in Interessengruppen und Parteien spaltete und dadurch verhinderte, was in den Augen der konservativen Revolutionäre allein den Wiederaufstieg Deutschlands zur Weltmacht ermöglichte. ... Der Liberalismus ersetzte die im Krieg gewonnen Gemeinschaft durch eine *Gesellschaft*, die aus lauter *egoistischen* Individuen bestand. Er gestattete es diesen Egoismen, sich zu organisieren und über das Medium der *parlamentarischen* Gesetzgebung Einfluß auf den Staat und seine Apparate zu nehmen. Er überantwortete die politische Willensbildung einer Institution, die sich im *ewigen Gespräch* erging, anstatt Entscheidungen zu treffen. Einen deutschen Staat gab es deshalb unter der Vorherrschaft des liberalen Systems nicht mehr, allenfalls einen Konkursverwalter. (Breuer 1993, 58-59; my italics)

Basing on this criticism of the liberal system, the authors of the *Konservative Revolution* called for a nationalist rebirth of the German state on authoritarian premises. The political ideology of the conservative-revolutionary movement was based on a communitarian idea of the "nation as a redemptive unity" (Herf 1984, 22), able to overcome the 'disintegrating' forces of capitalist economy and the 'egoistic' tendencies of liberal society[26]. The intellectuals of the *Konservative Revolution* propagated a 'communitarian' as well as 'organic' form of nationalism, at the center of which was the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* ('folk-

[26] On account of this 'redemptive' connotation of the imagined national community, Sontheimer remarks that nationalism amongst the conservative-revolutionary authors was not merely a political, but rather a "religiös-kulturelle[r] Begriff" (Sontheimer 1962, 154). The following excerpt from Wilhelm Stapel's article *Volk und Volkstum* (contained in the militant conservative-revolutionary magazine *Die Neue Front* of 1922), reads like something between pledge and prayer: "Alle meine Handlungen geschehen vor dem Angesicht meines Volkes. Ich lebe nicht nur mir allein, sondern in der Kette der Geschlechter und im Ringe des Volkes. Ich bin sittlich gebunden durch die Treue gegen unsere Vorfahren und durch die Sorge für unsere Nachkommen" (cited in Sontheimer 1962, 310). As one reads in another aggressive right-wing publication of the time, the *Stahlhelm-Handbuch* (1927), the redemption promised by *völkische* nationalism was one from the grievances of the present: "Der Nationalismus kennt keine Trennung der Menschen nach Klassen und keine Internationale gleicher Menschen. Der Nationalismus sieht die treibende Kraft alles Geschehens in einem gesunden Volke, im Wettstreit der Völker. Der Nationalismus allein hat die Kraft, die soziale Frage, die Krise des Kapitalismus und die Seuche der Demokratie im Rahmen des eigenen Volkes und auf dem Boden des eigenen Staates zu lösen" (cited in Sontheimer 1962, 155).

community')[27]. If lead by a strong authority, the national community would be able to transcend political divisions, overcome the anarchy of class conflict and smash down the impotent Republic, thus allowing Germany to regain internal stability and reconquer its status as a world power.

Despite their praise of national community, however, the conservative-revolutionary intellectuals shared a strongly hierarchical view of society and a 'personalistic' understanding of politics[28]. As Moeller van den Bruck asserts in *Das Dritte Reich*: "Eine Nation braucht eine unabhängige Oberschicht, die selbständiger Träger des nationalen Wollens ist und von der aus die erforderliche Suggestivwirkung der nationalen Idee auf ein Volk ausgeht. *Nation setzt nationale Oberschicht voraus*" (cited in Sontheimer 1962, 320; my italics). Similarly, in *Volksentscheid und Volksbegehren* (1927) Carl Schmitt maintains that "eine zahlenmäßige Minderheit als Volk auftreten und die öffentliche Meinung beherrschen [kann], wenn sie nur gegenüber einer politische willenlosen oder uninteressierten Mehrheit einen echten politischen Willen hat" (cited in Sontheimer 1962, 218). In fact, regardless of their self-understanding as 'new' conservatives, most of the authors of the *Konservative Revolution* clung to the old, Prussian-style "leadership principle" (Woods 1996, 3), and believed in the power of charismatic authority, which they opposed to the chaotic plurality and puzzling anonymity of democratic politics and the parliamentary system: "Daß Herrschaft wieder ganz persönlich und den Maßstäben des Alltagsleben enthoben, also charismatisch sein würde, wurde von fast allen erwartet und gewünscht" (Breuer 1993, 96).

The seemingly ambivalent plea for community *and* authority, *Volk* and hierarchy is reflected in the attitude of the conservative-revolutionary writers towards contemporary mass movements. The latter issue is of particular importance for understanding this ideology, which emerged as a conservative reaction to the German Revolution of 1918-1919 (the *Novemberrevolution*), and ideally defined itself against the revolutionary movements (liberal as well as socialist) of European modernity[29]. Contrary to traditional political conservatism

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[27] As Sontheimer remarks: "Den Bekennern eines deutschen Nationalismus gilt neben der Idee des Volkes der Mythos des Nationalen nicht wenig. Ist jedoch *Nation* das in einer geistigen und blutsmäßigen Gemeinschaft geeinte Volk, so kommt gerade der Idee der *Gemeinschaft* eine besondere Bedeutung zu. In all diesen Vorstellungen ist ein Strukturelement wirksam, das dem antidemokratischen Denken unverzichtbar erscheint, die Idee des *Organischen*" (Sontheimer 1962, 307; italics in original).

[28] This is probably one of the greatest contradictions of the *Konservative Revolution* as a whole. The end of the despised Weimar Republic was brought about not by the conservative 'revolution' of an elite, but rather by a mass movement – the Nazi party – of the kind that most conservative-revolutionary authors despised (see for instance Sontheimer 1962, 325 and 368 ff.).

[29] As Spengler writes in *Jahre der Entscheidung* (1933): "Der Bolschewismus ist in Westeuropa zu Hause, und zwar, seit die englisch-materialistische Weltauffassung der Kreise, in denen Voltaire und Rousseau als gelehrige Schüler verkehrten, im Jakobinismus des Kontinents einen wirksamen Ausdruck gefunden hatte**.** *Die Demokratie des 19. Jahrhunderts ist bereits Bolschewismus*; sie besaß nur noch nicht den Mut zu ihren letzten Folgerungen.

which throughout the 19th century had aimed at reinstating the old, i.e., pre-revolutionary political order, amongst the ranks of the *Konservative Revolution* "wollte man keine Konterrevolution, sondern 'die Revolution gewinnen'" (Mohler 2005, 93). In other words, the purpose of this movement was to bring the 'masses' under control, in order to create a hierarchically secured political stability and authoritarian social order for Germany[30]. The life of the nation had to be shaped by new collective bonds and beliefs, able to hold in check the anarchic, centrifugal forces of mass society[31]. A sentence from Othmar Spann's *Der Wahre Staat* (1921) well exemplifies this view:

> Wer Individualist ist, Mechanisierung und Gleichheit wirklich will, kann Demokrat sein, wer aber den *Kulturstaat* will, wer etwas geistiges vom Staate verlangt, kann nicht mehr Demokrat sein. Es kann ihm nicht mehr gleichgültig sein, ob die Masse ihre Stimme erhebt oder nicht, er kann die gleiche Abstimmung aller nicht mehr wollen. (cited in Sontheimer 1962, 215; my italics)

This passage expresses a common opinion amongst conservative-revolutionary intellectuals, and touches upon the intrinsic link between political and cultural criticism in their works. Significantly, the criticism of political liberalism and cultural modernity go hand in hand for the most representative authors of the *Konservative Revolution*, namely Oswald Spengler and Moeller van den Bruck. Liberal modernity is associated by the former with the 'abstract' medium of money and an intellectualist kind of spirituality that has cut its bonds with *Heimat* and community. The liberal epoch for him is culpably "frei ... von den Hemmungen des erdverbundenen Lebens, seien es Rechte, Formen oder Gefühle, der Geist frei für jede Art von Kritik, das Geld frei für jede Art von Geschäft" (*UA* 1064). Spengler's major cultural critical work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* therefore intends to wage war "geistig gegen den

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Es ist nur ein Schritt vom Bastillesturm und der die allgemeine Gleichheit fördernden Guillotine zu den Idealen und Straßenkämpfen von 1848, dem Jahr des kommunistischen Manifests, und ein zweiter von dort bis zum Sturz des westlich gestalteten Zarentums. Der Bolschewismus droht uns nicht, sondern er beherrscht uns. Seine Gleichheit ist die Gleichsetzung des Volkes mit dem Pöbel, seine Freiheit ist die Befreiung von der Kultur und ihrer Gesellschaft" (Spengler 1961, 104-105; my italics).

[30] This position is well exemplified by the following passage from Moeller van den Brucks' *Das dritte Reich*: "Was heute revolutionär ist, wird morgen konservativ sein. Ewig löst die Erhaltung den Umsturz ab und holt nach, was dieser unterließ, stellt richtig, was dieser verfehlte. Wir wollen nicht die Revolution weitertreiben, sondern die Ideen der Revolution, die in ihr lagen und die sie selbst nicht verstand. Wir wollen diese revolutionären Ideen mit den konservativen verbinden, die sich immer wieder herstellen, und wollen sie konservativ-revolutionär dahin treiben, wo wir Zustände erreichen, bei denen wir wieder leben können" (cited in Mohler 2005, 94).

[31] The will to cope with the mass dynamics of modern politics and society is the main point of difference between 'revolutionary' and traditional conservatism, as Mohler notes: "In der Annahme, daß die Bindungen, in denen der konservative Mensch leben wollte, erst neu geschaffen werden müßten, unterschieden sich die Anhänger der *Konservative Revolution* vom älteren Konservatismus" (Mohler 2005, 96).

Rationalismus, politisch gegen die Demokratie, wirtschaftlich gegen das Geld" (*UA* 670)[32]. Moeller van den Bruck similarly regards liberalism as the *Weltanschauung* of a 'formless' class – the bourgeoisie – which destructs cultures, annihilates religions and substitutes *Gemeinschaft* for *Gesellschaft*: "Der Liberalismus hat Kulturen untergraben. Er hat Religionen vernichtet. Er hat Vaterländer zerstört. Er war die Selbstauflösung der Menschheit" (cited in Sontheimer 1962, 182). Moeller's final verdict on liberalism in *Das Dritte Reich* expresses a generally accepted view amongst the conservative-revolutionary authors: "Am Liberalismus gehen die Völker zugrunde" (ibid. 181). Wherever liberalism is able to hold sway, the unity of the *Volk* is undermined, moral illness spreads and culture decays (see also Breuer 1993, 51).

Spengler's and Moeller's words draw attention to the implicit cultural assumptions of conservative-revolutionary intellectuals. Most of them shared a Romantic idea of the 'organic' specificity of German *Kultur*, which they opposed to Western *Zivilisation*, understood not only in political and economic terms (i.e., as parliamentary democracy and capitalism), but also as a cultural formation characterized by rationalism, individualism, utilitarianism and materialism. This un-German civilization had originated in the Age of the Enlightenment (was therefore primarily French, secondarily British) and caused far-reaching upheavals in Germany in the aftermath of the French Revolution and with the liberal revolutions of the 19th century. Both had cast European society, German society in particular, into an anti-communitarian, nihilist vortex, which now had to be quenched once and for all[33]. This would still be possible, according to conservative-revolutionary writers, since the liberal epoch was in fact approaching its end. In Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* one reads:

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[32] The negative association of liberalism, intellectualism and money – or, following a similar pattern, Marxism/socialism, rationalism and materialism – was a recurring argumentative pattern in conservative-revolutionary discourses, and a point of contact with Nazi ideology. As Mohler notes: "Gemeinsamer Ausgangspunkt ... ist ... die in der deutschen Romantik entstandene Auffassung der Wesensgleichheit von Aufklärung und Geldmacht; daraus entstand gegen Ende des Jahrhunderts, bei den Völkischen, die These von der Zusammenarbeit des Linksradikalismus mit der Plutokratie" (Mohler 1976, 69).

[33] As Othmar Spann writes in *Hauptpunkte der universalistischen Staatsauffassung* (1930): "Seit das unruhige Volk der Franzosen der europäischen Welt ein 1789 bereitete und das geistig überwältigte der Deutschen ein 1848, stürzte das staatliche Leben von Abgrund zu Abgrund, und man weiß nicht mehr, was der wahre Staat ist. Demokratische Anarchie hier, Bolschewismus dort ist die Folge" (cited in Sontheimer 1962, 246). As Mohler notes, according to the conservative-revolutionary authors, "Der Krieg und der Kollaps der alten Ordnung haben jenen Nihilismus nur nackt hervortreten lassen, der seit der Aufklärung vorhanden war, aber durch di konservativen Kulissen verdeckt blieb. Diesem Nihilismus konnte nur der 'wahrhaft konservativ determinierte Mensch' entgegentreten, der nicht nur die Illusionen des Fortschritts, sondern auch die Gebrechlichkeit des alten Systems durchschaute" (Mohler 2005, 96).

> Niemand sollte sich darüber täuschen, daß das *Zeitalter der Theorie* auch für uns zu Ende geht. Die großen Systeme des Liberalismus und Sozialismus sind sämtlich zwischen 1750 und 1850 entstanden. Das von Marx ist heute schon fast ein Jahrhundert alt und ist das letzte geblieben. Innerlich bedeutet es mit seiner materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung die äußerste Konsequenz des Rationalismus und demnach einen Abschluß. Aber wie der Glaube an Rousseaus Menschenrechte etwa mit 1848, so hat der Glaube an ihn mit dem Weltkrieg seine Kraft verloren. ... Der Glaube daran hatte die Großväter ausgezeichnet; für die Enkel ist er ein Beweis von Provinzialismus. An seiner Stelle keimt heute schon aus Seelennot und Gewissensqual eine neue resignierte *Frömmigkeit* empor, die es aufgibt, ein neues Diesseits zu begründen, die statt der grellen Begriffe das *Geheimnis* sucht und es in den Tiefen der zweiten *Religiosität* auch endlich finden wird. (*UA* 1130; my italics)

The appeal to religious feelings and metaphysical values able to sustain the project of national regeneration is a recurrent feature of conservative-revolutionary parlance. The rhetoric of soul, *Innerlichkeit* and rootedness idiosyncratically mingles in the writings of Spengler, as much as in the work of other authors of the *Konservative Revolution*, with a decisionist pathos and volitional affect, expressing the wish to overcome what was perceived as a historical predicament for the German nation. In his famous speech "Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation" (1927) Hugo von Hofmannsthal articulates what can be regarded as the 'moral' credo of the conservative-revolutionary movement (see Mohler 2005, 95-6), when he asserts "daß ohne geglaubte Ganzheit zu leben unmöglich ist ... daß das Leben lebbar nur wird durch gültige Bindungen" (Hofmannsthal 1979, 39). These 'bonds' ("Bindungen") should serve to overcome the "Geisteszustand des einsamen weltlosen Deutschen, seit ihn die Revolution zu Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts von der *Sitte*, dem *Herkommen*, dem *Väterglauben* jäh losgerissen und ihm nur die schrankenlose Orgie des weltlosen Ich anheimgegeben hatte" (Hofmannsthal 1979, 38; my italics). This would only be possible through a new cultural and political project, which Hofmannsthal formulaically describes as a "politische[...] Erfassung des Geistigen und [...] geistige[...] des Politischen" (ibid. 40). This objective, Hofmannsthal concludes, "ist nichts anderes als eine *konservative Revolution* von einem Umfange, wie die europäische Geschichte ihn nicht kennt. Ihr Ziel ist Form, eine neue deutsche Wirklichkeit, an der die ganze Nation teilnehmen könnte" (ibid. 41; my italics).

Hofmannsthal's lofty speech, appealing to nationalist and romantic, political and spiritual sentiments alike, gives an idea of the rather broad scope and, indeed, almost utopian character of the conservative-revolutionary movement of Weimar Germany. The public engagement of the conservative writer Hofmannsthal also introduces a neighboring field of inquiry to that of the *Konservative Revolution*, of great relevance for an understanding of

Adorno's confrontation with conservative cultural criticism in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. I am referring to that literary, poetic and aesthetic current broadly speaking of German anti-modernism in the interwar period for which Stefan Breuer has suggested the name '*ästhetischer Fundamentalismus*' (Breuer 1995). Such writers as the above-mentioned Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the poet Stefan George (1968-1933), the philosopher Ludwig Klages (1872-1956) and the poet and orator Rudolf Borchardt (1877-1945) subscribed to this current of thought, which expressed by means of poetic imagination and speculative philosophy an 'aesthetic opposition' against modernity (Mattenklott 1970). In his work, particularly *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Adorno manifested a remarkable degree of intellectual affinity for such opposition[34]. Indeed, it is the 'aesthetic fundamentalists' – or simply anti-modernists, as I will call them – Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages, rather than the authors of the *Konservative Revolution*, who exerted a definite influence on Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, as I will attempt to show in the present study.

Although the works, interests and personalities of Rudolf Borchardt, Ludwig Klages and Stefan George[35] were predominantly poetic, philosophical and cultural, broadly speaking, their political orientation and ideological stances were in many respects akin to – and at times in fact coincided with – those expressed by the intellectuals of the *Konservative Revolution*. In a way, the poetic (George and Borchardt), essayistic (Borchardt) and philosophical (Klages) works produced by these writers can be seen as the 'aesthetic' counterparts to the conservative-revolutionary project pursued at the meta-political (see Bussche 1998) and ideological level by Spengler, Moeller and the like[36]. Sure enough, Rudolf Borchardt, Ludwig Klages and Stefan George cannot be reduced to a common political or even ideological

[34] With respect to the above-mentioned authors a problem of definition arises. As Lichtblau contents, the tag 'aesthetic fundamentalism' is both too general and at the same time too restrictive, since Breuer develops it for the most part through the example of the George-*Kreis* (see Lichtblau 1996, 178). However, Breuer in my opinion has convincingly touched upon an essential aspect and common denominator of the anti-modernist figures that I will deal with in the present study. Both 'aesthetic fundamentalism' and 'aesthetic anti-modernism' are in my opinion pertinent definitions for the ideas and mentality, aesthetics and cultural philosophy of the authors treated in this work.

[35] George will be considered on the margin of the present study. However, he is of high importance for the present discussion, because he counts as the major exponent of German aesthetic fundamentalism between the turn of the century and the Weimar period. Furthermore, Adorno was a keen reader of George, and dedicated to him (and Hofmannsthal) an important literary-critical essay in the late 30s, which I will treat as an anticipation of his later confrontation with Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages in *DA*. I will not consider Adorno's post-war essays on George, since they exceed the time range of the present work.

[36] Stefan Breuer has dealt with Rudolf Borchardt's an Stefan George's relationship with the *Konservative Revolution*, basing both on an analysis of their manifest political positions, and on the opinions expressed on them by some prominent revolutionary-conservative authors (Moeller van den Bruck, Edgar Julius Jung). Breuer comes to the conclusion that the association of these poets with the conservative-revolutionary movement is not entirely tenable (see Breuer 1997 and Breuer 1998). However, in his essays Breuer does not mention – yet tacitly assumes – one simple fact, which he extensively deals with in his book on 'aesthetic fundamentalism, namely, that these authors were essentially apolitical, and that their 'politics' manifested itself through literary, particularly poetic and essayistic means.

denominator. George's stylized poetry does not have such manifest political implications as for instance the essayistic production of the ultraconservative poet and orator Borchardt, who in turn was quite far from the *völkische* positions of the irrationalist *Lebensphilosoph* Klages. In spite of this, however, their work is premised on some common ideological tenets and political assumptions, which show conspicuously in their poetic, essayistic and philosophical production. Furthermore, all of these writers shared a politically fraught *bildungsbürgerliche* cultural semantics, which invariably led them to exert a radical criticism of the culture of liberal modernity, and to develop aesthetic models of intramundane 'salvation' ("innerweltliche Erlösung", Breuer 1995, 8) from the predicaments of the present. In this study I will necessarily consider their works selectively, as they relate to Adorno's work, particularly the *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. In so doing, I will not be able to do full justice to their breadth, value and significance – something that would require a study of its own. On the other hand, my attempt will be justified by the intention of showing the reasons for Adorno's confrontation with their cultural criticism of modernity in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*.

The common denominator between the representatives of German literary anti-modernism and the authors of the *Konservative Revolution* resides, as Breuer notes, in a fundamental "Weigerung die Zumutungen von Aufklärung und Moderne anzunehmen" (Breuer 1995, 2). In the case of aesthetic anti-modernism, this refusal reflects a rejection of the process of cultural modernization (as I have previously defined it, as characterized by individualization, rationalization, differentiation and domestication of nature), on account of its unfavorable effects on 'aesthetic' perception or, to speak with Breuer, "mit Rücksicht auf die Empfindungen ... welche sie hervorbringen" on the 'subject' of *Bildung* (Breuer 1995, 3)[37]. The 'fundamentalism' of German literary anti-modernism can be called 'aesthetic' in so far as it is grounded on *bildungsbürgerliche* parameters of aesthetic sensibility (the self-contained form, Winckelmann's '*edle Einfalt und stille Grösse*') and ethical values (the Kantian-Schillerian-Humboldtian imperative of self-formation and self-perfection through cultivation of individual talents). In all their specific differences, Borchardt, Klages and George shared an understanding of culture as aesthetically normative and morally binding. This understanding was in many respects at odds with some defining aspects of the culture of

[37] This sort of aesthetic revolt against modernity is not a 20th-century phenomenon in German intellectual and literary history. It found its first expression with Romanticism, was further pursued by Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche, and then forcefully resurfaced at the turn of the century with the cultural critical aestheticism of Stefan George and his circle (see Breuer 1995, 4).

modernity. Such cultural assumptions determine their *Kulturkritik* of contemporary German society, which I will now briefly introduce in its general aspects.

The criticism of modern culture variously exerted by the above-named writers (through poetry, essay-writing and philosophy) is first of all directed at the *depersonalization* – for which such words as 'alienation' ('*Entfremdung*'), 'fragmentation' ('*Fragmentierung*'), 'atomization' ('*Atomisierung*') were used at the time – of individual life and interpersonal relationships in modern mass and industrial society. In their opinions, the cultural regime of modernity *dispossesses* individuals, in that it literally sacrifices them to forces that are extraneous, indeed hostile to their lives. Literary anti-modernism responds to this sense of dispossession in a twofold manner: first of all through an exaltation of *individual cultivation* and an emphatic praise of genius, charisma and personality; secondly through a late-Romantic, *organic metaphysics of culture*, understood as the autochthonous manifestation of a specific national (i.e., German) soul, further incarnated – according to a Romantic view that can be traced back in Germany as far as Herder – by a few exceptional individuals excelling in the fields of art and literature, but also (to a lesser extent) government and politics (see Breuer 2001, 271 ff.). This understanding of *Kultur* as the expression of both individual and national spirituality – of personal genius and genius loci alike, so to speak – is opposed by the authors in question to 'civilization' ('*Zivilization*'), disparagingly understood as the sphere of exchange and circulation, artificiality and dissimulation – in brief, as the realm of chaotic, impersonal and centrifugal relations, and web of mediations (social, political, technological, commercial etc.).

Borchardt, Klages and George equally partake of this emphatic *Kultur*-ideology. As Breuer remarks, "Der Begriff der Kultur führt ... mitten ins Zentrum des ästhetischen Fundamentalismus" (Breuer 1995, 185), and determines the personal values and world-visions of these writers. Such 'culturalist' thought – as I propose to call it – is inflected in different fashions by the thinkers who we will encounter in the present study. George and the members of his poetic circle (the so-called George-*Kreis*) seek to preserve the values of classic German *Kultur* through the formation of an exclusive, hierarchical, closed community of cultivated individuals; Rudolf Borchardt romantically appeals to the force of tradition, and ideally restricts the German *Kulturnation* to the few that live in accordance with the values and ideals of humanistic *Kultur*; Klages pleads for a regeneration of culture based on a recuperation of man's bond with nature and a new, ecological relation with 'mother earth'. In all their differences, however, these authors share a radical criticism of modern civilization in all its 'decadent' forms: urbanization and mass society, market capitalism and finance, mass

media and advertisement, the cultural industry and the literary and artistic avant-gardes (see Bollenbeck 1999, 221 ff.). Stefan George has concisely expressed this common attitude through the lapidarian maxim: "Keine Zinsen, keine Maschinen, keine Menschenmassen" (cited in Breuer 1995, 198).

I will consider the specific forms of the cultural criticism of modernity expressed by Rudolf Borchardt, Ludwig Klages and Stefan George in the single chapters of the present study, and show how Adorno related to them in his work. In what follows, I will provide a summary picture of their common cultural assumptions, mentality and ideology, and see how these are reflected in their anti-modernist cultural criticism. In so doing, I will base my argument in particular on the cultural criticism produced by the George-*Kreis*, certainly the most widely known and influential circle of elitist literati in Germany during the first decades of the 20th century (see Groppe, 1997). My choice is motivated by the fact that the *Kulturkritik* of the George-*Kreis* is also in many respects representative of that of Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages. Furthermore, both of them were linked – either through friendship (Klages) or antagonism (Borchardt) – in different phases of their lives to the charismatic figure and poetry of Stefan George[38].

The *Kulturkritik* of the George-*Kreis* finds an emblematic manifestation in the joint publication of the circle's members between 1910 and 1912, namely the *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung*. This literary magazine, conceived as a polemical pamphlet ('*Streitschrift*') of the circle (see Kolk 1998, 304) and edited by two of George's closest disciples (Friedrich Wolters und Friedrich Gundolf), contains articles on poetic, aesthetic, cultural and social subjects. The different contributions reflect the positions of the 'master' – i.e., George himself – who, though not figuring as the official editor of the journal, was in fact the last editing authority before publication. The magazine has to be located in the larger context of the then-fashionable philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*), and can be regarded as an exemplary document of German aestheticist anti-modernism at the beginning of the 20th century[39].

[38] Borchardt regarded himself throughout his life as George's poetic antagonist (see Osterkamp 1997-II). Klages on the contrary had been very close to George, and written the first poetic biography to come out on him in 1902, before breaking up his relationship with the poet shortly after (see Klages 2008).

[39] A connection between this publication and Rudolf Borchardt is testified by the fact that the title *Jahrbuch* was understood by the members of the George-*Kreis* as a polemical allusion to the yearly literary magazine *Hesperus*. *Ein Jahrbuch*, edited by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Rudolf Borchardt und Rudolf Alexander Schröder starting in 1909. In this magazine Borchardt had published a harsh review of George's poetic collection *Der Siebente Ring* (1907). In his review Borchardt, though acknowledging the power of George's poetry, advised the youth against an uncritical fascination with George's charisma (see Karlauf 2007, 445).

The criticism of modernity expressed in the *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung* conceptually departs from a summary diagnosis of the damages inflicted on the body (*Leib*) by the process of modernization. In an article titled "Wesen und Beziehung", Friedrich Gundolf – one of the magazine's editors and one of George's closest followers – asserts: "Was früher mittel war ist selbstzweck geworden, die *organe* haben sich freigemacht von ihrer bestimmung und funktionieren selbständig weiter[40]" (Gundolf 1911, 10; my italics). The classical cultural critical argument of the inversion of means and ends (whose scientific formulation was provided in the same years by the work of German sociologist Max Weber, a must-read within the George-*Kreis*), is the point of departure in Gundolf's article for a criticism of modern life on account of its impairment of the feeling, sensing and imaginative faculties of man. The 'organs', as Gundolf calls them, are the technical and cultural means, broadly speaking, that men have created for their own benefit. While means were initially thought to serve man, in modernity they have become autonomous and taken the upper hand over their master's 'body': "Im 19. jahrhundert kam es ... so weit, dass alle werkzeuge sich emanzipierten, dass der leib, die natur selbst, zum erstenmal in der geschichte, nebensächlich zu werden anfing" (ibid. 13).

Since the motor of this direful overgrowth of the means over man's existential ends – as Gundolf understands them, namely self-cultivation and self-perfection – is technological progress, what modern man needs to do in order to regain possession of his life or 'body' is to interrupt the path of technological domination of nature: "Nicht mehr neue siege der technik über die natur ersehnt der einsichtige, sondern siege der natur, vor allem der im menschen verkörperten natur, über die technik" (ibid. 15). The exploitation of natural resources, as well as of man's own nature, has to be brought to an end, so as to create the preconditions for a new, better state of culture. Gundolf articulates a common argument of *lebensphilosophische Kulturkritik* from Nietzsche onwards (see Bollenbeck 2007), which we will encounter again while dealing with Klages (and, to a lesser extent, Borchardt). The criticism of the exploitation of nature in industrial modernity – which one also finds in Adorno-Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, written some 30 years after the *Jahrbuch* – gained momentum in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century, when it became a central element of different cultural movements such as the *Lebensreform*-, the *Jugend*- and the *Heimatschutzbewegung* (see Sieferle 1984, 161 ff.). From this perspective, the *Zivilisationskritik* that one finds in the publication of the George-*Kreis* is not particularly original, but rather draws on the common cultural critical repertoire of the time.

[40] *Lower-case* letters throughout in the articles of the *Jahrbuch*.

The difference between the positions expressed in the *Jahrbuch* and those of other cultural movements resides in the radical conclusions drawn by George and his followers from their harsh criticism of cultural modernity. At the level of ideas and mentality, the process of cultural modernization according to Gundolf – who in this respect gives voice to a generally accepted position within the George-*Kreis* – leads to increasing abstraction, barren intellectualism and disorienting relativism. The criticism of the encroachment of intellectual abstractions upon the 'concreteness' of life is a traditional element of conservative rhetoric in Europe from the time of the French Revolution onwards (see Mannheim 1984). When all binding values and absolute beliefs (in God, tradition, the spirit or soul) get dissolved by the critical spirit – so this line of argument – what remains is moral chaos and spiritual confusion. This argument is rehearsed by Gundolf and yet articulated in a new manner, not traditionally conservative, but rather vitalist and aestheticist. Life in modernity has lost contact with its bodily substance and forfeited its organic base, and therefore cannot satisfy the needs of a truly cultivated and aesthetically rewarding existence.

As is the case with the conservative-revolutionary writers, the *Jahrbuch* also attributes this perverse cultural development primarily to liberalism. Not all too differently from Spengler, Gundolf criticizes 19th-century liberal progressivism as an 'intellectualist', i.e., anti-natural and body-hostile ideology:

> Die heutige form des atheismus, die eigentliche *entgötterung*, ist der relativismus: die leugnung der substanzen aus der *unfähigkeit mit dem leib zu denken*, dem erlebnis des leibes ... noch zu vertrauen: der instinktmangel hat sich die relativistischen theorien als notwehr geschaffen ... Alle *aufklärungs- und fortschrittstheorien* dienen nur der aufrechterhaltung dieser präsumirten herrschaft des *intellekts* über das leben. (Gundolf 1911, 20; my italics)

Based on this judgment, Gundolf calls for a general revocation of the Enlightenment and the progressive ideas that mark the birth of European modernity. For him, "Alle 'fortschrittsideen' sind nur selbstrechtfertigungen oder selbstbetäubungen der dezentralisierten organe" (ibid. 16). Gundolf's remark points to a fundamental aspect of the anti-modernist cultural criticism of the George-*Kreis* (but also of Borchardt, Klages and Spengler), which is its fundamentally *anti-progressive* character. In an article contained in the first issue of the *Jahrbuch* (1910) bearing the meaningful title "Zur Kritik des Fortschritts", another member of the George-*Kreis*, Berthold Vallentin, clearly spells out the programmatic critique of the 'modern' ideology of progress pursued by George and his circle:

> Was den sogenannten fortschritt für den menschen gesunder sinne bis an die grenzen des grauens furchtbar macht, ist das gewaltsam-ungeheuerliche seiner bildungen. Er entwickelt sich an irgendeinem teilorgan äussern oder innern lebens als dessen aufpropfung und verdehnt und verästelt es so lange, bis der von ihm geschwängerte teil als das satte ganze erscheint... 'Die welt im zeichen des verkehrs, das zeitalter der technik' heisst ihm ein zustand krüppelhafter bildung den er unter missbrauch lebendig wirksamer kräfte herbeigeführt hat. Was nach dem plane vernünftigen weltwesens angelegt war als mittel im dienst des gesamtorganismus, die herrschaft über den stoff zu erleichtern, kräfte zu sparen bei der überwindung toter körper, wird plötzlich vom fortschritt als selbständiges angefasst, aus seiner gebotenen dienstbarkeit gelöst, zu einem ding eigener zwecke aufgetrieben... [D]amit wurde ein zustand geschaffen in dem wie in schwerem fieber die welt von einer 'erfindung' zur andern taumelte, die stoffverfeinerungen, die stoffverbindungen, die stoffbeherrschungen zu immer neuen vereinfachungen, verfaltungen, überwindungen drängten. ... Damit hat der fortschritt die welt auf ein geleise immer krankhafterer entwicklung gebracht, einer entwicklung die ein glied des ganzen auf kosten aller anderen elefantiastisch wuchernd auftreibt und den ganzen körper einer aushöhlung entgegenführt gegen welche die verschriene 'décadance' der geistigen immer noch als eine höchst anständige kraftentfaltung erscheint. (Vallentin 1910, 54-56)

In Vallentin's article, the criticism of the contradictions and paradoxes of modernization translates into a clinical picture of modern civilization as a state of cultural illness. Such cultural critical assessment brings the members of the George-*Kreis* to wage a spiritual battle against modernity in all its forms: city-life and entertainment culture, industrial production and market economy, the 'business' of science and technological innovation, political democracy and mass society. The nightmare of George and his followers is, as Gundolf puts it, "die völlige entsselung der menschheit, die amerikanisierung, die verameisung der erde" (Gundolf 1911, 19). From the radical aesthetic perspective of the George-*Kreis*, the modern world is not compatible with a life lived in compliance with the values and norms dictated by a traditional *bildungsbürgerliche* worldview and frame of values. Vallentin thus expresses a common position of German aesthetic anti-modernism when he states that culture and progress (*Fortschritt*) are antithetical: "Der fortschritt ist das geborene hindernis der kultur. Alle arbeit die in seinem zeichen geschieht ist schlechtweg kulturwidrig" (Vallentin 1910, 51). Progress and culture are incompatible, because whereas the latter should be conducive to individual self-formation – or, to use the vocabulary of the time, to true *Bildung*, as opposed to petit-bourgeois *Philisterbildung* – the former forces him to adapt to the coercive dynamics of modern mass society, and to accept the ideology of economic growth and social progress that sustains it.

For this reasons, the authors of German anti-modernism plead for a restoration of the 'essentials' of culture, understood as a comprehensive way of life and worldview. In a public speech held in 1929, entitled "Die Entwertung des Kulturbegriffs. Ein Unglück und ein Glück", Rudolf Borchardt explicates his idea of quasi-religious asceticism as the only way to recover the moral foundations of *Kultur*:

> Wir sind völlig gewöhnt, in unsere Kultur einzurechnen, was dem Menschen an Vermehrung seines irdischen Vermögens, seiner Macht über das Irdische fast wider Willen, ganz wider Willen, zufällt und ihn dort am lautesten zu preisen, wo das neu ihm zugefallen Werkzeug und Spielzeug seiner Hände, das ihn heimlich regiert, seiner selbst spottet. ... Es wird eines ungeheuren Entschlusses bedürfen, um ihn in *dem* Sinne wieder zum Masse der Dinge zu machen, daß wir nichts an ihm achten, als was er selber an sich verachtet und fast leugnet, jene erhabene Freiheit, auszuschlagen, was ihn nicht fördert, zu überschweigen, was den linden Pöbel ergötzt. ... Noch in allen großen Zeiten der Weltgeschichte hat der größte Reichtum, derjenige, vor dem am Zahltage alle Schätze der Erde zu Spielmarken zusammenfielen, geheißen 'freiwillige Armut'. Ich will nicht alles haben wollen was es irgend gibt, aber was ich irgend habe, will ich heilig halten. Ich will nicht alles wissen wollen, können wollen, leisten wollen, was irgend gekonnt, gewußt, geleistet werden kann. Ich will nichts wissen als was mich fördert, nichts können als was ich muß, nichts leisten, was ich nicht schulde. Nicht derjenige ist der wahre Herr der Zeit, der alles bei sich, um sich, in sich sammelt, was sie zeitig oder unzeitig aus ihrer automatisch gewordenen Förderwut aufwirft; nur derjenige ist es, der sie von oben herab ansieht und in jede Aufnahme den Akt seine vollen Willens, seiner gerechten Wahl darum legt und legen muß. ... In diesem Sinn und keinem anderen ist Kultur ... eine Wahl. (Borchardt, *Die Entwertung des Kulturbegriffs*, 321-322; italics in original)

Borchardt's praise of will and individual choice, his lament of the cultural means that dominate the man/master, and further the religious overtones of his jeremiad against present culture are on exactly the same wavelength as the cultural critical publications of the George-*Kreis*. Moreover, Borchardt's speech reads as a transposition into the cultural sphere of the *Weltanschauung* and vocabulary of the *Konservative Revolution*[41]. The cultivated individual for Borchardt is characterized by self-willed determination and immovability. If necessary, he must renounce the world, rather than being caught by the humiliating dynamics of the present.

[41] In his work on anti-democratic thought of Weimar Germany Sontheimer highlights the aesthetic component of conservative-revolutionary *Dezisionismus*, propagated by such authors as Carl Schmitt and Ernst Jünger: "Dem dezisionistischen Denken wohnt *ein ästhetizistisches Moment* inne: es hat seine Lust an der *Eindeutigkeit*, der *Klarheit* und *Konsequenz* der Entscheidung. Es findet Gefallen an einer Ordnung, die widerspruchslos von oben nach unten durchkonstruierte ist und kann einen Zustand, in welchem sich viele verschiedene Kräfte um Anteil an der Macht bemühen, nur als *unschönes Durcheinander* begreifen, das sich keiner eindeutigen und übersichtlichen Struktur mehr fügt" (Sontheimer 1962, 331; my italics). What holds for the political authors of the *Konservative Revolution* also applies to Borchardt, George and Klages in the cultural sphere.

Similarly, in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* Spengler asserts: "Der kultivierte Mensch hat seine Energie *nach innen*, der zivilisierte *nach außen*" (*UA* 51; my italics). If "die Gegenwart ist eine zivilisierte, keine kultivierte Zeit" (ibid. 55), those who want to preserve their individual cultivation must step back from society. While this is not an option for the political writer and philosopher Spengler, it certainly is an option – indeed the *only* one possible – for the aesthetic fundamentalists Borchardt, Klages and George.

As I have shown so far, according to the cultural critical diagnosis of the George-*Kreis*, life in the modern world has become inextricably entangled in a web of 'peripheral' relationships, which alienate the individuals from their vital center (the 'body') and thus obscure their spiritual goals (see Gundolf 1911, 18 and Breuer 1995, 193). This is why George and his followers – as well as Borchardt, Klages and Spengler – invariably praise the cultural 'hero' as 'he who is immovably *centered*' (in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson). As Gundolf asserts: "Die meisten menschen bleiben trieb und material ... kräfte ohne völlige körperlichkeit oder massen ohne aktive energien ... nur in den wenigsten wird die substanz leib vom mittelsten herzen aus. ... Wesentlich ist diesen dass sie *mitte haben und mitte sind*" (Gundolf 1911, 27; my italics). The 'centered' man constitutes a self-sufficient world, and is therefore able to offer resistance to the mainstream tendencies of his time (see Breuer 2001, 274). He does not necessarily live outside of or against the present, but rather sovereignly ignores its constrictions and impositions: "Der zentrale mensch kann auch 'modern' sein. ... Aber er muss sich nicht um das modern kümmern, sondern danach trachten die mitte nicht zu verlieren" (Gundolf 1911, 28). That one ought to not lose one's own centre in the world is one of the tenets of 19th-century *Bildungs*-philosophy, as exemplarily formulated by Wilhelm von Humboldt in *Theorie der Bildung des Menschen* (1793)[42]. Over a century later, within the George-*Kreis*, this eminently humanistic ideal assumes an openly anti-modernist and rather anti-social connotation – at least as far as modern democratic (or 'mass') society and culture are concerned. *Bildung* becomes an elitist attribute, which serves to differentiate the few 'elected' from the culturally impoverished and apathetic masses.

The self-centric and aristocratic intellectual ethos expressed by the *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung* necessarily entails an 'esoteric' understanding as well as practice of culture. Even when it does manifest itself in a ritual form, as is notoriously the case with the George-*Kreis*, cultural esotericism can be regarded as a common feature of the anti-modernist

[42] According to Humboldt man is urged by nature "von sich aus zu den Gegenständen ausser ihm überzugehen, und hier kommt es nun darauf an, *daß er in dieser Entfremdung nicht sich selbst verliere*, sondern vielmehr von allem, war er außer sich vornimmt, immer das erhellende Licht und die wohltätige Wärme in sein Innres zurückstrahle Innres. Zu dieser Absicht aber muß er die Masse der Gegenstände sich selbst näher bringen, diesem Stoff die Gestalt seines Geistes aufdrücken und beide einander ähnlicher machen" (Humboldt 1903, 284).

writers who we will encounter in the present study. If the creative, exceptional individual and the 'organic', hierarchically structured community are understood in sheer anti-social terms as the absolute centre, the source and bearer of all culture, all tendencies moving *away* from this centre, *into* the medium of society will be regarded as signs of cultural decay. This is why the cultural criticism of the 'aesthetic fundamentalists' Borchardt, Klages and George plays out the idea of the closed community (or *Gemeinschaft*) as the centre of cultural renovation against the 'open' society (*Gesellschaft*) of liberal modernity, regarded as the place of cultural decadence and dispersion[43]. The idea of the closed community takes different forms in the work of the above-mentioned writers: from the 'sectarian' practices of the George-*Kreis* to Borchardt's idealization of the 'cultural nation' and Klages' archaistic construct of the 'Pelasgians' as a model of primitive community. Yet in all their differences, these cultural practices and projections express the same kind of rejection of modern culture and the necessity to recuperate essentially proto-modern, i.e., communitarian forms of socialization, in the conviction that, as Valentin asserts, "*Nur in gewachsener gemeinschaft wächst das Einzle*!" (Vallentin 1910, 57; italics in original).

This brings us to another important characteristic that Borchardt, Klages and George have in common. The rejection of modernity that they differently voice has a fundamentally *regressive intention*. As Breuer contends,

> Wie der religiöse Fundamentalismus reagiert auch der ästhetische auf einen epochalen Strukturwandel, der zur Rationalisierung und Versachlichung, d.h. Entpersönlichung zentraler gesellschaftlicher Bereiche führt. Wie der religiöse Fundamentalismus entzündet er sich an der Differenzierung der Gesellschaft in mehr oder weniger eigengesetzliche Teilbereiche mit je spezifischen Teilethiken. Und wie der religiöse entwickelt er ... eine Gegenstrategie, deren hervorstechendes Merkmal die *Regression* ist: sozial, indem er die Rückkehr zu einfachen, auf Interaktion beruhenden Sozialsystemen (Kreisen) predigt und demgegenüber alle komplexeren Beziehungen, die allein durch Organisation reguliert werden können, negiert; ökonomisch, indem er für Selbstversorgung und Autarkie eintritt und geldvermittelten Tausch, Kapitalismus und Weltmarkt ablehnt; politisch-rechtlich, indem er verfahrensförmige Regelungen zurückweist und statt dessen auf Meister-Jünger-Verhältnisse setzt, also auf Verhältnisse der Hörigkeit, der Hierarchie, der Heteronomie. (Breuer 1995, 241; my italics)

[43] '*Gemeinschaft*' and '*Gesellschaft*' became popular notions and political catchwords in Germany with Ferdinand Tönnies sociological treaty *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie* (1887).

In their attempts to tackle the 'problem' of modernity at its roots, Borchardt, Klages and George produce counter-images to modernity, guided by aesthetic and moral values injected with religious overtones. However, as Breuer further notes

> Moderne Fundamentalisten wollen nicht, wie religiöse Fundamentalisten, aus der Welt heraus, in die unvordenkliche Gnade Gottes oder das Nirwana. Sie wollen aber in der Zeit zurück, in jenes Stadium, in dem es noch all das gibt, was sich in der Moderne zusehends verflüchtigt: *Einheit, Ganzheit, Sinn*, in dem die sozialen Beziehungen noch primär persönliche Beziehungen sind und nicht sachlich-rational. Sie wollen dies entweder nur für den kleinen Kreis der Auserwählten, der Virtuosen, der *perfecti*, in welchem Fall man in Analogie zur religiösen Weltflucht von Zeitflucht sprechen kann; oder für die Gesamtgesellschaft, die von den Leiden erzeugenden Strukturen befreit und gleichsam kollektive auf den Stand der Virtuosen angehoben werden soll. Und sie wollen dies in Anlehnung an jene innerweltlichen Mächte, die dies in großer Intensität versprechen: die Kunst, die Erotik, die Moral, die je auf ihre Weise in Kontrast zu den unpersönlich-sachlichen und zugleich die Einheit des Individuums zerreißenden Lebensordnungen der Modern stehen. (Breuer 2002, 14; my italics, except for '*perfecti*')

As I hope will emerge in the course of the present study, the rejection of modernity of Borchardt, Klages and George in effect takes the respective forms of a moral/cultural, mystic/erotic and poetic/aesthetic fundamentalism. These different articulations of unworldly anti-modernism are characterized by their willfully anachronistic character (or 'untimely', to use Nietzsche's word). In a different way, each of these writers looked back to, or fictionally projected a past condition in which the 'cultural contradictions' (Bell 1979) of capitalist modernity were not there. Sure enough, theirs was for the most part a conscious 'play' with regression (see Sloterdijk, 1985, 310), serving their poetic, cultural-political and philosophical purposes. However, this play was a serious one, and ought by no means to be regarded as a token of individual extravagance. If one considers the cultural critical mood pervading intellectual discourses during the Weimar Republic (see Gangl-Raulet 2007), the authors in question do not stand alone with their *backward-looking orientation and idealization of the past as a source of inspiration for their criticism of the present.*

However difficult to understand this is today, Borchardt, Klages and George were far from believing that there are irrevocable tendencies determining the course of human history and the development of society. On the contrary, they thought (or at least wished), that some basic achievements of modernity (liberalism, democracy, capitalism, social mobility, technological progress) could be either revoked or 'corrected', and that it would be possible to

'turn back' the clock of history (or at least some segments of it). In this sense, they certainly were conservative, or even 'reactionary' intellectuals. In using this word in the present work, I do not intend to always infuse a value judgment into it. However, the derogatory connotation of the term is to a certain extent unavoidable. As Albert O. Hirschmann notes, this fact if nothing else proves, "how much our language" is still "under the influence of the belief in progress" (Hirschman 1991, 9). Undoubtedly, "[b]ecause of the stubbornly progressive temper of the modern era, 'reactionaries' live in a hostile world. They are up against an intellectual climate in which a positive value attaches to whatever lofty objective is placed on the social agenda by self-proclaimed 'progressives'" (ibid. 11)[44]. My vocabulary and line of argument in this study inevitably stand under this influence, and are therefore informed – for better or worse – by such 'progressive' bias. I have attempted to compensate for this by considering the works of Borchardt and Klages (and, on the margin, George and Spengler) as objectively as possible, although my approach has been strongly determined by the way in which Adorno relates to and talks about them.

Another question that emerged while dealing with Borchardt, Klages, George and Spengler regards both the meaning of and relation between the attributions 'conservative' and 'reactionary'. This question is as old as the use of these terms, and was already a matter of debate throughout the 19th century. 'Reaction' has been consistently used as a derogatory term in Germany by liberal and radical-democratic publicists and intellectuals since the failed revolution of 1848 (see Kondylis 1984, 210). The semantic history of the term 'conservative' is similar, although it never carried such a derogatory connotation as 'reactionary'[45]. Both terms emerged – first in France, then in the rest of Europe – in the aftermath of the French Revolution, and were "von Beginn an stark von politischen Gegenbegriffen ('Liberalismus', 'Demokratie', 'Radikalismus') mitbestimmt" (Vierhaus 1982, 531). Generally speaking,

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[44] Furthermore, as Panajotis Kondylis notes in the entry "Reaktion, Restauration" of the socio-political lexicon *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, "Der Reaktionsbegriff bleibt weiterhin vom Fortschrittsbegriff abhängig und lässt sich daher beliebig interpretieren" (Kondylis 1984, 230).

[45] In *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* Rudolf Vierhaus defines '*Konservatismus*' "als bewußte politische Stellungnahme von einzelnen und Gruppen ... die sich – generell formuliert – in ihren Besitzständen, im allgemeinen Zuschnitt ihrer Lebensverhältnisse, durch Veränderungen in den ökonomischen sozialen und politischen Verhältnissen bedroht sehen und die Abwehr dieser Gefahr mit der Bewahrung geschichtlicher Kontinuität, der Geltung von Recht und Fortgang der Kultur identifizieren. Gegen 'zerstörende' Tendenzen einzutreten, halten sich für die naturgemäße Aufgabe von ordnungswahrender Obrigkeit, von Justiz und Verwaltung. Bildung und Erziehung haben nach ihrer Vorstellung die Aufgabe, den Sinn für die Werte der Tradition zu wecken und eine auf die bestehende Ordnung bezogene positive Werthaltung zu erzeugen" (Vierhaus 1982, 532). The main tenet of conservative thought is that "'Bestehendes' bewahrt werden sollte oder, wenn Reformen nötig sind, diese an das Bestehende anknüpfen und erstarrte und depravierte Institutionen wiederbeleben sollten" (ibid. 533). For this reason conservative (or traditionalist) rhetoric typically avails itself of "zahlreiche Wörter aus den Bedeutungsfeldern der Dauer und Fortdauer, des organischen Wachstums, der Bewahrung, Erhaltung und Pflege, der Ordnung und des gesetzmäßigen Weitergehens, der geschichtlichen Entwicklung und der Kontinuität" (ibid.).

throughout the 19th century both concepts referred to two basic articulations of the same 'traditionalist' stance with respect to the political, social and cultural transformations of the liberal era. Whereas conservatives plead for gradual reforms – when compatible with the traditional order – reactionaries claimed a return to (or 'restoration' of) pre-revolutionary conditions[46]. While this objective could to a certain extent still hold for part of the 19th century, it had to be radically reformulated in the 20th, under the pressure of large-scale social and political changes. 'Reactionary' stances, now robbed of the perspective of restoring a forsaken world, could therefore turn 'revolutionary', as was the case in Germany with the *Konservative Revolution* in the interwar period[47]. The 'new' conservatives of this movement – Spengler first of all – were for the most part 'modernist' reactionaries (which explains how they could appropriate the notion of 'revolution'; see Herf 1984), whereas the aesthetic fundamentalists Borchardt and Klages were, politically speaking, reactionaries in the traditional sense of the term[48].

This said, Borchardt, Klages and George certainly were not political writers, nor politically-minded men. They were in fact essentially apolitical, and regarded the political arena of their time with a mix of distrust, stilted hopes and radical contempt. Whenever they expressed their views on contemporary issues, however, they took positions that were very close to those of conservative-revolutionary writers such as Spengler and Moeller[49]. Sontheimer's following remarks underline the intrinsic connection between *Konservative Revolution* and aesthetic anti-modernism in Weimar Germany:

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[46] "Da die sich rasch entfaltenden soziale Dynamik eine bloß geschichtliche Basierung des Konservatismus im unbeweglichen Rahmen des Bestehenden unmöglich gemacht hatte, mußten seine Anhänger entweder der Reaktion als Reform nach rückwärts verfallen oder aber ihren Konservatismus von seinem buchstäblichen statischen Sinne loslösen und ihn um die Perspektive einer Reform nach vorwärts erweitern" (Kondylis 1984, 216).

[47] As Vierhaus notes, "Konservatives Denken und Handeln ... können unter der Herausforderung tiefgreifenden und umfassenden sozialen Wandels bei reaktionärer Zielsetzung durchaus radikale Züge annehmen. Wird nicht nur die Wiederherstellung einer Herrschaftsform und die Rückführung einer classe dirigeante in ihre einstige Rolle angestrebt ... sondern unter Berufung auf eine einst heile, durch menschliche Hybris unwiederbringliche zerstörte Ordnung, eine heile Zukunft jenseits der abgelehnten Gegenwart, dann kann Konservatismus als politisches und ideologisches Programm zum revolutionären Potential werden" (Vierhaus 1982, 532-3).

[48] As I will show later, 'restoration' (as '*Wiederherstellung*') characterizes the cultural politics of Borchardt and the philosophical program of Klages, whereas the creation of a "heile Zukunft jenseits der abgelehnten Gegenwart" (Vierhaus 1982, 533) defines the political-philosophical vision of Spengler and the poetic production of George.

[49] A telling document of this proximity is Borchardt's public speech "Führung" (1931), in which he complains about the fact that the German people has become a "armes, führerloses Volk" (Borchardt, "Führung", 401), which "ist heut nicht zu führen, sondern nur *zu erobern*" (ibid. 424; my italics). Borchardt sees a concrete possibility there, since he thought that the time was ripe for a conservative revolution: "Die ganze Welt wird reißend konservativ, aus Selbstschutz, aus Erbschutz, aus der Pflicht heraus, die durcheinandergerüttelten Elemente ... unter die Hand des nationalen Kontinuums wieder einzufangen, jeder auf einem anderen Wege, wir auf dem schwersten, der Wiederumstürzung des Umsturzes, der negierten und negierenden Negation, der Revolution gegen die Revolution" (ibid. 428).

> Die antidemokratische Geistesbewegung der sogenannten 'konservativen Revolution' ist von dem gleichen antirationalen Affekt getragen wie ein großer Teil der geisteswissenschaftlichen und künstlerischen Bewegung dieser Jahre. Sie sieht in der Revolte gegen den mächtigen, den Menschen verarmenden Geist des Rationalismus ihre Existenzberechtigung, mit dem entscheidenden Unterschied freilich, daß die antidemokratische Geistesrichtung *ernst macht* mit der Anwendung nichtrationaler Vorstellungen auf das politische und gesellschaftliche Leben. In diesem Umsetzungsprozeß wird der *Geist sozusagen politisch*. Der vielfach ästhetisch formulierte Protest gegen mechanische Lebensformen, gegen die Verkümmerung der Seele im modernen Dasein wurde seiner Politikferne entkleidet und kritisch auf die politischen Lebensformen der liberalen Demokratie gerichtet. ... Nur wo ein allgemeiner Irrationalismus im Denken bereits vorgebildet ist, kann der politische Irrationalismus als Denktypus Kraft und Gestalt gewinnen. (Sontheimer 1962, 61; my italics)

In stressing the irrationalist component of the conservative-revolutionary ideology, Sontheimer also suggests the implicit political dimension of the aestheticist criticism of modernity in the Weimar period. If, as Thomas Mann argued, "in jeder Haltung ist das Politische latent" (cited in Sontheimer 1962, 61), there can be no doubt that the 'latent' politics of Rudolf Borchardt, Ludwig Klages and Stefan George was that of 'reaction' against the polity of liberal modernity. Adorno's confrontation with Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, as well as with Stefan George and Oswald Spengler in two 'minor' essays written in the late 30s and early 40s is not a confrontation with political thinkers, ideologues, or propagandists (with the (partial) exception of Spengler). Their anti-modernist *Zivilisationskritik*, however, carried political implications for Adorno, as it manifested a clearly anti-liberal and pro-authoritarian intellectual ethos. From the distance of his exilic condition, and with the benefit of hindsight, he regarded their works as symptomatic of the anti-democratic 'turn' of large parts of the conservative-minded *bildungsbürgerliche* German intelligentsia in the interwar period – a turn that made it susceptible to embrace, at least initially, the promise of national rebirth and cultural regeneration of the Nazi movement (Bollenbeck 2000 and Bollenbeck 1994, 288 ff.).

In the *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, which constitutes the main object of this study, Adorno critically engages the radical criticism of civilization of Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages. While he accepts and indeed appropriates some of their arguments and insights, he takes issue with the cultural-political implications and ideological assumptions of their cultural critical discourses. In his pre-war essays on Stefan George and Oswald Spengler, Adorno confronts himself with these two central figures of German cultural conservatism in the interwar period, and manifests an ambivalent mixture of admiration and

rejection towards their poetic and philosophical works. Adorno's works on George and Spengler can be regarded with hindsight as a 'prequel' to his confrontation with Borchardt and Klages in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. For this reason, before proceeding to an analysis of this work, in the following section I will dwell on Adorno's treatment of the anti-modernist poetry of Stefan George and the conservative-revolutionary philosophy of Oswald Spengler.

1.3. The 'Prequel' to Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*: "George und Hofmannsthal. Zum Briefwechsel: 1891–1906" (1939-40) and "Spengler Today" (1941)

In the present section of this work, I will consider Adorno's confrontations with the poet Stefan George and the philosopher Oswald Spengler in two essays written during his American exile: "George und Hofmannsthal. Zum Briefwechsel: 1891–1906" (1939-40) and "Spengler Today" (1941). Stefan George unquestionably counts as the most prominent poet of German anti-modernism (or 'aesthetic fundamentalism') between the turn of the century and the Weimar period. Oswald Spengler, on the other hand, can be regarded as the major (and certainly the most renowned) philosophical exponent of the conservative-revolutionary movement. Adorno's dealing with them is significant, in the context of the present study, because it anticipates his later confrontation with the anti-modernist cultural criticism of Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages in the *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. I will therefore treat Adorno's essays on Stefan George and Oswald Spengler as a sort of introduction to my reading of *Dialektik der Aufklärung* in the second and third chapters of this study.

First of all, I will consider Adorno's confrontation with the *Kulturkritik* of Stefan George (and thus, indirectly, of his poetic circle) in the essay "George und Hofmannsthal. Zum Briefwechsel: 1891–1906" (here referred to simply as *Briefwechsel*). This work provides evidence for Adorno's interest in George not only as a poet, but also as a cultural critic. Adorno was familiar with George's poetry since youth, as he grew up in a time and cultural milieu in which the poet was highly renowned (see Hummelt 2005, 48). George was regarded by many during his lifetime as a foremost renovator of German poetry, and remained one of the most widely acclaimed poets in Germany until his death in 1933[50]. Even more significant to the present discussion is that, as Jan Andres notes, "Georges Kunst ist schon von ihrem Anspruch und vor den konkreten Aussagen der Gedichte Medium und Ausdruck von Kulturkritik. Es ist performative Kulturkritik" (Andres 2006, 34). George's poetic work "lässt sich … als Widerstand gegen die Moderne und die Zivilisation mit den Ausdrucksformen der

[50] It might be useful at this point to mention that Adorno also came into contact during his study at Frankfurt University with professors coming from the George-*Kreis*, such as the literary scholar Max Kommerell and the historian Ernst Kantorowicz. He audited for instance Kantoriwicz' inagurual lecture (*Antrittsvorlesung*), which he followed with such interest as to be mistaken by the later journalist Karl Korn for a member of the George-*Kreis* (cf. Müller-Doohm 2003, 216-7).

höchtsten Kunst und mit den Mitteln des Künstlers [begreifen]" (ibid.). Considering this, it is not surprising that Adorno's critical appraisal of Stefan George in the *Briefwechsel* essay concentrates on the cultural critical entailments of the latter's poetry. Indeed, Adorno regards George as the foremost representative of the 'reactionary' radicalization that, in his view, characterizes the development of German *Kulturkritik* from the turn of the 20th century onwards. In a 1937 letter to Max Horkheimer, in which Adorno informs the latter about his recent occupations (he has just finished his monograph on Wagner), one reads:

> Das letzte worum ich mich nähe bekümmert habe, ist der Fall Wagner-Nietzsche. … Dabei ist mir nun eine Idee gekommen, die mich als Fortsetzung des Wagner … sehr fesselt. Es schwebt mir nämlich vor, der *Funktionswechsel der so genannten deutschen Kulturkritik*, die bei Nietzsche oder Burckhardt noch wesentlich progressiven Charakter hat, *zu ihrem jetzigen reaktionären Charakter* an einem exemplarischen Modell zu entwickeln. ... Das Modell aber, an das ich denke, ist *kein anderes als George*, bei dem dieser Umschlag beinahe auf den Tag zu bestimmen ist. Er erfolgte im 'Teppich'. (Adorno-Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1927-1937*, 496; my italics)

Adorno ultimately did not realize his idea of analyzing of the 'change of function' of German cultural criticism from progressive to reactionary in a single work. He instead carried out this project sparsely in his production, particularly in the period spanning from the end of the 30s to the mid-50s. His essay on the epistolary exchange between George und Hofmannsthal, as well as single chapters of his exile masterpiece *Minima Moralia* (1944-47) bear traces of this project, which later expanded into a more general coming to terms with German cultural conservatism in the post-war essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" (published in 1951), opening the homonymous essay collection (more on this in chapter IV, 1.2.).

In parallel to this development, Adorno – along with his friend Walter Benjamin (see Mattenklott 2005) – maintained an unabated interest in George throughout his life[51]. The poet is the subject of three essays written by Adorno in a time period of thirty years: the already mentioned "George und Hofmannsthal. Zum Briefwechsel: 1891–1906" (*GS* 10.1, 195), "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft" (*GS* 11, 49) and "George" (*GS* 11, 523). As I have already mentioned, the first was written by Adorno during his American exile in 1939-40, while the other two were conceived as radio lectures, given respectively for the radio stations

[51] Adorno and Bernjamin were not the only Marxist intellectuals to be interested in George. As Geret Luhr has shown, also György Lukács was extremely fascinated by the poet and dealt with him as early as 1911 in his essay "Die Seele und die Formen" (see Luhr 2002, 162). Adorno probably knew this essay, as suggested by the fact that his critique of George's poetry in *Briefwechsel* is in many respects reminiscent of that of Lukács.

RIAS Berlin in 1951 (and first published in *Akzenten* in 1957) and *Deutschlandfunk* in 1967. Whereas the latter two essays concentrate on George's poetics, and are relatively free of polemics – given the changed cultural-political climate of post-war Germany – the first one is decidedly more critical, although it does not fail to recognize the value of parts of George's poetry[52].

In the *Briefwechsel* essay, the epistolary correspondence (published in 1938) that occurred between George und Hofmannsthal in the years around the turn of the 20th century (1891-1906), serves Adorno as pretext for a critical appraisal of George as a cultural critical poet (Hofmannsthal is a secondary object of attention in Adorno's essay). Adorno's approach to George – part of whose lyric production Adorno set to music in some of his *Lieder* (cf. Müller-Doohm 2003, 951-955) – is marked in this essay by ambivalence. On the one hand, Adorno appreciates George as a fine aesthete and rigorous stylist of language, which in his poetry becomes purified, so to speak, from the 'taint' of daily communication and commercial use. Adorno particularly admires George's symbolic force and formal discipline, which make his poetry 'resistant' against the flattening standardization of language in media, press and advertisement: "Die leidenschaftliche Bemühung um sprachlichen Ausdruck, der bannend das Banale fernhält, ist der sei's auch hoffnungslose Versuch, das Erfahrene dem tödlichsten Feind zu entziehen, der ihm in der späten bürgerlichen Gesellschaft heranwächst: dem Vergessen" (*GS* 10.1, 236). As Ulrich Plass remarks, Adorno "praises George's aesthetic asceticism, his art of reduction and omission, for providing the lyrical subject with a means to step outside the reifying forces of the marketplace" (Plass 2006, 92). For Adorno, the market is the place of reification through forgetfulness – as one reads in a fragment of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*: "Alle Verdinglichung ist ein Vergessen" (*DA* 263) – which George's essentialist reduction of language attempts to withstand: "Das Banale ist dem Vergessen geweiht; das Geprägte soll dauern als geheime Geschichtsschreibung" (*GS* 10.1, 236). George's poetic chiseling becomes for Adorno a sort of secret historiography, i.e., an effective mode of writing on contemporary reality from an utterly detached position.

Adorno traces George's poetics back to the French symbolist tradition of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine. This literary current is regarded by Adorno historically as a first

[52] During his Paris exile Walter Benjamin wrote a letter to Adorno, in which he praised the latter's *Briefwechsel* essay as the best work on George ever written, and one of Adorno's finest pieces of critical writing. In this work, according to Benjamin, Adorno accomplished a "unzeitgemäße und undankbare Aufgabe: eine 'Rettung' Georges … so schlüssig wie es nur sein kann, so unaufdringlich, wie es sein muß" (Benjamin 2000, 450).

poetic response to the homogenizing dynamics of modern 'mass' society[53]. This is the reason why he cannot agree with the traditional Marxist view of symbolist aestheticism as a 'reactionary' and escapist movement (cf. *GS* 10.1, 227). Indeed, according to Adorno, symbolist poetry provides even deeper critical insights into present social tendencies than realistic and naturalistic literature:

> Die anderen stellen die kapitalistische Gesellschaft dar, aber lassen die Menschen fiktiv so reden, als ob sie noch miteinander reden könnten. Die ästhetischen Fiktionen sprechen den wahrhaften Monolog, den die kommunikative Rede bloß verdeckt. Die anderen erzählen Begebenheiten, als ob vom Kapitalismus sich noch erzählen ließe. Alle neuromantischen sind letzte Worte. Die anderen bedienen sich der Psychologie als Klebemittels zwischen Innen und entfremdetem Außen. ... Anstelle der Psychologie tritt bei ihren ästhetischen Gegnern das unauflösliche Bild, das – wie sehr auch der Transparenz entratend – doch die Kräfte designiert, die zur Katastrophe treiben. ... Baudelaires 'Petites Vieilles', noch Georges 'Täter' oder 'Ihr tratet zu dem herde' stehen der Einsicht ins Zusammenbruchsgesetz näher als die unverdrossene Beschreibung von Slums und Bergwerken. Tönt in dieser dumpf das Echo des historischen Stundenschlags, *so wissen jene Gedichte, was die Stunde geschlagen hat*. In diesem Wissen ... entspringt die Form: im Trotz. (*GS* 10.1, 235-236; my italics)

Adorno's evaluation of symbolism against the trivial realism prescribed by progressive literary critics reads as an indirect praise of George. In his poetry the criticism of contemporary language and society are intertwined. George's "Trotz gegen die Gesellschaft ist einer gegen deren Sprache" (ibid. 236). The aesthete George renounces the use of language for the purpose of communication, and thus stands for "die Utopie, nicht man selber zu sein" (ibid. 237). The 'negative' utopia incarnated by George is that of not being just anybody, a normally speaking and behaving individual:

> Die anderen teilen die Sprache der Menschen. Sie sind 'sozial'. Die Ästheten sind ihnen um so weit voraus, wie sie asozial sind. Ihre Werke messen sich an der Erkenntnis, daß die Sprache der Menschen die Sprache ihrer Entwürdigung ist. Die Sprache ihnen rauben, der Kommunikation sich versagen, ist besser als Anpassung. (ibid. 236)

[53] As Adorno concisely states in *Minima Moralia*: "die exzentrische Psychologie der décadence entwirft die negative Anthropologie der Massengesellschaft" (*GS* 4, 190).

This, for Adorno, is the 'rebellious' principle of George's poetry. His aestheticist utopia abrogates the social contract ("die Utopie des Ästhetizismus kündigt dem Glück den Gesellschaftsvertrag", ibid. 237), proclaiming the individual's independence from the equalizing, and as such subtly coercive dynamics of market society. At the same time, however, according to Adorno rigorous aesthetes such as George cannot offer an alternative to the world that they reject. They seek self-realization outside of the social realm and thus voluntarily become 'outcasts' (Adorno uses for George the word "Verfemter", ibid. 206). Their social and cultural criticism is legitimate as long as they maintain outsider status and provide for aesthetic as well as moral scandal ("solange sie den Anstoß der 'Entartung' bieten", ibid. 236, footnote 28). On the contrary, as soon as they relinquish their implicit critical stance and attempt to provide a positive counter-image to present society, they are fatally reintegrated into it ("was immer sie der herrschenden Gesellschaft positiv kontrastieren mögen, ist ihr untertan", ibid).

This, according to Adorno, is precisely what happened with George in the transition from his early symbolist and *Jugendstil* phase to his self-enthronement as poet-prophet and master of a poetic circle built around his charismatic personality: "so degeneriert im Stiftertum des späten George der Frevler zum Helden" (ibid. 209). The outcast dandy and scandalous 'sinner' thus became the revered hero and self-proclaimed educator of an elitist group of young men that regarded themselves as the aristocratic core of a dubious '*Geheimes Deutschland*'. As we have seen, Adorno pins down this transition in George's poetic production in *Das Teppich des Lebens* (published in 1899). Adorno's opinion can be explained through the position that this collection holds within George's oeuvre, marking a turning point from his first, 'aestheticist' phase – represented by *Algabal* (1892) and *Das Jahr der Seele* (1897) – to the more decidedly 'political' phase of *Der Siebente Ring* (1907) and *Der Stern des Bundes* (1914) (see Andres 2006, 35). George's *Teppich* entails a decisive change of paradigm in his production as regards the aesthetic autonomy of poetry and its relation with society. Dirk von Petersdorff sums up the gist of this transformation as follows:

> Das Frühwerk hatte die Unabhängigkeit und Eigenständigkeit der Kunst außerordentlich weit gefasst. Mit dem 'Teppich des Lebens' setzte eine Problematisierung der Autonomie ein: Sie stand in Gefahr, eine lebensferne und selbstbezügliche Dichtung hervorzubringen. In den Jahren nach 1900 reduziert George nun entschieden die Autonomie von Dichtung und verbindet die Kunst mit Personen, Gruppen, Institutionen, die in der Gesellschaft tätig sind. Die Kunst wird zum Teil eines größeren *gegen-modernen Projekts*. … Sie dient zur Darstellung eines nicht mehr in heterogene Ansprüche und Praktiken zerrissenen Menschen und zur

> Projektion einer mythologisch geeinten, auf eine gemeinsame höchste Wahrheit verpflichteten Gesellschaft. (Petersdorff 2005-I, 110; my italics)

As Petersdorff underlines, the revocation of the autonomy of the poetic sphere in *Das Teppich* goes along with a decidedly anti-modernist program, aimed at opposing the habits, values and institutions of liberal society through the mythical projection – or rather 'foundation' – of elitist counter-structures (cf. Petersdorff 2005-I, 106)[54]. These are understood by George and his followers as a sort of aesthetic anticipation of a new 'state' (*Reich*) to come (as the title of George's later collection *Das Neue Reich* (1928) suggests). A telling example of the mood pervading *Das Teppich* is the tenth poem of the "Vorspiel". I quote it in full since, as Petersdorff suggests, it is representative of the 'affirmative' turn that marks this collection:

> Verweilst du in den traurigsten bezirken
> Wo ruhmlos tat der starken wie der bleichen
> Begraben wird so lenkt – wie ohn entweichen
> Zu jeder lust der leib – mein ruf zum wirken.
>
> Die klare antwort steigt mit meiner sonne
> Wenn du dich fragst: nach welchem winde kehren
> Wo greifen da sich alle fäden queren
> Wo schöpfen da es quillt aus jedem bronne?
>
> Und leidest du am zagemut der väter
> Dass der gestalten wechselnd buntes schwirren
> Und ihre überfülle dich verirren:
> Vernichtet dich die weltenzahl im äther:
>
> So komm zur stätte wo wir uns verbünden!
> In meinem hain der weihe hallt es brausend:
> Sind auch der dinge formen abertausend
> Ist dir nur Eine – Meine – sie zu künden.
> (George-*GAW* Vol. 5, 21)

The 'place' ("state") of the new bonds is the closed circle of select individuals, strictly separated from the inglorious and sad reality ("ruhmlos", "traurigsten bezirken") of the liberal society inherited by the 'fathers' ("zagemut der väter"). The latter have not been able to provide order and orientation, nor to construct a world endowed with sense for their children. The confusing 'buzz' of daily business ("Der gestalten wechselnd buntes schwirren") and the

[54] Geret Luhr has defined this strategy as "mytische Aristokratisierung", which serves George and his adepts "sich ... von der als Gefahr empfundenen Masse zu distanzieren, ... zu auserwälten Augestoßenen zu machen" (Luhr 2002, 212).

overabundance ("überfülle") of existential options not substantiated by inner beliefs or convictions can only be overcome – this is the 'message' of the poem – through a determined discipline of self-exclusion from the disorientating dynamics of present society (cf. Petersdorff 2005-I, 103). In *Das Teppich,* a voice speaks that clearly determines what needs to be done. This authoritative trait constitutes a novelty of *Das Teppich* with respect to George's previous collection *Das Jahr der Seele* (not by chance the one that Adorno arguably appreciated the most). Whereas in the latter,

> dialogisch gesprochen wurde, werden jetzt Verhältnisse einer eindeutig *asymmetrischen Rede* entworfen. Diese aber gehören anders als im Frühwerk ... nicht der Vergangenheit an, sondern der Gegenwart. Formuliert wird der Anspruch, in der Gegenwart Verhältnisse zu begründen, die in ihrem hierarchischen Charakter, ihrer Fixierung eines nicht-revidierbaren Sinns und ihrer Reduktion von Pluralität die Bedingungen der Moderne negieren. (Petersdorff 2005-I, 102; my italics)

The poetics of *Das Teppich* is thus characterized by a new 'communicative' strategy of the lyric 'I'. The latter now directly addresses the reader by proclaiming binding values and norms of conduct. These appear to come from a higher instance, symbolically represented by the angel that appears at the beginning of the collection. This mirror-image of the lyric 'I' announces to the poet (and, indeed, to the reader) a message of aesthetic regeneration: "Das schöne leben sendet mich an dich / Als boten" (George-*GAW* Vol. 5, 12; "Ich forschte bleichen eifers nach dem horte"). The way in which the angel addresses the reader does not allow for questioning or criticism. The angel simply orders those who receive its message to follow it (cf. Petersdorff 2005-I, 102). The reader is incited to take inspiration from the lyric 'I' and thus to subject himself to the angel's foreign will: "Nun tu ich alles was der engel will" (George-*GAW* Vol. 5, 14; "In meinem leben rannen schlimme tage"). As Petersdorff notes, from the initial appearance of the angel "Züge[...] von Autorität, Herrschaft und Freiheits-Negation" (Petersdorff 2005-I, 102) come to light in *Das Teppich*. The appearance of the heavenly creature announces subjection, not only *of* the lyric 'I' (who devotes himself to the angel of beauty), but also *to* the lyric 'I' (as the personification of the angel). The angel's voice and that of the poet indeed overlap in many of the poems contained in this collection. Both voices announce an 'authoritarian' message of beauty, as well as a new strategy of elitist retreat from present-day society, as testified by the following strophe of the poem "Ich bin freund und führer dir und ferge":

> Ich bin freund und führer dir und ferge.
> Nicht mehr mitzustreiten ziemt dir nun
> Auch nicht mit den Weisen · hoch vom berge
> Sollst du schaun wie sie im tale tun.
> (George-*GAW* Vol. 5, 18)

The people in the 'valley' go about their daily business, unaware of the new life promised by the angel ("Weite menge siehst du rüstig traben / Laut ist ihr sich mühendes gewimmel"). However, a small group of people – namely, George and his followers – have been able to apprehend the revelation of a new course ("Eine kleine schar zieht stille bahnen / Stolz entfernt vom wirkenden getriebe"), and to change its life accordingly, following the a-temporal, ideal beauty of classic Greek antiquity ("Und als losung steht auf ihren fahnen: / Hellas ewig unsre liebe"; ibid.). This too is typical of *Das Teppich*: the aesthetic idealization of pre-modern historical ages – which one also finds in George's early production, prominently in *Algabal* – serves him, more manifestly than before, as an indirect criticism of the present. The tendency to create counter-images to the contemporary world continued in George's poetic production after *Das Teppich*, culminating in the "Zeitgedichte" of *Der Siebente Ring* (1907) (see Andres 2006).

After this brief overview of the poetics of *Das Teppich*, Adorno's remark in his letter to Horkheimer about the 'reactionary' turn of George's cultural criticism in this collection becomes more understandable. In *Briefwechsel*, Adorno notes how "Georges Engel dem Dichter gleicht" (*GS* 10.1, 237). The angel is not a heavenly creature, but rather an authoritative figure, a menacing fetish of beauty – and a projection of George himself – that aims at robbing those who embrace its message of their free will. Its announcement of the 'beautiful life' constitutes for Adorno a betrayal of George's earlier aestheticist 'resistance' against the displayed banality of contemporary society and the cheap allures of mass culture. Adorno contrasts George with the 'father' of symbolism Baudelaire:

> Baudelaire ist allen, die ihm folgten, überlegen darum, weil er an keiner Stelle jener Schönheit als positiver und unmittelbarer sich zugeneigt hat, sondern bloß als unwiederbringlich verlorener oder in äußerster Verneinung … ihn betrügt nicht der rosige Engel des schönen Lebens, zu dessen Fidusbild Schönheit selber in George sich hergibt. Durch sie kommuniziert George mit den realistischen Abbildnern. (ibid. 232-233)

Adorno's previous appraisal of George's distance from the trivial and self-assured conformism of realist literature is turned upside down in this passage. George becomes himself a self-content imitator of reality, and a worse one than that depicted by realist writers, since George's all-consuming 'reality' is his own self-styled poetic image. George's self-enactment as a poet-priest and his willful enshrinement in an aura of mysteriousness are exposed by Adorno as an affected pose ("Haltung"), through which "die Not der Entfremdung … in die Tugend der Selbstsetzung umgebogen [wird]" (ibid. 201)[55]. George makes himself as well as the members of his *Kreis* into objects of contemplation. Instead of escaping the logic of alienation and reification of contemporary society, he thus in a way reproduces them within the boundaries of his closed community:

> Die von George und Hofmannsthal urgierte Entfremdung der Kunst vom Leben, die die Kunst zu erhöhen gedenkt, schlägt in grenzenlose und gefügige Nähe zum Leben um. Symbolismus ist in Wahrheit nicht darauf aus, alle Stoffmomente sich als Symbole eines Inwendigen zu unterwerfen. Eben an dieser Möglichkeit verzweifelt man und proklamiert, *das Absurdum*, die entfremdete Dingwelt selber, in ihrer Undurchdringlichkeit fürs Subjekt, verleihe diesem Weihe und Sinn, wenn nur das Subjekt in die Dingwelt sich auflöse. Nicht länger weiß sich Subjektivität als das beseelende Zentrum des Kosmos. Sie überliefert sich jenem Wunderbaren, das geschähe, wenn die bloßen sinnverlassenen Stoffe von sich aus die verlöschende Subjektivität beseelten. Anstatt daß die Dinge als Symbole der Subjektivität nachgäben, gibt Subjektivität nach als Symbol der Dinge, bereit, in sich selber schließlich *zu dem Ding zu erstarren*, zu dem sie von der Gesellschaft ohnehin gemacht wird. (ibid. 234; my italics)

Adorno's talk about the 'world of things' ("Dingwelt") reiterates the traditional Marxist (and Lukácsian) critique of the reification of human relations in capitalist society. In order not to passively succumb to the total commodification of the world, George accommodates himself to it. For Adorno "das Absurdum" of George's attitude is the hope of finding salvation in the principles – i.e., alienation and reification – which he had set about to defy in the first place through his 'ascetic' symbolism. While George's early poetry subtly articulates a rejection of market society and mass culture, *Das Teppich* takes recourse to a counter-position which in Adorno's opinion represents a cheap solution, indeed a betrayal of the poet's original cultural critical stances. George's cult of poetic beauty then becomes a barren elitist practice; his opposition to society a chimerical escape from reality; his sectarian praxis the pretext for

[55] In his study on George, Wolfgang Braungart has extensively dealt with the 'ritualist' character of George's poetry and the 'cultic' practices of his poetic circle (see Braungart 1997).

creating a compliant environment, where the poet is free to behave as an authoritarian leader, and to profit from this position. George

> Möchte die Dichtung von der Nachfrage des Publikums emanzipieren und gleichwohl in einem sozialen Zusammenhang verbleiben, den er später mit Worten wie Bund und Held, Volk und Tat mythologisiert hat. Sich der 'rücksicht auf die lesende menge' entheben, heißt ihm, durch eine Technik der Beherrschung … die lesende Menge in eine von *Zwangskonsumenten* verwandeln. (ibid. 220; my italics)

The former pariah George paradoxically becomes an aggressive capitalist of *belles lettres*, who seeks to transforms his audience into a compact bundle of coercive consumers. George's strategy of exclusivity is regarded by Adorno as a shrewd attempt to evade market competition through the creation of a secured monopoly:

> Die Verachtung des Erfolgs bezieht sich bloß auf den Marktmechanismus, der die Konkurrierenden Fehlschlägen aussetzt. Erfolg wird angestrebt unter Umgehung des Marktes. Die Größe, die sich stolz dazu bescheidet, ihn nicht zu suchen, ist die des literarischen Trustmagnaten. (ibid. 221)

Adorno considers George's retreat from the market as a feint. More than refusing success, George constantly enacts his own success, and effectively advertises his poetic 'products' by veiling them in a halo of exclusivity. For Adorno, this strategy is based on the cult of luxury and preciousness, which represent the epitome of the commercial value that George's poetry pretends to escape[56]. Adorno further elaborated on this critical insight in his exile masterpiece

[56] A consideration of George's dealing with the book as a cult object supports Adorno's critical argument. Besides developing an idiosyncratic poetic style and calligraphic writing, George made attempts at a 're-auratization' of the book (see Roos, 2000, 71 ff.). To this purpose he established his own publishing house, in which he intended to personally produce hand-crafted books in limited edition for a few select people. George, however, also desired to pursue visibility on the literary market. He therefore contrived a smart expedient: he kept publishing his poetry through a regular publishing house; however, the copies produced in series here contained an index to the limited edition of the same work put out by his own publishing house. The same goal was achieved by numbering the serially produced books or by putting on their title page a copy of the poet's handwritten signature. In other words, George managed to contrive a subtle editorial strategy, which allowed him to put his books on the market while endowing them with a nimbus of exclusivity. This strategy is also reflected in his invention of a personal print writing liking his handwriting: an unmistakable mark of distinction (ironically enough, a real *trade*mark), which conferred an aura of uniqueness – a sort of spiritual copyright, so to speak – upon his works. The following passage from *Minima Moralia* indicates Adorno's distance from George's librarian undertakings: "In einer Welt, in der längst die Bücher nicht mehr aussehen wie Bücher, sind es nur noch solche, die keine mehr sind. Stand am Anfang der bürgerlichen Ära die Erfindung der Druckerpresse, so wäre bald deren Widerruf durch Mimeographie fällig, das allein angemessene, das unauffällige Mittel der Verbreitung" (*GS* 4, 56). As an antidote to the irremediable 'decadence' of the book and

Minima Moralia. In a chapter of this work meaningfully titled "Goldprobe", he attempts to understand the emergence in modernity of the value of 'authenticity' – frequently opposed by conservative cultural criticism to the inauthenticity, frivolity and artificiality of mass culture – as a correlate of modern industrial production and market exchange:

> Die Entdeckung der Echtheit als letzten Bollwerk der individualistischen Ethik ist ein Reflex der industriellen Massenproduktion. Erst indem ungezählt standardisierte Güter um des Profits willen vorspiegeln, ein Einmaliges zu sein, bildet sich als Antithese dazu, doch nach den gleichen Kriterien, die Idee des nicht zu Vervielfältigenden als des eigentlich Echten. ... *Der Trug der Echtheit* geht zurück auf die bürgerliche Verblendung dem Tauschvorgang gegenüber. Echt erscheint, worauf die Waren und anderen Tauschmittel reduziert werden, *Gold* zumal. Wie das Gold aber wird die von seinem Feingehalt abstrahierte Echtheit zum *Fetisch*. Beide werden behandelt, als wären sie das Substrat, das doch in Wahrheit ein gesellschaftliches Verhältnis ist, während Gold und Echtheit gerade nur Fungibilität, die Vergleichbarkeit der Sachen ausdrücken; gerade sie sind nicht an sich, sondern für anderes. (*GS* 4, 177; my italics)

The 'authentic' is not an unchanging substance, but rather a measure convened upon and functional to exchange. For Adorno, the idea informing George's poetry is that of precious material, the value of which is determined precisely by its rarity and authenticity (cf. *GS* 10.1, 230). Both are the product of a 'bourgeois' fetishization of the imaginary 'absolute' value to which all exchange values could be reduced. Such fetishization results from the incapacity to see that value originates in the social relations of production, which manifest themselves in a mediated way through market competition. This blindness characterizes George, and condemns his aesthetic opposition against the status quo to utter impotence – indeed, to philistine compliance with the existing world. In a work entitled *Das Bewußtsein der Wissenssoziologie*, written in 1937 (thus shortly before the *Briefwechsel* essay), Adorno makes a scathing remark about elitist anti-modernism à la George:

> Längst ist der *Bildungsphilister* nicht mehr die Figur, als welche David Friedrich Strauß von Nietzsche identifiziert ward, der Mann, der sieht, wie herrlich weit er es gebracht hat; er gerade ist zum *Wortführer der Kulturkritik* geworden, die Nietzsche einmal gegen ihn inaugurierte, und verleugnet als Kulturkritiker die geistige

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its loss of centrality as a cultural medium, Adorno does not envision its artificial re-auratization through the luxury edition, but rather an 'ascetic' essentialism in both production and marketing, implying a minimal expenditure of material resources and a disregard for concerns of aesthetic appetibility.

> Produktion seiner eigenen Epoche, oft genug selbst seiner eigenen Klasse, aus der Angst heraus, sie könnte sich gegen die Grundlagen des Bestehenden kehren. ... *Bildungsphilister und Kulturkritiker haben die Posten getauscht*, die sie zur Zeit des jungen Nietzsche noch innehatten. (*GS* 20.1, 21-22)

This devastating critique should be understood as a reference to the cultural criticism of George and like-minded intellectuals from the milieu of the *Konservative Revolution*. Their criticism of modern culture is a cheap one for Adorno, because it does not bother to consider the intricate complex of relations and the evolving dynamics of contemporary society, preferring to retreat in a safe position of self-appointed superiority. Such conservative critics censoriously judge and condemn present cultural phenomena without partaking, and by this way truly understanding them. As I will show in the last chapter of the present study, Adorno reiterates this argument in his later essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" (1951), which is a telling example of his continuing preoccupation with elitist cultural criticism in the post-war period.

Compared with his devastating critique of George's aesthetic anti-modernism – only partially revised in his later essays on the poet (see Plass 2006, 89 ff.) – Adorno's exile essay "Spengler Today" (1941) has a rather mild tone[57]. This fact deserves attention, as "[b]oth the title and the contents of Oswald Spengler's most famous work, *The Decline of the West*, mark him as one of the major exponents of the anticivilizational mood of cultural criticism in the Weimar Republic" (Herf 1984, 49; see also Merlio 2000, 33 ff.). Adorno's essay can be regarded as a document of his positions towards the *Konservative Revolution* of Weimar Germany, and in particular of its 'reactionary modernist' inflection (see Herf 1984). Unlike Ludwig Klages and Rudolf Borchardt, who were anti-modernist Neo-Romantics – as I will show in the following chapters – Spengler's work is not only "replete with the familiar catalogue of antimodernism", but

> also presents ... the reconciliation of romantic and irrationalist sentiments with enthusiasm for technical advance. ... To be sure, Spengler juxtaposed German *Kultur* and Western *Zivilisation*, but unlike Klages or Moeller van den Bruck, he sought to reconcile Kultur with twentieth-century German nationalism. (Herf 1984, 49)

[57] The essay was published in a slightly modified German translation (entitled "Spengler nach dem Untergang") in the cultural magazine *Der Monat* in1950, and later included in the first volume of *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (cf. *GS* 10.1, 47). Olivier Agard has interestingly pointed to the context-related differences between the English and the German versions of this text (see Agard 2005, 166).

Spengler set about writing his best-selling magnum opus *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (here cited as *UA*) before WWI, although the work only came out (in two volumes) between 1918 and 1922. The central idea of the book, as suggested by the title, is that Western culture has passed its cultural heyday and is living out its ending. Spengler attempts to support this thesis with a historico-philosophical construction of vast dimensions. He establishes an array of analogies between past cultures and their respective phases of development (birth, growth and expansion, petrification and death). Based on such analogic comparisons between different epochs he furthermore draws 'prophetic' conclusions about the (social, political, cultural, economic) present of Europe, Germany in particular. The latter finds itself at a turning point of its history, in which important decisions about the destiny of the country, specifically its political institutions and forms of government, have to be made. The fundamental choice for Spengler is between decay and rebirth, passive acceptance of decline and embracement of the new, imperial end-phase of Western civilization, which Germany – the 'youngest', in his opinion, of the old European nations – is bound to lead.

Spengler's work appears from today's perspective as a summa of German right-wing cultural criticism in the interwar period. *UA* is a "Werk, das nahezu alle Motive der zeitgenössischen Kulturkritik verarbeitete und zu einer umfassenden Synthese verband" (Felken 1988, 240). In this voluminous work Spengler offers a "ultimatives Weltanschauungsangebot" (Bollenbeck 2007, 215), which should be understood in the context of the highly politicized climate of German society after the Great War. As Georg Bollenbeck notes,

> Man versteht Spengler besser, wenn man ihn als einen Übergangserscheinung verortet: belesen und kulturbeflissen wie ein wilhelminischer Gymnasialprofessor, und sich zugleich sachlich, kalt und forciert-antihuman gebend wie die radikalnationalistische Nachkriegsgeneration. ... Spengler's 'Untergang des Abendlandes' zeigt, dass die 'Ideen von 1914', die Rechtfertigung des Krieges als Kampf der deutschen Kultur gegen die westlichen Zivilisation, ja dass der Krieg überhaupt als eine 'Maschine zur Brutalisierung der Welt' (Erick Hobsbawm), auch die Kulturkritik erfasst. Ohne die Goldmarksekuritäten, verunsichert durch Krieg und Revolution, findet eine Radikalisierung und Politisierung statt, angesichts derer die apolitische Lebensreform der Vorkriegszeit, die Berufung auf den 'Rembrandtdeutschen' und die 'Seelenevolution' zunehmend unzeitgemäß wirken. Vorstellungen einer Gesellschaftsreform als Reform der Kultur oder des Lebens sinken im Kurs. Nun beruft man sich auch weniger auf das Leben oder die 'ästhetische Kultur' und mehr auf Existenz, Opfer, Tod und Volksgemeinschaft. Gerade eine neue Rechte tritt im Zeichen von Politisierung und Polarisierung mit

> ihrer Weltanschauung rechthaberisch, kompromisslos und aggressiv auf. (Bollenbeck 2007, 216)

Spengler's success in the years after WWI certainly has to be explained through the situation described by Bollenbeck. The philosopher was able to interpret the mood of many of his learned contemporaries. He did so by offering a *Kulturkritik* that was traditional and new or – to use a political metaphor that well describes Spengler's ideological orientation – conservative and revolutionary at the same time. As Jeffrey Herf notes,

> The politically explosive aspect of Spengler's version of romanticism and *Lebensphilosophie* did not lie in a restatement of the dichotomies of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*. These dichotomies had becomes the common coin of cultural pessimism. Rather, his originality lay in combining a panorama of the past with a view of myth and symbol that suggested the possibility of a new age of aestheticized politics dawning in the future. (Herf 1984, 55)

Spengler's 'mythical' aesthetization of politics appealed to many right-wing thinkers in the interwar period (for instance Ernst Jünger, cf. Bollenbeck 2007, 225), and anticipated important aspects of Nazi ideology. He always maintained a professorial, indeed disdainful distance from the Nazis and refused to be used for propaganda purposes after their seizure of power. However, his philosophical ideas and *Weltanschauung* – as much as those of other thinkers of the *Konservative Revolution*, such as Ludwig Klages and Moeller van den Bruck – were initially positively received by the Nazis, who "lay claim to them as the thinkers who helped lay the intellectual foundations for the day in January 1933 when Hitler became Chancellor" (Woods 1996, 127). The Nazis' attempts to win over the intellectuals of the *Konservative Revolution* mostly failed, given the latter's elitist mindset and intellectual refinement (as compared to the former). However, these attempts reveal an undeniable ideological proximity and even political affinity[58].

Considering these facts, Adorno's attempt to revalue Spengler's cultural criticism from the temporal and spatial distance of his American exile is quite surprising. Adorno rationalizes this attempt at the beginning of "Spengler Today" (here cited as *ST*) with reference to the contemporary situation in Germany, where "Oswald Spengler's doctrine has

[58] It is only consequent, then, that in an article published in 1933 in the *Völkischer Beobachter* the Nazi intellectual Alfred Baeumler praised Spengler's "anti-liberalism, irrationalism and imperialism" (cited in Woods 1996, 127).

been forgotten", and "he is pronounced a grumbler and reactionary in the manipulated, National Socialist sense of this word" (*ST* 305). In the face of this situation, "[t]he forgotten Spengler takes his revenge by threatening to be right. His oblivion bears witness to an intellectual impotence comparable to the political impotence of the Weimar Republic in the face of Hitler" (ibid. 306). Adorno's talk about 'intellectual impotence' is aimed at exposing the inadequacy of German academic philosophy in dealing with Spengler, who was dismissed by many 'mandarin' professors (Ringer 1969) as a charlatan philosopher upon the publication of his work (see Bollenbeck 2007, 216). Despite (or perhaps due to) this controversial reception of *UA*, Adorno provocatively asserts at the outset of his essay that "there is good reason once again to ask whether Spengler's teaching is true or false" (*ST* 306).

In his analysis of Spengler's main work, Adorno is particularly interested in the philosopher's cultural critical reflections about modern democracy, the media system and the culture industry:

> In order to demonstrate Spengler's force we shall at first not discuss his general historico-philosophical concept of the plant-like growth and decay of culture, but the way he directed this philosophy of history to the imminent phase of history before us. ... His most characteristic predictions pertain to questions of mass domination, such as propaganda, mass culture, forms of political manipulation, particularly to certain tendencies in democracy that threaten to make it turn into dictatorship. (ibid. 306-7)

According to Adorno, *UA* provides brilliant insights into the relation between the increase in general education of the masses and their proportional manipulability by both the political party system and the media establishment[59]. According to Spengler, the media (particularly the press) no longer serve the purpose of general 'enlightenment' – as was the case in early liberal society, i.e., in 19th-century Western Europe – but rather the interests of those who control them, who can thus manipulate the public opinion: "Man sucht durch das Geld Leserscharen und ganze Völker ... unter die eigne Gedankenzucht zu bringen. Hier erfahren

[59] The following passage from *UA* gives an example of Spengler's arguments: "Mit der politischen Presse hängt das Bedürfnis nach allgemeiner Schulbildung zusammen, das der Antike durchaus fehlt. Es ist ein ganz unbewußter Drang darin, die Massen als Objekte der Parteipolitik dem Machtmittel der Zeitung zuzuführen. Dem Idealisten der frühen Demokratie erschien das als Aufklärung ohne Hintergedanken, und heute noch gibt es hier und da Schwachköpfe, die sich am Gedanken der Pressefreiheit begeistern, aber gerade damit haben die kommenden Cäsaren der Weltpresse freie Bahn. Wer lesen gelernt hat, verfällt ihrer Macht, und aus der erträumten Selbstbestimmung wird die späte Demokratie zu einem radikalen Bestimmt*werden* der Völker durch die Gewalten, denen das gedruckte Wort gehorcht" (UA *1140;* italics in original).

sie nur noch, was sie wissen *sollen*, und ein höherer Wille gestaltet das Bild ihrer Welt. ... Das ist das Ende der Demokratie" (*UA* 1142). Spengler's criticism of democracy (in general as well as in its contemporary form during the Weimar Republic) relies indeed on the conviction "daß Demokratie und Plutokratie gleichbedeutend sind. Sie verhalten sich wie der Wunsch zur Wirklichkeit, wie Theorie und Praxis, wie die Erkenntnis zum Erfolg" (*UA* 1061). This tenet belongs to the ideological base of the conservative-revolutionary movement of Weimar Germany (see Sontheimer 1962, 180 ff.). A further passage from Spengler's work well exemplifies his combined critique of liberalism (and its younger 'brother', namely socialism), democracy and capitalism:

> Zu den Standesidealen des Nichtstandes [the bourgeiosie, A/N] gehört sowohl die Achtung vor der großen Zahl, wie sie in den Begriffen der Gleichheit aller, der angebornen Rechte und weiterhin im Prinzip des allgemeinen Wahlrechts zum Ausdruck kommt, als auch die Freiheit der öffentlichen Meinung, vor allem die Pressefreiheit. *Das sind Ideale, aber in Wirklichkeit* gehört zur Freiheit der öffentlichen Meinung die Bearbeitung dieser Meinung, die Geld kostet, zur Pressefreiheit der Besitz der Presse, der eine Geldfrage ist, und zum Wahlrecht die Wahlagitation, die von den Wünschen des Geldgebers abhängig bleibt. Die Vertreter der Ideen erblicken nur die eine Seite, die Vertreter des Geldes arbeiten mit der andern. Alle Begriffe des Liberalismus und Sozialismus sind erst durch Geld in Bewegung gesetzt worden und zwar im Interesse des Geldes. (*UA* 1061)

Regardless of the political implications of Spengler's criticism of democracy, liberal society, the culture industry and the media system, Adorno considers his views to be not only correct, but also prophetical: "One could say that Spengler became aware of traits in the press that were fully developed only later, when the radio came on the scene, just as he raised objections against democracy that attained their full weight only when dictatorship established itself" (*ST* 308). In his work Spengler showed a keen understanding of the "expropriation of human consciousness through the centralized means of public communication" (ibid.) in modern urban society. Adorno is particularly fascinated by Spengler's analysis of mass culture. The latter "sees ... clearly the frame of mind gripping the masses outside the actual process of production, matters usually referred to under the head of 'leisure time'" (ibid. 307). In *ST* Adorno refers to the following passage from *UA*:

> Die intellektuelle Spannung kennt nur noch eine, die spezifisch weltstädtische Form der Erholung: *die Entspannung*, die 'Zerstreuung'. Das *echte* Spiel, die

> Lebensfreude, die Lust, der Rausch sind aus dem kosmischen Takte geboren und werden in ihrem Wesen gar nicht mehr begriffen. Aber die Ablösung intensivster praktischer Denkarbeit durch ihren Gegensatz, die mit Bewußtsein betriebene Trottelei, die Ablösung der geistigen Anspannung durch die körperliche des Sports, der körperlichen durch die sinnliche des 'Vergnügens' und die geistige der 'Aufregung' des Spiels und der Wette, der Ersatz der reinen Logik der täglichen Arbeit durch die mit Bewußtsein genossene Mystik – das kehrt in allen Weltstädten aller Zivilisationen wieder. Kino, Expressionismus, Theosophie, Boxkämpfe, Niggertänze, Poker und Rennwetten – man wird das alles in Rom wiederfinden. (*UA* 678, cf. *ST* 307-8; italics in original)

Spengler's contemptuous vision of the modern city is not entirely embraced by Adorno, who nevertheless shows a high degree of understanding for the philosopher's indignant criticism of mass culture: "The full force of Spengler's contempt is hurled at the victims of the advertising culture of our epoch" (*ST* 308). For Adorno, Spengler clearly recognizes that enlightenment (as provided by general education, free information, but also rationalized labor and social mobility) does not equal emancipation alone, but also entails new, penetrating forms of manipulation and subtle coercion: "Spengler speaks of the manner in which the course of history makes men forget the idea and reality of their own freedom" (ibid. 312). Spengler holds that, as opposed to the past (i.e., the old, pre-liberal regime), people in modern society are allowed to think and act freely, yet they refrain from both. Adorno favorably judges Spengler's provocation: "Ein Demokrat vom alten Schlage würde heute nicht Freiheit *für* die Presse, sondern *von* der Presse fordern" (*UA* 2047; cf. *ST* 309; italics in original).

Based on this and a number of other cultural critical insights offered by *UA*, Adorno expresses an unambiguous appraisal of Spengler's intellectual merits: "Spengler has a sense of the dual character of enlightenment in the era of universal domination" (*ST* 309). This amounts to saying that Spengler recognizes the contradictions and paradoxes of enlightenment, which Adorno will expose (together with Horkheimer) shortly after his Spengler essay in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. "Spengler Today" is particularly relevant for an assessment of Adorno's intellectual occupation previous to his work on the dialectic of enlightenment. The essay on Spengler allows one to understand the reasons for Adorno's interest in conservative cultural criticism, particularly the critique of liberalism and progressive ideology in general expressed by the authors of the *Konservative Revolution*. In the central and conceptually densest section of "Spengler Today", Adorno justifies this interest with a critical comparison between *conservative cultural criticism* and *progressive social criticism* in Germany in the interwar period. From today's perspective, Adorno's appreciation of the right-wing intellectuals of the *Konservative Revolution* is rather

astonishing: "Spengler stands, together with Klages, Moeller van den Bruck, and also Jünger and Steding, among those theoreticians of extreme reaction whose criticism of liberalism proved superior in many respects to that which came from the left wing" (ibid. 318)[60]. Adorno explains this superiority with "a different attitude towards the complex of 'ideology'" (ibid.). In the following passage, Adorno provides a criticism of progressive *Gesellschaftskritik* that has wide-ranging implications for his cultural critical practice, and for his later work on *Dialektik der Aufklärung*:

> The adherents of dialectical materialism viewed the liberal ideology which they criticized largely as a false promise. They did not challenge the ideas of humanity, liberty, justice as such, but merely denied the claim of our society to represent the realization of these ideas. Though they treated the ideologies as illusions, they still found them illusions of truth itself. This lent a conciliatory splendor, if not to the existent, at least to its 'objective tendencies'. Their doctrine of the increase of societal antagonisms, or their statements about the potential relapse into barbarism, were hardly taken seriously. Ideologies were unmasked as apologetic concealments. Yet they were rarely conceived as powerful instruments functioning in order to change liberal competitive society into a system of immediate oppression. Thus the question of how the existent can possibly be changed by those who are its very victims, psychologically mutilated by its impact, has very rarely been put. ... *Concepts such as those of the masses or of culture* were largely exempt from dialectical criticism. No one cared much about how they were involved within the total process of our society. There was no realization that the *masses* in the specific sense of the terms are not merely the majority of exploited toilers but that their characteristics as 'masses' are themselves due to the present phase of class society. Nor was there acknowledgment of the extent to which *culture* is changing into a regulative system of class domination. Above all the leftist critics failed to notice that the 'ideas' themselves, in their abstract form, are not merely images of the truth that will later materialize, but that they are ailing themselves, afflicted with the same injustice under which they are conceived and bound up with the world against which they are set. (ibid. 318-9; my italics)

These observations anticipate the radical cultural criticism expressed by Adorno-Horkheimer in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in particular in the chapter on the cultural industry contained in this work ("Kulturindustrie – Aufklärung als Massenbetrug"). In the above passage, Adorno criticizes the cultural naiveté of left-wing political movements and their intellectual spokesmen. The latter were unable to recognize the role of 'culture' as a means of manipulation of consciousness. In other words, Marxist critics of liberal society were *bad critics of culture*. They contented themselves with a dogmatic and inelastic *Gesellschafts-* as well as *Ideologiekritik*, whereas they should have also practiced a shrewd *Kulturkritik*. Besides this critique of the traditional Marxist approach, Adorno's reflections deserve

[60] Significantly, in "Spengler nach dem Untergang", the post-war German version of "Spengler Today", the reference to Klages, Moeller van den Bruck, Jünger and Steding has been omitted (see Agard 2005, 167).

attention because they are proof of the importance that he attributed to cultural criticism as part of a more general criticism of modern capitalist society. The left-wing intellectuals of Weimar Germany – Adorno speaks in rather general terms here – were unable to grasp the dialectical relation between socio-economic structure (or 'base') and cultural production (the 'superstructure'). In the face of contemporary developments, they preserved a naive faith in the 'objective tendencies' of history, and fallaciously believed that the longed-for solution of social and economic problems – regardless of whether revolutionary or reformatory – would necessarily determine a transformation at the level of ideology and culture. In so doing, they disregarded the fact that, as Adorno puts it, ideas themselves can 'ail', due to shrewd manipulation and subtle suppression, thus preventing any change.

Marxist social critics undervalued the power of culture in provoking far-reaching changes in the people's mentality, and therefore in their willingness to change the course of history. A dogmatically held materialism prevented many left-wing intellectuals from critically questioning their received ideas. Precisely this made their critique of liberalism in many respects inferior to that of the conservative-revolutionary intellectuals of Weimar Germany:

> On the right, one could the more easily see through the ideologies the more disinterested one was in the truth these ideologies contained, in however false a form. All the reactionary critics follow Nietzsche inasmuch as they regard liberty, humanity, and justice as nothing but a swindle devised by the weak as a protection against the strong. As advocates of the strong they can very easily point to the contradiction between those ideas – ailing as they necessarily are – and reality. (ibid. 319)

Adorno on the one hand appreciates the dispassionate critique of liberalism and Enlightenment ideas provided by right-wing intellectuals, as testified by his unambiguous appraisal of Spengler. On the other hand, however, he finds that this critique is based on highly objectionable assumptions:

> Their critique of ideologies is a *comfortable* one. It consists mainly in shifting from the insight into a bad reality to an insight into bad ideas, the latter supposedly proved because those ideas have not become reality. The momentum inherent in this *cheap criticism* is due to its firm bond of understanding with the powers that be. Spengler and his equals are less the prophets of the course of the world spirit than its devoted agents. (ibid.; my italics)

While it is true that the right-wing intellectuals of Weimar Germany were in many respects sharper critics of liberal society and progressive ideology than the progressive ones, their criticism is invalidated by their doing away with ideas altogether. Adorno particularly criticizes Spengler for this. In *UA*, Spengler emphatically distinguishes between 'facts' and 'truths', the latter being mere theoretical artifices (or mental 'constructs') that have nothing to do with real life[61]. Along these lines, he repeatedly contrasts the analytic, 'intellectualist' character of the liberal era to the vitalist and pragmatist spirit of the emerging 'Caesarist' era, characterized by charismatic political decision-making ('*Entscheidung*') and Faustian technology in the service of Nietzschean[62] 'Will to Power':

> Die Heraufkunft des Cäsarismus bricht die Diktatur des Geldes und ihrer politischen Waffe, der Demokratie. Nach einem langen Triumph der weltstädtischen Wirtschaft und ihrer Interessen über die politische Gestaltungskraft erweist sich die *politische Seite des Lebens* doch als stärker. Das Schwert siegt über das Geld, der Herrenwille unterwirft sich wieder den Willen zur Beute. (*UA* 1193; my italics)

As Jeffrey Herf remarks, for Spengler "politics, not economics, is the decisive force in the battle of blood and tradition against mind and money" (Herf 1984, 57). As is characteristic of the conservative-revolutionary ideology of Weimar Germany (see Mohler 1976, 69), Spengler's anti-liberalism goes hand in hand with his anti-intellectualism, which is characterized by a peculiar, at times indeed quite self-contradictory mixture of Romantic spiritualism and technocratic modernism. While on the one hand he shares the humanistic education of the Wilhelmine *Bildungsbürgertum* (he was born in 1880), and accordingly holds a high opinion of traditional *Kultur* (art, music, poetry), his 'prophetic' pragmatism leads him to the conclusion that "[d]ie Gegenwart ist eine zivilisierte, keine kultivierte Zeit. Damit scheidet eine ganze Reihe von Lebensinhalten als unmöglich aus. Man kann das bedauern ... aber man kann es nicht ändern" (*UA* 55). What these untimely, and therefore impracticable,

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[61] Here is an example of Spengler's stark contraposition between 'facts' and 'truths': "Man mag den Wunsch einschätzen, wie man will, aber man sollte den Mut haben, die Dinge zu sehen, wie sie sind. Das zeichnet den Menschen von Rasse aus, durch dessen Dasein *allein* es Geschichte gibt. Das Leben ist hart, wenn es groß sein soll. Es läßt *nur* die Wahl zwischen Sieg und Niederlage, nicht zwischen Krieg und Frieden, und die Opfer des Sieges gehören zum Siege. Denn es ist nichts als Literatur, geschriebene, gedachte, gelebte Literatur, die hier anklagend und eifernd neben den Ereignissen einhergeht. Es sind bloße Wahrheiten, die sich im Gedränge der Tatsachen verlieren. Die Geschichte hat nie geruht, von diesen Vorschlägen Kenntnis zu nehmen" (*UA* 1099; my italics). Hence Spengler's conclusion: "Wahrheiten gibt es für den Geist; Tatsachen gibt es nur in bezug auf das Leben" (ibid. 611).

[62] For Nietzsche's influence on Spengler see Woods 1996, 51.

options are, Spengler spells out in the following passage: “Wir sind zivilisierte Menschen ... wir haben mit den harten und kalten Tatsachen eines *späten* Lebens zu rechnen. ... Von einer großen Malerei und Musik wird für den westeuropäischen Menschen nicht mehr die Rede sein. Ihm sind nur extensive Möglichkeiten geblieben” (ibid. 56; italics in original). Such ‘extensional’ possibilities pertain to the realms of technology and machines, industry and commerce, imperialism and war. Based on the assumption that art and literature, religion and philosophy have past their prime in Western culture, Spengler thus proclaims in the introduction to *UA*: “Wenn unter dem Eindruck dieses Buches sich Menschen der neuen Generation der Technik statt der Lyrik, der Marine statt der Malerei, der Politik statt der Erkenntniskritik zuwenden, so tun sie, was ich wünsche, und man kann ihnen nichts Besseres wünschen” (ibid. 57).

Spengler’s denial of *Kultur*, however, is not as pragmatic and down-to-earth as it pretends to be. In fact, his stoic acceptation of the ‘hard’ realities of *Zivilisation* produces in its turn a heroic and romantic, ‘reactionary modernist’ myth. In *UA*, Spengler finds “a way of speaking about the rationalization of German industry and disenchantment of modern thought as if these represented processes of renewed myth and reenchantment” (Herf 1984, 54). Through this effective strategy Spengler is able to endorse “technical rationality linked to the willful self that knew no limits to its own celebration” (ibid. 55). In other words, he spiritualized technology, industry and war like no other contemporary, and thus justified their unbounded use for political ends (something that the Nazis could certainly learn from Spengler).

Against this background, it is understandable how for Adorno, Spengler’s philosophy evinces a “kinship with the ideal of domination” (*ST* 313). His criticism of the present is based on compliance with the ‘powers that be’, in whose self-appointed service Spengler puts his philosophy to work: “essentially critical insight into the impotence of truth in previous history ... degenerates in Spengler into a justification of the mere existent itself” (ibid. 317). Spengler’s disenchanted pragmatism, his proud reliance on the hard ‘facts’ of history – which he unremittingly contrasts to the idealistic and humanitarian ‘theories’ of both liberalism and socialism – is disguisedly ideological for Adorno. While Spengler stylizes himself as a dispassionate and detached intellectual, who has nothing to lose by proclaiming his ‘awful’ truths about the decline of the West and the end of the liberal epoch, his philosophy according to Adorno actually caters to the widespread anti-democratic mood of Weimar Germany and serves concrete power interests:

> Spengler reveals the embittered resentment of a German middle class scholar who finally wants to make capital of the treasure of his learning and to invest it in the most promising branch of business, that is, in heavy industry. His proclamation of the collapse of culture is wishful thinking. The mind hopes to be pardoned by taking the side of its sworn enemy, power, and by self-denunciation trains itself to provide anti-ideological ideologies. (ibid. 315-6)

Here, Adorno alludes to Spengler's personal ties to conservative German industrialists, as well as to his outspoken anti-republican and nationalist sympathies[63]. Spengler's partisanship for conservative-revolutionary politics, which for Adorno is grounded in his fascination with "the ideal of domination", permits him "the deepest insight whenever the potentialities of this ideal are in question and blinds him with hatred as soon as he encounters impulses that go beyond the relationships of domination prevailing in history up to now" (ibid. 313). Spengler always sides with the strong, and can only express contempt for the powerless. Adorno considers this basic disposition as a form of intellectual self-denial. The conservative philosopher becomes in Adorno's essay the example of that 'betrayal of the intellectuals' (or 'treason of the learned') denounced some years earlier by the French author Julien Benda in his then renowned book *La Trahison des Clercs* (1927).

Adorno's condemnation of Spengler's anti-intellectualism, however, aims not only at indicting the political entailments of his philosophy. Adorno also takes issue with the theoretical assumptions of Spengler's work. The latter's

> prediction that the power to think will die terminates in a *taboo on thinking* which he attempts to justify on the basis of the inexorable course of history. This touches upon the Archimedean point of Spengler's scheme. His historico-philosophical assertion that the mind (Geist) is dying away, and the anti-intellectual consequences deriving from the assertion, do not relate merely to the 'civilization' phase of history, but are basic elements of Spengler's estimate of Man. (ibid. 313)

Such "estimate of Man" is downright incompatible with Adorno's Neo-Marxist philosophy. This is the point at which his difference with Spengler becomes most evident. Their respective positions towards the notions of human freedom ('consciousness') and intellectual activity ('theory') are fundamentally at odds. In the last and most polemical section of "Spengler

[63] As Herf notes, "Spengler's close personal ties to German industrialists and to the conservative revolutionaries in the June Club nurtured his ambiguous synthesis of technics and irrationalism that later afforded engineers a central role in the new elite whose task it was to rescue Germany from the liberalism of the Weimar Republic" (Herf 1984, 49).

Today", Adorno therefore focuses on Spengler's cultural philosophy, which he had left aside at the beginning of the essay in order to concentrate on the merits of Spengler's critique of mass democracy and the culture industry.

Spengler's 'prophetic' philosophy of history and critical diagnosis of contemporary society are intrinsically connected to his organic theory of culture. Elaborating on a philosophical motif that he takes from early German Romanticism (particularly Johann Gottfried Herder), in *UA* Spengler understands cultures as organisms: "*Kulturen sind Organismen*" (*UA* 140; italics in original). All cultures develop according to a predetermined life pattern, which Spengler understands by analogy to seasons. Every culture has its hour of birth (or 'spring'), its maturation or prime (or 'summer'), followed by a process of aging and decline ('fall' and 'winter'), which men cannot avert. Cultures reach their end-phase when their immanent potentialities have been fully realized, upon which their life forces irreversibly abate. Following the popular dichotomy of contemporary cultural criticism, Spengler names the poles of this development '*Kultur*' and '*Zivilisation*', the first being the prime of a culture, the latter its decline and end. The two concepts structure his magnum opus, enabling him "to present complex, ambiguous realities in the form of stark, simple, clear alternatives" (Herf 1984, 66). These alternatives suggest instructions for present action:

> Der Untergang des Abendlandes … bedeutet nichts Geringeres als das *Problem der Zivilisation.* Eine der Grundfragen aller höheren Geschichte liegt hier vor. Was ist Zivilisation, als organisch-logische Folge, als Vollendung und Ausgang einer Kultur begriffen?
>
> Denn jede Kultur hat ihre *eigne* Zivilisation. Zum ersten Male werden hier die beiden Worte, die bis jetzt einen unbestimmten Unterschied ethischer Art zu bezeichnen hatten, in periodischem Sinne, als Ausdrücke für ein strenges und notwendiges *organisches Nacheinander* gefaßt. Die Zivilisation ist das unausweichliche *Schicksal* einer Kultur. Hier ist der Gipfel erreicht, von dem aus die letzten und schwersten Fragen der historischen Morphologie lösbar werden. Zivilisationen sind die *äußersten* und *künstlichsten* Zustände, deren eine höhere Art von Menschen fähig ist. Sie sind ein Abschluß; sie folgen dem Werden als das Gewordene, dem Leben als der Tod, der Entwicklung als die Starrheit, dem Lande und der seelischen Kindheit, wie sie Dorik und Gotik zeigen, als das geistige Greisentum und die steinerne, versteinernde Weltstadt. Sie sind ein *Ende*, unwiderruflich, aber sie sind mit innerster Notwendigkeit immer wieder erreicht worden. (*UA* 43; italics in original)

Spengler's contemplative philosophy of history has a performative edge. His proclamations about present *Zivilisation* function as a call to radical forms of action and ultimate decisions,

which he sees as impending on contemporary Germany. This explains his exhortation to the youth to disregard theory, art and culture, and to invest their energy in politics, the army and technology. As Adorno notes, Spengler's 'decline' of culture appears to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Based on the assumption that "Die Gegenwart ist eine zivilisierte, keine kultivierte Zeit" (*UA* 55), Spengler asserts the necessity of 'Ceasarism', i.e., authoritarian rule, aimed at propelling Germany's mission on the road of imperial *Weltherrschaft*. For Spengler, "Imperialismus ist reine Zivilisation. In dieser Erscheinungsform hegt unwiderruflich das Schicksal des Abendlandes" (ibid. 51). The implication here is that Germany finds itself at a crucial crossroads: either it embraces the civilizational *Zeitgeist*, marked by 'Caesarism' and imperialism, or else it will collapse under social chaos and subjugation to foreign powers:

> Wer nicht begreift, daß sich an diesem Ausgang nichts ändern läßt, daß man *dies* wollen muß oder gar nichts, daß man dies Schicksal lieben oder an der Zukunft, am Leben verzweifeln muß, wer das Großartige nicht empfindet, das auch in dieser Wirksamkeit gewaltiger Intelligenzen, dieser Energie und Disziplin metallharter Naturen, diesem Kampf mit den kältesten, abstraktesten Mitteln liegt, wer mit dem Idealismus eines Provinzialen herumgeht und den Lebensstil verflossener Zeiten sucht, der muß es aufgeben, Geschichte verstehen, Geschichte durchleben, Geschichte schaffen zu wollen. (ibid. 53; italics in original)

Despite the seemingly cold pragmatism displayed by Spengler (reminiscent of Jünger's 'heroic realism', cf. Merlio 2007), his meta-political avant-gardism (see Bussche 1998, 119) depends on Romantic premises, and is deeply imbued with traditional *bildungsbürgerliche* ideas (see Merlio 2000, 37). His 'morphological' perspective – as he calls it – is based on the idea that all historical concretions – political and cultural institutions, architectural and artistic forms, economic and social structures – are manifestations of something internal or hidden: the cultural 'soul' (see also Herf 1984, 52). *Kultur* for Spengler is "Ausdruck des Seelischen" (*UA* 69), which manifests itself through symbols. As he explains in the introduction to *UA*, the aim of his cultural philosophy is to show

> was Kultur ist, in welchem Verhältnis sie *zur sichtbaren Geschichte*, zum Leben, zur Seele, zur Natur, zum Geiste steht, unter welchen Formen sie *in Erscheinung tritt* und inwiefern diese Formen – Völker, Sprachen und Epochen, Schlachten und Ideen, Staaten und Götter, Künste und Kunstwerke, Wissenschaften, Rechte, Wirtschaftsformen und Weltanschauungen, große Menschen und große Ereignisse – *Symbole* und als solche zu deuten sind. (ibid. 4; my italics)

The ‘symbolic’ forms of culture are appearances of an underlying, invisible entity (the ‘*Kulturseele*’) that fatally determines the life of nations. In *UA*, the common *Zivilisationskritik* of German cultural conservatism broadens out into an aestheticist and organicist *metaphysics* of culture. This dual metaphysical project informs Spengler’s philosophy of history throughout, which in its turn provides the ground for his conservative-revolutionary politics. Against this background, it is not surprising that Adorno’s critique of Spengler in *ST* is particularly directed towards the latter’s notion of *Kultur* as the emanation of ‘*Seelentum*’. Adorno notes how “Spengler hypostatizes the doctrine of cultural souls as a metaphysical principle that serves as the ultimate explanation of the historical dynamic” (*ST* 320). For Adorno, Spengler’s symbolic philosophy of culture basically reduces *Kulturgeschichte* to *Stilgeschichte*: “With a little exaggeration one might … say that to Spengler world history becomes a history of ‘style’” (ibid.). By understanding history predominantly in terms of symbolic forms, Spengler aestheticizes it, for he “considers the historical experiences of mankind to be as much the product of men’s inner selves as works of art” (ibid.). Adorno exposes the ‘pragmatic’ Spengler as a traditionalist German ‘mandarin’ (despite the fact that he is not a professor), who automatically perpetuates the Romantic-protestant cult of *Innerlichkeit*. The result of this attitude is a grandiose solipsism: “culture becomes for him a play of the soul with itself” (ibid. 322). In this way, “a most paradoxical constellation arises: everything external becomes an image of the internal, and no actual process occurs between subject and object in Spengler’s philosophy of history. His world appears to grow organically out of the substance of the soul, like a plant from a seed” (ibid. 321). For Adorno, Spengler’s proudly proclaimed factualism in truth conceals a hidden “philosophy of identity” (ibid. 320). His grandiloquent idealism and aggressive imperialism are thus two faces of the same metaphysical coin.

If this were the whole truth about Spengler, it would be enough to dismiss his philosophy, yet not sufficient to indict his politics. According to Adorno, however, the all-pervasiveness that Spengler ascribes to culture is deceitful. His “absolute idealism” puts man at center stage, yet it culminates in a “demonic mythology” (ibid. 322), which does not leave room for free action. If the cultural soul is the principle of history, and if the latter’s development is pre-determined and inescapable, one has to adjust to this process, and accept the historical destiny of one’s culture. In Spengler’s philosophy, history is dehumanized (cf. *ST* 321), for it denies man the possibility of being a subject of historical change: “By being reduced to the essence of the soul, history gains an unbroken organic aspect, closed within

itself. In this way, however, it becomes even more deterministic" (*ST* 321). Despite his proclaimed voluntarism, cult of leadership and authoritarian decisionism, Spengler's organicist philosophy of history ultimately negates the idea of human freedom, and thus reveals itself to be essentially quietist.

Spengler's de-humanization of history is not neutral, but rather ideologically imbued. The "aimless up and down of culture", and the "timelessness which Spengler blames upon the late civilizations ... actually constitute the nucleus of *his own* world plan" (ibid. 322; my italics). In Adorno's view, Spengler's reduction of historical processes to the dynamics of cultural 'souls' is compliant with the principles of class and imperialist rule:

> Pure soul and pure domination coincide, as the Spenglerian soul violently and mercilessly dominates its own bearers. Real history is ideologically transfigured into a history of the soul only in order that the resisting, rebellious features of man, *their consciousness*, might be the more completely subordinated to blind necessity. (ibid.; my italics)

Adorno unmasks Spengler as a *Zivilisationsphilosoph*, i.e., a philosopher representative of that late phase of Western civilization which he both deprecates (as 'decadence') and deems to be a 'fatal' necessity (as far as imperialism goes). His contradictory, ultimately fatalist embracement of the '*Zeitgeist*' translates into a fundamentally reactionary stance[64]. In "Spengler Today", Adorno therefore seeks to unmask Spengler's notion of cultural *Schicksal* as a transfiguration of oppression, aimed at ideologically legitimizing the politics of anti-democratic reaction of the German right during the Weimar Republic. Adorno notes that the "recurrence of the ever identical pattern" in which Spengler's

> doctrine of fate terminates, is nothing but the perpetual reproduction of man's offence against man. ... Whenever Spengler speaks of fate he is dealing with the subjugation of one group of men by another. The metaphysics of the soul supplements his positivism in order to hypostatize as eternal and inescapable the principle of a relentless self-perpetuating rule. Actually, however, the inescapability of fate is defined through domination and injustice. (ibid. 323)

[64] Spengler's assertions are quite unambiguous in this sense: "der Geist ist zeitlos und ungeschichtlich. Alle Ideen der Revolution sind 'ewig' und 'wahr'. Allgemeine Menschenrechte, Freiheit und Gleichheit sind Literatur und Abstraktion, keine Tatsachen" (*UA* 778).

From Adorno's Neo-Marxist perspective, the fatality of power that is dignified in Spengler's metaphysical doctrine "can be mastered if men succeed in overcoming" the historical "structures of domination" (ibid. 324). That Spengler was not able to take into account non-authoritative forms of political agency and their power to actually make – i.e., change – history, should be regarded as a fundamental flaw of the meta-political (and, indeed, apolitical; see Bussche 1998, 21) philosophy of *UA*. This flaw, however, is not only due to Spengler's ideological 'bias', but also reflects a deeper theoretical shortcoming of his philosophy of culture. For Adorno, Spengler's reduction of history to the inner dynamics of cultural souls results from his utter blindness towards material history: "The man of facts in this case fails to recognize the part played throughout history by material needs" (*ST* 320). Spengler's failure to account for the coefficient of necessity in the historical development of cultures causes him to eliminate the conceptual opposite of necessity – that is, freedom – altogether. From Adorno's dialectical materialist perspective, freedom indeed results from man's attempt to liberate himself from natural constraints:

> Spengler's philosophy disdainfully thrusts aside the nature with which men have to struggle in history. Instead of this struggle, history itself becomes a second nature as blind and fated as vegetable life. ... What we may call the freedom of man consists only in the human attempts to break the rule imposed by nature. If that is ignored and the historical world is made a mere product of human essence, freedom will be lost in the resulting all-humanity (*Allmenschlichkeit*) of history. ... The idealist arrogance of Spengler's conception of history and the degradation of man implied in it are actually one and the same thing. Culture is not, as with Spengler, the life of self-developing collective souls but rather the struggle of men for the conditions of their perpetuation. Culture thus contains an element of resistance to blind necessity: the will for self-determination through Reason. (ibid. 322)

Adorno attempts to oppose Spengler's anti-intellectualism by evaluating the role of intellectual activity in shaping history. 'Facts', Adorno insinuates, are not just the product of blood and instinct, but rather of understanding and reflection. Reason, even in its most advanced, 'civilizational' stages, does not equal unworldly intellectualism – as Spengler contends – but is rather man's primary tool to preserve his physical existence. Spengler's cultural philosophy on the contrary "severs culture from mankind's desire to survive" (ibid.)[65]. Adorno suggests that *UA* does not articulate a sophisticated cultural philosophy, but

[65] Indeed, Spengler profoundly despises material necessity and, consequently, man's striving towards economic welfare. He only shows sympathy for 'heroic' struggle by means of war and war-like politics: "Das Leben besitzt … eine politische *und* eine wirtschaftliche Art, für die Geschichte 'in Form' zu sein. Sie überlagern,

rather a mystique of decline and death, which, as I have already mentioned, is a function of Spengler's conservative-revolutionary politics. In his critique of Spengler's *UA*, Adorno anticipates an insight that will play a fundamental role in his philosophy of history in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*:

> The relation between man and nature, which engenders the tendency of man to dominate nature, reproduces itself in man's domination of other man. This is hardly realized in the *Decline of the West*. Spengler does not see to what degree the historical fate glorified by his approach results from human interaction with nature. (ibid. 320-321)

Domination of nature and social domination are two faces of the same coin in Adorno's critical philosophy. Spengler's ignorance of this correlation (or 'entwinement', as Adorno-Horkheimer will call it in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*) makes him idealize power as such, in an utterly undialectical way, as the metaphysical principle of history. In spite of Spengler's voluntarism, such idealization of power – which is fully reflected in his affectedly anti-humanitarian pose – is essentially contemplative: "The image of history becomes completely esthetic to him" (ibid. 321). Spengler's tendency to spiritualize historical processes feeds on that German Romantic-Idealist tradition that he often dismisses in his work on account of its unworldly impracticality. Such aesthetization of history, which results in a transfiguration of power relations (as unchangeable and inescapable), is regarded by Adorno as the philosophical counterpart to the fascist aestheticization of politics theorized by his friend Walter Benjamin in his 1936 essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit".

In conclusion, while Adorno can relate to Spengler's criticism of the culture industry and the mass media, as well as to his dispassionate analysis of the degeneration of contemporary democracy, capitalism and the liberal system, he completely rejects the moral

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stützen oder bekämpfen sich, aber die politische ist unbedingt die erste. … Sich ernähren und sich bekämpfen: den Rangunterschied beider Lebensseiten läßt ihr Verhältnis zum Tode erkennen. Es gibt keinen tieferen Gegensatz als den von *Hungertod* und *Heldentod.* Wirtschaftlich wird das Leben bedroht, entwürdigt, erniedrigt durch den Hunger im weitesten Sinne; auch die Unmöglichkeit, seine Kräfte zur vollen Entwicklung zu bringen, gehört dazu, die Enge im Lebensraum, die Dunkelheit, der Druck, nicht nur die unmittelbare Gefahr. Ganze Völker haben durch die zehrende Kümmerlichkeit ihrer Lebenshaltung die Spannkraft der Rasse verloren. Hier stirbt man *an* etwas, nicht *für* etwas. Die Politik opfert Menschen für ein Ziel; sie fallen für eine Idee; die Wirtschaft läßt sie nur verderben. *Der Krieg ist der Schöpfer, der Hunger der Vernichter aller großen Dinge.* Dort wird das Leben durch den Tod gehoben, ... hier weckt der Hunger jene häßliche, gemeine, ganz unmetaphysische Art von Lebensangst, unter welcher die höhere Formenwelt einer Kultur jäh zusammenbricht und der nackte Daseinskampf menschlicher Bestien beginnt" (*UA* 1148).

entailments and political consequences of Spengler's *Kulturkritik* and philosophy of history. In *ST*, the philosopher appears as the embittered representative of a conservative German intelligentsia, whose *Weltanschauung* is increasingly marked in the Weimar period by a resentful disillusionment with the present state of things, and consequently by the desire to overcome this situation by taking recourse to ultimate solutions. Spengler's proclamation of the decline of the West engenders a 'politics of cultural despair' (Stern 1961) that found resonance amongst many of his contemporaries, and provided a solid intellectual base for the Nazi aggression against the Weimar Republic.

Adorno wrote "Spengler Today" at a time when the similarities between Spengler's philosophy and Nazi ideology were glaring. Adorno's American audience (the essay was initially conceived as a public speech, held in 1938, cf. *GS* 10.2, 839), was certainly aware of this proximity. It is all the more surprising, then, that Adorno's essay should end with a renewed acknowledgment of Spengler's merits, and a plea for productive appropriation of his philosophical legacy. For Adorno, the critique of Spengler "involves more than a belief in *continuous progress* and the *survival of culture*. Spengler has stressed the raw nature of culture, and with an emphasis which ought once and for all to shake naive confidence in its conciliatory effect" (*ST* 324; my italics). Adorno's critical remark implicitly targets the 'humanist' belief in culture of contemporary liberal, progressive and even traditional conservative intellectuals. *Kultur* after Spengler can no longer be understood as a supreme value, or as an antidote against the resurgence of barbarism within civilization:

> More strikingly than almost anyone else, he has demonstrated how [the] rawness of culture again and again drives it toward decay and how, as form and order, culture is affiliated with that blind domination which, through permanent crises, is always prone to annihilate itself and its victims. ...There is no chance of evading the magic circle of Spengler's morphology by defaming barbarism and relying upon the healthiness of culture. Any such straightforward optimism is proscribed by the present situation. Instead, we should become aware of the element of barbarism inherent in culture itself. Only those considerations that challenge the idea of culture no less than they challenge the reality of barbarism have a chance to survive Spengler's verdict. (ibid. 325)

These remarks already point to Adorno-Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, which they set about writing in 1942, shortly after "Spengler Today". In my opinion, the seemingly pessimistic philosophy of history and radical critique of Western civilization of *Dialektik der Aufklärung* stand in correlation to Adorno's confrontation with Spengler in his American

essay (see also Agard 2005, 171). Although Adorno-Horkheimer pursued their project of Enlightenment critique independently of Spengler, *UA* might have reinforced the authors in the opinion that cultural criticism under present conditions should refrain from overconfident optimism, and abandon the progressive belief in the perfectibility of culture. In this sense, Spengler is for Adorno the best possible enemy, more useful for the purposes of his philosophy than many 'false' friends (i.e., liberal or progressive thinkers who were in fact ideologically closer to him). In *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, the 'hero' of modern civilization, Odysseus, is depicted by Adorno as a self-sacrificing hero, who as such contains the seeds of culture's self-destruction, but also points to the utopia of a liberated society. Adorno's Homeric hero is an ambiguous figure, bearing witness "to the coercion and sacrifice which culture lays upon man" – as demonstrated by Spengler – but also to "the forces set free" by cultural "decay ... [i]n the world of violence and oppressive life" (*ST* 325). Adorno's American essay on Spengler anticipates the constitutive ambivalence of the critique of civilization of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, which I will deal with extensively in the following two chapters of this work.

CHAPTER II.
The Underground Confrontation: Rudolf Borchardt in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*

2.1. An Introduction to the *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*: *Zivilisationskritik* and Homeric Allegoresis

The *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (here cited as *DA*) marks a peak in Adorno's confrontation with conservative-revolutionary and anti-modernist cultural criticism, and can be regarded as a follow-up to his essays on the epistolary correspondence between George and Hofmannsthal (1938-1939) and on Spengler (1941). Moreover, this work constitutes a watershed in Adorno's treatment of anti-modernist cultural criticism, and shows a remarkable degree of familiarity with, and indeed proximity to conservative writers; a proximity that will not resurface in his work (at least in such an explicit way) until the end of the 60s, with his literary critical essays on Rudolf Borchardt and Stefan George (cf. *GS* 11, 523 and 536). This proximity has puzzled many readers of *DA*, who have perceived in this work a conservative undertone, reminiscent of the pessimistic philosophies of history and cultural critical *Weltanschauungen* that circulated in Germany during the Weimar period. As Michael Großheim notes:

> an der *Dialektik der Aufklärung* scheiden sich die Geister aller Provenienz. So wie das Buch ein bedeutendes Zeugnis nicht-konservativer Kulturkritik darstellt, läßt es auf der anderen Seit auch einen Konservatismus sichtbar werden, der dezidiert nicht kulturkritisch ist. (Großheim 1996, 104)

As Großheim suggests, the question pertaining to the 'conservatism' of *DA* is more complex than it seems at first. Certainly in *DA* one finds a number of argumentative patterns in common with conservative cultural criticism in the interwar period, as Willem van Reijen has shown (cf. Reijen 1998). Adorno-Horkheimer's critical discourse on civilization undeniably

presents typical elements of what Albert Otto Hirschman has called the 'rhetoric of reaction' (see Hirschman 1991)[66]. Such rhetoric, which originated in Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution, is characterized by three basic argumentative patterns or theses about social and historical change, namely 'perversity', 'futility' and 'jeopardy'.

The first thesis (or thesis of the "perverse effect", Hirschman1991, 7) says that any 'progressive' change eventually leads to an effect opposite to the one initially intended, "the exact contrary of the objective being proclaimed and pursued" (ibid. 11). One finds this argument, expanded into a historico-philosophical level of reflection, in the central thesis of *DA*, according to which "schon der Mythos ist Aufklärung, und: Aufklärung schlägt in Mythologie zurück" (*DA* 16). If mythology is already a form of enlightenment, every further step on the way of enlightenment will signify an increase of the power of myth – as Adorno-Horkheimer understand it, namely as fear and superstition – over man. As Adorno-Horkheimer contend in the first chapter of *DA*, "Aufklärung ist die radikal gewordene, mythische Angst" (*DA* 32). While this *Angst* was already there, in a primitive form, at the beginning of human culture, through the progress of enlightenment it has become total, indeed 'totalitarian': "Aufklärung ist totalitär" (*DA* 22).

A 'soft' variation of the perversity argument is, as Hirschman shows, the 'futility' thesis, claiming that any attempt to change a given status or order of things "is, was or will be largely surface, facade, cosmetic, hence illusory, as the 'deep' structures of society remain wholly untouched" (Hirschman 1991, 42). There are plenty of passages in *DA* that attempt to demonstrate how enlightenment was "abortive" (ibid.) ever since it caught hold of human understanding. An example of this argument is given by the dialectics of domination of nature articulated in *DA*, according to which men become the more enslaved to the forces of nature, the more they seek to control them. To make things worse, this dialectics, presented in *DA* as a quasi-natural, ever-repeating process of self-destruction throughout human history, seems to be unavoidable: "Naturverfallenheit besteht in der Naturbeherrschung, ohne die Geist nicht existiert" (*DA* 57). '*Geist*' ('spirit') is synonymous with '*Zivilisation*' in *DA*, as I will attempt to show in the third chapter of this work. Without domination of nature, civilization – which enables humans to grow stronger in society and thus satisfy their material needs – cannot exist; yet this process – or 'progress' – entails enslavement, indeed degenerative 'addiction'

[66] Although I owe this important insight to Willem van Reijen, whose article "Konservative Rhetorik in der *Dialektik der Aufklärung*" relies on Hirschmann's book on the 'rhetoric of reaction' (see Reijen 1998), I will directly refer to the latter work in my brief analysis of the conservative elements of Adorno-Horkheimer's critique of civilization in *DA*.

(‘*Verfallenheit*’) to nature: “Die Naturverfallenheit der Menschen heute ist vom gesellschaftlichen Fortschritt nicht abzulösen” (ibid. 14).

Finally, *DA* also presents the third of the reactionary theses expounded by Hirschman, namely the ‘jeopardy’ thesis. According to the latter, though progress (social, political, technological, scientific and economic) might be in effect possible “or even desirable in itself”, it “involves unacceptable costs or consequences” (Hirschman 1991, 81). This argument can be found in *DA* in multiple variations. A frequently recurring one is Adorno-Horkheimer’s statement that the path of domination of nature throughout the history of civilization has determined – and indeed continues to determine – amputation, repression and obliteration of man’s ‘inner’ nature. This ‘perverse’ development of the logic of progress results in a ‘jeopardization’ of human life:

> mit der Verleugnung der Natur im Menschen wird nicht bloß das Telos der auswendigen Naturbeherrschung sondern das Telos des eigenen Lebens verwirrt und undurchsichtig. In dem Augenblick, in dem der Mensch das *Bewußtsein seiner selbst als Natur* sich abschneidet, werden alle die Zwecke, für die er sich am Leben erhält, der gesellschaftliche Fortschritt, die Steigerung aller materiellen und geistigen Kräfte, ja Bewußtsein selber, *nichtig*. ... Die Herrschaft des Menschen über sich selbst, die sein Selbst begründet, ist virtuell allemal die Vernichtung des Subjekts, in dessen Dienst sie geschieht, denn die beherrschte, unterdrückte und durch Selbsterhaltung aufgelöste Substanz ist gar nichts anderes als das Lebendige, als dessen Funktion die Leistungen der Selbsterhaltung einzig sich bestimmen, eigentlich gerade das, was erhalten werden soll. (*DA* 73; my italics)

The presence of such elements of ‘reactionary’ rhetoric in *DA* raises the question of whether Adorno-Horkheimer produced with this work a piece of conservative cultural criticism, similar in kind to that of Oswald Spengler and many others in the Weimar years (particularly Ludwig Klages, as I will show in the third chapter of this work). This question, however, cannot find a simplistic answer. In order to answer it, one should take into account the relation of *DA* to critical discourses on modernity in Germany in the interwar period; cultural criticism was not the exclusive domain of cultural pessimism and conservative anti-modernism. As Gilbert Merliot and Gérard Raulet have shown, *Kulturkritik* in that time was a common discursive platform for intellectual exchanges between left and right, progressive and conservative thinkers. Regardless of ideological differences, critical discourses on modernity were based on a fundamental structural commonality:

> Das wesentliche Kriterium der Kulturkritik liegt ... nicht in ihrer mehr oder weniger ausgeprägten Regressivität oder Progressivität. Sie liegt eher in ihrer *fundamentale Infragestellung der Fortschrittsidee*, genauer gesagt in ihrer Infragestellung des Baconschen Prinzips, auf welches Modernisierung und Aufklärung sich gründen: Wissen ist Macht, es soll die Herrschaft über die Natur gewährleisten und den Menschen zu Tugend und Glück führen. Eigentlich sollte das Wort 'Kulturkritik' für diese ganzheitliche, sozusagen strukturelle Kritik vorbehalten werden. (Merliot/Raulet 2005, 10; italics in original)

As I have demonstrated in the first chapter of this work, German intellectuals had been questioning the process of social, economic and cultural modernization, its paradoxes and downsides, starting from the end of the 19th century. In this time period, cultural criticism properly speaking was predominantly the affair of either conservative or elitist minds[67]. This situation, however, gradually changed during the first decades of the 20th century, with the result that in the crisis-ridden Weimar years a peculiar approximation occurred between progressive and conservative intellectual discourses on modernity (see Gangl/Raulet 2007). Left, i.e., Marxist social criticism – as practiced by such thinkers as Lukács, Marcuse, Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno – then started appropriating some elements of the conservative criticism of capitalist modernity and bourgeois society[68]. As Merliot/Raulet note, during the Weimar years,

[67] In his comprehensive study on the history of critical discourses on progress and technology in Germany, Rolf Peter Sieferle has shown how, already at turn of the 20th century, "sich die Kritik am kapitalistischen Industriesystem in zwei Flügeln geteilt hat. Die 'soziale Frage', also die Auswirkungen auf die Lage der Arbeiter, ist zu Domäne der Sozialdemokratie geworden. Die Kritik an den Umweltveränderungen, an der kulturellen Überformung der Lebenswelt durch die Rationalität des Kapitalismus und durch die Formen moderner Technik wurde dagegen *ausschließliche Angelegenheit von Konservativen*" (Sieferle 1984, 157; my italics). In this sense, Sieferle continues, "Fortschrittliche Gesellschaftskritik wie konservative Zivilisationskritik … *standen sich gegenüber und ergänzten sich zugleich*. Beide sahen die kulturelle und gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit als schlecht, als unzureichend, als den Vorstellungen von einem richtigen, angemessenen Leben widersprechend an. Sie konnte von zwei unterschiedlichen Positionen aus kritisiert werden. Von 'links' konnte gefordert werden, daß man über die Gegenwart hinausgehen sollte, da diese noch zu wenig Modernität, Aufklärung, Technik und Industrie enthielt. Die symmetrische Gegenposition von 'rechts' wollte dagegen hinter die Gegenwart zurück, sah sie als eine Periode der Auflösung geschlossener, identischer Strukturen an, die es zu bewahren (so weit noch vorhanden) bzw. wiederherzustellen galt" (ibid. 158, my italics). As I hope will become clear in the course of the present study, one of the major accomplishments of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* is to combine progressive and conservative cultural critical perspectives. By so doing this work provides a *Kulturkritik* that is more encompassing and yet at the same time also more balanced than that of other of Adorno's conservative as well as progressive contemporaries.

[68] This proximity of left and right intellectuals in the field of cultural criticism is also reflected in their the common tendency towards radical (meta-)political positions in those years. As Kurt Sontheimer remarks: "Zwischen beiden ideologischen Fronten blieb ... dem öffentlichen Geist zu wenig Raum zur Entfaltung. Der Charakter des Unbedingten, der die Bedingtheit des eigenen Denkens zu sehen verwehrte, gab beiden Richtungen das Gepräge" (Sontheimer 1962, 393).

> Auch 'rationalistischen', liberalen oder marxistischen Denkern fällt es allem Anschein nach besonders schwer, Diagnosen und Prognosen der konservativen Kulturkritik von der Hand zu weisen. Die Austauschdiskurse, die sich zwischen linker und rechter Kulturkritik einstellen, lassen sich hauptsächlich dadurch erklären, dass die fortschrittliche-linke Kritik allmählich fundamentaler und totaler wird. Mit anderen Worten: die *Gesellschaftskritik wird immer mehr zur eigentlichen Kulturkritik*. Die Entfremdung des Menschen in der kapitalistischen Produktions- und Konsumgesellschaft vermag sie kaum noch al ein nur vorübergehendes Phänomen zu betrachten. (Merliot/Raulet 2005, 16; my italics)

The loss of confidence in the possibility of meaningful change in present society, reinforced by the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 (cf. Dubiel 1978, 87), explains the apparent commonalities between Adorno-Horkheimer's *DA* and the constitutively pessimistic *Zivilisationskritik* of such authors as Oswald Spengler and Ludwig Klages (more on this in chapter III)[69]. However, while it is true that some arguments of *DA* might be regarded as 'conservative', they are such not in the political meaning of the term, but rather at a deeper, philosophical level. What should be 'conserved' for Adorno-Horkheimer is the concern with human life in the age of its total instrumental disposability and mass destructibility[70] (as displayed by the Nazi concentration camps in the early 40s). Contrary to traditional conservative cultural criticism, Adorno-Horkheimer did not mourn a lost world and reject modernity, nor did they take recourse to radical solutions, such as Spengler's 'heroic' embracement of technocratic modernism and 'apocalyptic' imperialism (cf. 1.3). Although by the early 40s they had lost hope in the possibility of a socialist revolution or reform of society in advanced industrial countries, they thought that the predicament of modern, capitalist civilization could only be overcome through a 'surplus' of civilization, which is to say through the further advancement of Enlightenment ideas in society. Such advancement would only be possible, according to them, through the radical questioning of a still merely half-enlightened reason. As Horkheimer wrote in the *Eclipse of Reason* (1947), "If by enlightenment and intellectual progress we mean the freeing of man from superstitious belief in evil forces, in demons and fairies, in blind fate – in short, the emancipation from fear – then

[69] As Schmid Noerr points out in his "Editor's Afterword" to the latest English version of *DA*, by the beginning of the 1940s, "[t]he hope for a radical transformation of conditions, indeed, any confidence in the possibility of historical progress at all, seemed to be without substance. The failure of a proletarian revolution to occur in the developed capitalist societies, the subjugation of workers' organizations to a consolidated and expanding fascism, the manipulative power of monopolistic mass society in the West and of state socialism on the Stalinist model in the East – all these political experiences lent impetus to the transition from the Critical Theory of the 1930s to the critique of instrumental reason during the 1940s, a critique which became at the same time theoretically more *radical* and practically more *conservative*" (Schmid Noerr 2002, 228; my italics).

[70] Adorno's aphoristic masterwork *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, written in the exile between 1947 and 1477, can be regarded to a large extent as the result of his years-long preoccupation with this topic.

denunciation of what is currently called reason is the greatest service we can render" (Horkheimer 1974, 187).

Thus, in spite of all affinities with traditional *Zivilisationskritik*, *DA* also reveals the deep gap that separates Adorno-Horkheimer from the conservative and reactionary cultural critics of the interwar period. *DA* is a large-scale philosophical attempt to detect the causes of civilization's fall into barbarism, and of enlightenment's regression to myth in the Age of European Fascism[71]. Adorno-Horkheimer's critical effort to understand "warum die Menschheit ... in eine neue Art von Barbarei versinkt" (*DA* 11), however, does not result in a rejection of post-Enlightenment modernity and Western civilization at large – as was the case of most conservative *Kulturkritiker* in Weimar Germany – but is rather aimed at providing a 'self-enlightenment' of enlightenment itself, understood as the informing principle of Western European modernity. In dealing with this task, the two authors found themselves in the paradoxical situation of speaking both for *and* against enlightenment, as they note in the preface of their work:

> Die Aporie, der wir uns bei unserer Arbeit gegenüber fanden, erwies sich ... als der erste Gegenstand, den wir zu untersuchen hatten: die Selbstzerstörung der Aufklärung. Wir hegen *keinen Zweifel* – und darin liegt unsere petitio principii –, daß die Freiheit in der Gesellschaft vom aufklärenden Denken unabtrennbar ist. Jedoch glauben wir, genauso deutlich erkannt zu haben, daß der Begriff eben dieses Denkens, nicht weniger als die konkreten historischen Formen, die Institutionen der Gesellschaft, in die es verflochten ist, schon den *Keim zu jenem Rückschritt* enthalten, der heute überall sich ereignet. Nimmt Aufklärung die Reflexion auf dieses rückläufige Moment nicht in sich auf, so besiegelt sie ihr eigenes Schicksal. Indem die Besinnung auf das Destruktive des Fortschritts *seinen Feinden* überlassen bleibt, verliert das blindlings pragmatisierte Denken seinen aufhebenden Charakter, und darum auch die Beziehung auf Wahrheit. (*DA* 13; my italics)

The 'enemies' of enlightenment for Adorno-Horkheimer are above all the conservative-revolutionary intellectuals of Weimar Germany (see 1.2.). As I will attempt to demonstrate in this study, one of the tasks of *DA*, and particularly of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter, is to defend the principles of the Enlightenment from contemporary reactionary and anti-modernist critics,

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[71] "An der rätselhaften Bereitschaft der technologisch erzogenen Massen, in den Bann eines jeglichen Despotismus zu geraten, an ihrer selbstzerstörerischen Affinität zur völkischen Paranoia, an all dem unbegriffenen Widersinn wird die Schwäche des gegenwärtigen theoretischen Verständnisses offenbar.

Wir glauben, in diesen Fragmenten insofern zu solchem Verständnis beizutragen, als wir zeigen, daß die Ursache des Rückfalls von Aufklärung in Mythologie nicht so sehr bei den eigens zum Zweck des Rückfalls ersonnenen nationalistischen, heidnischen und sonstigen modernen Mythologien zu suchen ist, sondern bei der in Furcht vor der Wahrheit erstarrenden Aufklärung selbst" (*DA* 14).

while also appropriating some elements of their Enlightenment critique. As Adorno-Horkheimer write in the foreword to *DA*: "Es geht nicht um die Kultur als Wert, wie die Kritiker der Zivilisation ... im Sinn haben, sondern die Aufklärung muß sich auf sich selbst besinnen, wenn die Menschen nicht vollends verraten werden sollen" (*DA* 15).

In order to understand what is at stake in Adorno-Horkheimer's confrontation with the anti-modernist critique of civilization in Weimar Germany, it is useful to briefly recall the content of *DA*. As is known, the work was written by Adorno-Horkheimer during their Californian exile from 1942 to 1944, and was conceived by the two authors as a wide-ranging attempt to come to terms with the present situation in Europe, marked by Fascism, WWII and genocide. The book is structured as a collection of essays or 'philosophical fragments' (the entire title of the work is *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*). The first three chapters ("Begriff der Aufklärung", "Odysseus oder Mythos und Aufklärung", "Juliette oder Aufklärung und Moral") are philosophical in character, and present a critique of instrumental reason as the 'principle' of enlightenment[72].The third chapter of *DA* ("Kulturindustrie. Aufklärung als Massenbetrug") concentrates on the cultural industry as a form of 'enlightened', that is to say rationally organized and technologically perpetrated manipulation of the masses. The fourth and final chapter ("Elemente des Antisemitismus. Grenzen der Aufklärung") deals with anti-Semitism, which is regarded by Adorno-Horkheimer as the representative case of the historical failure of Enlightenment ideas in Germany. The book closes with a collection of aphoristic 'notes and sketches' ("Aufzeichnungen und Entwürfe") on contemporary cultural and social topics[73].

DA was written jointly by Adorno and Horkheimer, who always underlined their common authorship of the book, equally sharing responsibility for each and every line ever

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[72] 'Enlightenment' is understood by Adorno-Horkheimer in a threefold manner: historically, as a cultural movement that marks the birth of European modernity; philosophically, as rational thinking in general (regardless of whether practical or theoretical, and with what ethical entailments); socially, as "die wirkliche Bewegung der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft als ganzer unter dem Aspekt ihrer in Personen und Institutionen verkörperten Idee" (*DA* 14). I refer to the first meaning when I use the word 'Enlightenment'with capital letter, to the other two meanings simply as 'enlightenment'.

[73] Schmid Noerr notes how "the book scarcely forms a unity in the formal sense. It consists of five highly unconnected chapters, together with a number of shorter notes, the subjects of which at first sight appear somewhat heterogeneous. The various analyses relate to phenomena such as the way in which science has become detached from practical life, formalized morality, an entertainment culture which has reverted to manipulation, and a paranoid behavioral structure, as expressed in aggressive anti-Semitism, which marks the limits of enlightenment. The common element which the authors perceive in these phenomena is the tendency toward the self-destruction of enlightenment's own guiding criteria which had been inherent in enlightenment thought from the beginning. The historical analyses are intended to elucidate the present, For this reason, the two historical chapters, concerned with decisive thresholds of enlightenment in Homeric Greece and in Central Europe in the eighteenth century, are relegated to the status of 'excurses', although *they are indispensable* to the argument of the book as a whole. In this way, against the background of a prehistory of subjectivity, the authors show why the National Socialist terror was not an aberration of modern history but was rooted deeply in the fundamental characteristics of Western civilization"(Schmid Noerr 2002, 217-218; my italics).

since its publication in 1947 (cf. Schmid Noerr 2002, 220). However, the original typescripts have revealed a division of tasks in the writing process (see Schmid Noerr 2002, 221-224 and Müller-Doom 2003, 427). For the purpose of the present discussion, it is important to bear in mind that the first chapter "Begriff der Aufklärung" was conceived and dictated by Adorno and Horkheimer together, whereas Adorno was the author of the second chapter – "dieses vielleicht eindrücklichste Kapitel des Buches" (Müller-Doom 2003, 433) – consisting in a philosophical interpretation of Homer's *Odyssey*.

In "Odysseus oder Mythos und Aufklärung", arguably the most conceptually dense and figuratively suggestive chapter of *DA*, Adorno develops a critical genealogy of modernity through an allegorical reading of the *Odyssey* as a parable of the historical development of enlightenment. Adorno's reading of the Homeric epic focuses on Odysseus as a prototypically enlightened, i.e., 'modern' subject. The hero is depicted by Adorno as a champion of instrumental reason, who always manages to assert himself against the antagonistic forces of nature, embodied by the mythical figures that Odysseus encounters in the Mediterranean (the Sirens, the Cyclops, the Lotus-Eaters, Circe). The 'civilized' hero proves superior to these primitive creatures, which thwart his course of homecoming to Ithaca, on account of his developed instrumental intelligence. In this sense, he is representative of the achievements of human progress in terms of practical rationality and technical acquirements, which enable men to gain ever-growing power over nature.

At the same time, however, the *Odyssey* anticipates for Adorno the contradictions and paradoxes of 'progressive' modernity. Odysseus' Mediterranean wanderings show that enlightened reason, if reduced to its instrumental function and carried to the extreme, becomes itself 'mythical', that is to say blindly coercive. Adorno-Horkheimer's critique of enlightenment in *DA* relies on a set of simple propositions. Throughout history, men have learned how to control nature by means of instrumental rationality for the purpose of improving their life conditions. In the process, nature has been increasingly subjugated and 'forgotten'. In Western European modernity, marked by the rise of industrial capitalism, this process has culminated in man's total alienation from nature: "Die Menschen bezahlen die Vermehrung ihrer Macht mit der Entfremdung von dem, worüber sie die Macht ausüben" (*DA* 25; my italics). Utterly forgetful of and cut off from its natural basis, modern humanity heads towards self-destruction, aided by that instrumental reason which – once a motor of progress – it is no longer able to hold in check.

Man's loss of control over 'rational' powers is testified by the inversion of means and ends in capitalist modernity (see Weber 1921). The ability to purposefully relate means and

ends – thus we come to the final basic proposition of Adorno-Horkheimer's critique of enlightened reason – is at the core of modern subjectivity, i.e., of the 'rational' self. Following the intrinsic logic of economic rationality, however, instrumental means have eventually gotten the upper hand over the ends that they were supposed to serve in the first place, with the result that human life in modernity becomes a function – and the disposable prey – of technical apparatuses and productive structures. According to Adorno, Odysseus, the proto-modern hero, anticipates this development:

> die Inthronisierung des Mittels als Zweck, die im späten Kapitalismus den Charakter des offenen Wahnsinns annimmt, ist schon in der *Urgeschichte der Subjektivität* wahrnehmbar. ... Die Widervernunft des totalitären Kapitalismus, dessen Technik, Bedürfnisse zu befriedigen, in ihrer vergegenständlichten, von Herrschaft determinierten Gestalt die Befriedigung der Bedürfnisse unmöglich macht und zur Ausrottung der Menschen treibt – diese Widervernunft ist prototypisch im Heros ausgebildet. (*DA* 73)

Adorno traces a broad arc between Greek culture and modern civilization, and considers Odysseus as a modern bourgeois, i.e., rational individual. Leaving aside the question of the legitimacy of such comparison – which Adorno carries out with convincing force – the aim of the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* is to provide a critical genealogy of modern subjectivity through an allegorical interpretation of Odysseus' adventures, in order to account for the breakdown of European civilization ("Zusammenbruch der bürgerlichen Zivilisation", *DA* 11) in the early 1940s. In this sense, Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation can be regarded as a "kulturgeschichtliche Großerzählung zur Erklärung der Ungeheuerlichkeit" (Buschlinger 2007, 13) of an extremely unsettling present, which urged contemporaries to radically revise such notions as 'humanity', 'reason', 'progress' and 'enlightenment'. The rather peculiar and indeed extremely original character of Adorno's work consists in developing a critical discourse on modern civilization through the interpretation of an early literary document of Western culture. Adorno's *Zivilisationskritik* is not direct, as in traditional cultural criticism, but rather indirect (i.e., allegorical), for it emerges from a philosophically sustained reading of a work of narrative fiction. This makes the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* particularly suggestive, yet also difficult to understand.

Surprisingly few readers of *DA* up to today have posed the question of why Adorno choose a classical literary work as a platform for reflections on contemporary events of

catastrophic magnitude[74]. After all, while he and Horkheimer were working on *DA*, the war was ravaging Europe, and the industrial annihilation of human lives in Nazi concentration camps was already under way. Considering this, the question arises as to how two intellectuals concerned with a critical understanding of present social and cultural developments could devote so much attention to a literary masterwork of Greek antiquity such as Homer's *Odyssey*. Admittedly, this choice strikes one as peculiar at first. On the other hand, it invokes the special role played by the study of classical antiquity in modern German intellectual history. From this perspective, Adorno's taking recourse to the *Odyssey*, this "Grundtext der europäischen Zivilisation" (*DA* 63), in order to allegorically refer to present developments is not as remote from reality as it first appears to be.

The study of Greek antiquity– initiated by Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), the founder of modern Homeric philology – is historically connected in Germany with the Age of Enlightenment and Weimar Classicism. As Renate Reschke notes, "die griechische Antike war im 18 Jahrhundert ein geistiger Kontinent und kultureller Raum, nach dem erobernd, mit imperialer Geste gegriffen wurde, um sie als Begründungsfeld und *Legitimationsreservoir für das Projekt Aufklärung* zu reklamieren" (Reschke 2004, 143; my italics). Such prominent figures as Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Friedrich Schiller already saw in the Greeks "ein Beispiel der geglückten Identität" (Bollenbeck 1994, 150), and regarded them as a cultural model that deserved to be imitated in the present. The Greeks were imagined "als Verkörperung 'wahren Menschtums' ... der Schönheit, Tapferkeit und Weisheit" (Bollenbeck 1994, 152), and functioned as such as a source of aesthetic and moral inspiration.

Though this image was idealized, it was effective in shaping German humanistic culture from the turn of the 19th century onwards. In the wake of the Enlightenment, Greek antiquity became in Germany a platform of identity projections for the forming bourgeoisie: "Mit dem Anspruch auf Identifikation, Vergleichbarkeit oder Maßstabsetzung wurde sie ['die griechische Antike', A/N] zum historischen Medium kultureller Selbstbestimmung einer sich konstituierenden Bürgerlichkeit" (Reschke 2004, 143). Ancient Greece thus provided the "Bild einer Zukunft, die nicht anders als am idealisierten Vergangenen, an einer Antike, die als kultureller Ursprung, der zugleich Höhepunkt war, zu imaginieren galt" (ibid. 143). Indeed, the ideal of ancient Greece mirrored the mentality and aspirations of the German intelligentsia in the long phase of transition from the *Ancien Régime* to bourgeois modernity.

[74] Heinz Steinert should be mentioned here as one of the few to have addressed this question recently (see Steinert 2007).

As Georg Bollenbeck notes, in the first decades of the 19th century "[m]it der Vergangenheit können an die Gegenwart Emanzipationsansprüche gestellt werden" (Bollenbeck 1994, 152). This explains why "den Griechen wird von der deutschen Intelligenz eine fast religiöse Verehrung im neuen, diesseitigen Glauben an das Ideal der *Persönlichkeit* entgegengebracht" (ibid.; my italics). The ideal of free individual cultivation in the medium of classical literature became an informing principle of secondary school education (the classical *Gymnasium*) in 19th-century Germany, and played a central role in the Humboldtian conception of *Bildung* and reform of the German university.

Thus, the Neo-Humanistic "Bildungsideal" (Bollenbeck 1994, 147) – which can be regarded as a specifically German response to the cultural 'revolution' of the Enlightenment[75] – was intimately connected to classical studies since the turn of the 19th century. Within this context, the Homeric epics, and in particular the *Odyssey* became the objects of particular attention in Germany. As Heinz Steinert explains,

> Homer ist in Deutschland zwischen 1781 und 1793 durch die Übersetzungen von Johann Heinrich Voß bekannt worden. Homer ist damit ein wichtiger Teil der deutschen Aufklärung und Klassik. Die Odyssee ist in diesem Sinn 'Urgeschichte der Subjektivität' ... *in der Zeit, in der sie rezipiert wurde*. ... Odysseus taugt zum Urbild des bürgerlichen Individuums nur danke der Rezeption in der Goethe-Zeit, also mit der Herausbildung des bildungsbürgerlichen Individuums. (Steinert 2007, 65; italics in original)

As Steinert suggests, Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter in *DA* tacitly relies on the assumption that the interest in the *Odyssey* amongst cultivated readers in Germany around the turn of the 19th century was due to their particular affinity for the Homeric hero Odysseus. The latter is regarded by Adorno as a proto-bourgeois individual *insofar as* he was a preferred mirror image of the *bildungsbürgerliche* readership of Homer in that time. Indeed, the German Homeric reception had been accompanied since the late 18th century by a number of actualizing allegorical interpretations of the epics, particularly the *Odyssey*. As Joachim Jacob has shown, this interpretative tradition can be traced back in Germany to Johann Joachim Winckelmann, further Friedrich Schlegel, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling[76]. From this perspective, Adorno's allegorical reading of the *Odyssey* can be

[75] Reinhardt Koselleck asserts: "Bildung ist als neuzeitlicher Grundbegriff Ergebnis der Aufklärung und zugleich Antwort auf sie" (Koselleck 1990, 19).

[76] "Horkheimers und Adorno Entzifferung der Odyssee als 'Grundtext der europäischen Zivilisation' nimmt ... jene bürgerliche Tradition der Homer-Deutung beim Wort, die sich zumal in Deutschland seit Johann Joachim

regarded as "ein spätes, vielleicht ein letztes Dokument in der Geschichte der Homer-Allegorese" (Jacob1998, 292) in Germany.

This 'last' attempt at an allegorical interpretation of the *Odyssey* should be understood against the background of the evolution of classical studies and the *Bildung* paradigm in Germany during the last decades of the 19th century. In this period, marked by a growing scepticism amongst bourgeois intellectuals towards liberal-progressive ideology and the cultural values inherited from the Age of Enlightenment (see Bollenbeck 1994, 225 ff.), the ideal of ancient Greece no longer served as a platform of identity projections for an emerging and self-conscious bourgeoisie, but started to function as a counter-model to the disquieting realities of industrial, urban and capitalist modernity (see 1.1.). Friedrich Nietzsche is the foremost representative of this new tendency. After a whole century of German Graecomania, he turned against the classicist idealization of ancient Greece ("diese unwahre Begeisterung für das Altertum") that started with the Enlightenment: "Das 'Hellenische' seit Winckelmann: stärkste Verflachung" (cited in Reschke 2004, 146 and 145). In his early work *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist der Musik* (1871) Nietzsche developed an image of Greek antiquity that was subtly critical of the reduction of Hellenic culture to an idealized classicism (or '*Gipsklassizismus*') of harmony and proportions, reflecting in his view modern bourgeois values, wishes and ideas. Through the theoretical fiction of Dionysus, he called into question the image of ancient Greece that 19th-century German philology had inherited from the Enlightenment: "'Aufklärung' und alexandrinische Bildung ist es – besten Falls! –, was Philologen wollen, nicht Hellenentum" (cited in Reschke 2004, 145). He thus initiated a new wave of cultural (and cultural critical) projections on antiquity that were not only radically different, but also downright antagonistic to the Neo-humanistic idealization of Greece throughout the 19th century[77]. Dionysus became in the wake of Nietzsche the symbol for

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Winckelmann in dem 'häuslichen Leben' wiedererkannt hatte, das sich in der Odyssee darstelle. Gegenüber dem heroischen und aristokratischen Gestus der Ilias, die darum 'ein Lehrbuch für Könige und Regenten' ist, taugt die Odyssee für den Hausgebrauch, und der 'bürgerliche Charakter' ihres Helden offenbart sich in dem Bund, den Weisheit und Zivilisation in seiner Person eingehen. Die unbeirrbare Heimatliebe und die jeder Verführung widerstehende Tugendhaftigkeit, die den Helden nicht nur als Stratege, sondern auch als Ehemann auszeichnen, sind die leitenden Motive dieser Deutung, deren Tradition schon mit der Wiederentdeckung Homers in der europäischen Renaissance beginnt" (Jacob 1998, 294).

[77] As Reschke notes: "Mit der dezidierten Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber archaischer Kultur und Kunst und der Hinwendung zur vorsokratischen Philosophie praktizierte er eine Art Aufklärung der Aufklärung, genauer ihrer klassizistischen Ausschreibung" (Reschke 2004, 151). Nietzsche's polemic against contemporary classical studies was also a key for his broader confrontation with the German *Bildung* tradition, which in his opinion had transformed into an empty, self-edifying myth: "Man glaubt förmlich an Zauberei, in Betreff dieser 'klassischen Bildung'" (cited in Reschke 2004, 145). Nietzsche's *Bildungskritik* – which was an important part of his *Kulturkritik* – was not a critique of bourgeois education and Enlightenment in general, but rather of *Philisterbildung*, reflecting the worst tendencies of a flattening *Aufklärung***.** His classicism critique is therefore directed at contemporary cultural conformism, both within and without the academia: "Die Instrumentalisierung

another, archaic image of Greek antiquity, which was contrasted with Hellenic classicism, and thus indirectly with 'positivist' official philology and its shallowly 'progressive' spirit.

While posing as anti-liberal and anti-progressive, however, Nietzsche's cultural projection in fact continued the traditional German idealization of ancient Greece, though with inverted ideological entailments (i.e., no longer liberal and progressive, but rather conservative and aristocratic). As Renate Reschke points out, Nietzsche's "Konstrukt einer beunruhigenderen Antike" catered to the new cultural climate of turn-of-the-century Germany: "der neue Zeitgeist setzte dem historisch vergilbten Antikeideal die artifizielle Verdunklungsfigur des Dionysos entgegen ... ebenso einsichtig, ebenso einseitig, ebenso wirkmächtig, ebenso dem Zeitgeist entsprechend" as the previous classicistic image of antiquity had been (Reschke 2004, 151). Through the "Denkfigur des Dyonisos" (ibid.) Nietzsche created "das Bild einer anderen Kultur" (ibid. 150), which was imagined to be diametrically opposed to present culture. He thus became "an important contributor to, and a major beneficiary" (Aschheim 1992, 11) of the post-liberal and anti-modernist mood of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* around the turn of the 20th century.

As Bollenbeck notes, Nietzsche's "Griechentum ist der Schlüssel zum Verständnis seiner kulturkritischen Totalkonstruktion, weil dessen Kultur eine Steigerung des Lebens erlaubt, die in der Moderne nicht mehr möglich ist" (Bollenbeck 2007, 176). With *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche thus inaugurated a mode of dealing with Greek antiquity that was not strictly philological, but rather cultural critical, since it contained a (usually polemical) indexical reference to the present. His Dionysian construct furthermore elicited a new wave of interest in the archaic period of Greek culture in German classical studies, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s[78] (see Schmidt 2007-I, 197-199). In this time period "die Rezeption der Antike" in Germany "ist bei vielen an ihr Interessierten ... nicht mehr klassizistisch ... In einer radikalen Umkehrung des Gegebenen wird das eigentliche Leben in die Antike verlegt, die Gegenwart wird nur als blutleerer Entartungszustand wahrgenommen" (Dörr 2007, 37). The rejection of classicism and Enlightenment, and the fascination with archaic culture, together with a criticism of present culture: all these elements come toegether to form the peculiar post-Nietzschean constellation that provides the background for Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter in *DA*.

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der Alten zur Legitimation der Modernen gehörte für Nietzsche zur Realität der abgeirrten Cultur, der Subordination alles Kulturellen unter eine allgemeine Verwertbarkeit" (Reschke 2004, 147).

[78] The 'rediscovery' of Johann Jakob Bachofen's work *Das Mutterrecht* (1861) also furthered this tendency (see Dörr 2007, 45 ff.). For a comprehensive overview of Greek studies in early 20th-century Germany see Christ 1999, 151 ff. and 193 ff.

2.2. The Prehistory of Adorno's *Odyssey* Interpretation: Cecil Marcel Bowra and the Project of 'Enlightenment' of Greek Antiquity

In the preceding section I have furnished a brief overview of the intellectual and discursive tradition within which Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter in *DA* in my opinion ought to be situated. As I have shown, classical studies in Germany have been fundamentally shaped by the specific manner in which Enlightenment culture developed in the country in the course of the 19th century (the so-called German *Sonderweg* to modernity). The interpretation of literary works from Greek antiquity was then a fundamental component of bourgeois *Bildung* in the medium of cultural forms transmitted from the past. The Greeks functioned as an uplifting projection of modern wishes, values and ideas, and as such were conferred with an exemplary moral and aesthetic value.

This sort of edifying idealization gradually changed in the last decades of the 19th century, when with the process of industrial and urban modernization of the country the traditional bourgeois notions of '*Bildung*' and '*Kultur*' started to loose their symbolic pre-eminence within German society (see 1.1.). The consequent resentment of many *bildungsbürgerliche* intellectuals at the turn of the century resulted in an anti-modernist reconfiguration of the Greek ideal, able to serve the aims of a conservative and elitist cultural politics, which rejected the spirit of the 'bourgeois' and 'progressive' 19th century, and created visions of an alternative modernity. Nietzsche is the foremost representative of this cultural tendency, which found a considerable diffusion in the mental habitus of the educated German bourgeoisie from the turn of the century onwards, and well into the Weimar period.

Considered against this background, Adorno's taking recourse to the *Odyssey* for his critical evaluation of modern civilization can be seen in a new light. From the point of view of *intellectual and cultural history*, his use of the Homeric epic as a 'pretext', so to speak, for his cultural critical reflections on the present does not appear as a token of personal originality, nor as a virtuoso piece of interpretative bravura. Adorno's interpretation of *Odyssey* rather has to be located within the German humanistic tradition, wherein the treatment of Greek antiquity historically holds a peculiar symbolic place and serves a specific intellectual function. Since the image of ancient Greece had been a field of explication for bourgeois Enlightenment first, for anti-modernist Enlightenment critique at a later time, the interpretation of a classic work of Greek antiquity implied for the late-*bildungsbürgerliche*

intellectual Adorno a confrontation with fundamental tendencies of the German *Geistesgeschichte* from the 19th century to his present.

As I will attempt to demonstrate in the current chapter, the archaistic idealization of Greece that developed in Germany in the wake of Nietzsche constitutes the implicit frame of reference of Adorno's Homeric reading in *DA*. My contention is that the *Odyssey* chapter is determined to a remarkable extent by Adorno's critical confrontation with the post-Nietzschean and anti-modernist approach to Greek antiquity of the poet *Rudolf Borchardt* and the philosopher *Ludwig Klages*. The aim of the present work is to demonstrate how the 'excursus' on the *Odyssey* should be read against the background of Adorno's productive polemic against the *literary aesthetics, cultural philosophy and political ideology* of the above-mentioned conservative (or 'reactionary') authors. In particular, in the current chapter I will address Adorno's confrontation with Borchardt, whereas the following chapter will be devoted to Klages – although both are intended, often simultaneously, as a polemical point of reference in Adorno's text.

Before going into a textual analysis of the *Odyssey* chapter, however, I will provide a preliminary overview of the 'prehistory' of Adorno's confrontation with the archaistic approach to Greek antiquity on the part of the anti-modernist intellectuals Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages. This overview will help clarify, I hope, Adorno's intention to recover a fundamentally progressive, 'enlightened' image of Greek antiquity in the face of the widespread archaicist cult of ancient Greece in the interwar period. Adorno had probably entertained the idea of a philosophical interpretation of the *Odyssey* for quite some time starting in the 30s. Before he set about writing it during his American exile in the early 40s he had thought of devolving its realization to someone educated in ancient philology and professionally acquainted with Greek antiquity. To this purpose he had thought of the British philologist Cecil Marcel Bowra, whom he had come to know during his stay in Oxford in 1936. Adorno was intrigued by the idea of having a renowned Oxford philologist publish an article on Greek poetry in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (*ZfS*) that was in accord with the leftist intentions of the journal. Here is what Adorno writes Horkheimer in a letter dated May 26, 1936:

> Ich verkehre hier recht viel mit C. M. Bowra, der vielen als der bedeutendste lebende klassische Philologe in England gilt (er wird wahrscheinlich Gilbert Murrays Nachfolger). Er ist einer der geistreichsten und gebildetesten Menschen die ich kenne, *steht dem Kreis von Hofmannstahl und Borchardt nahe*, ist aber im Gegensatz zu unseren Bekannten aus der gleichen Sphäre *politisch hochanständig* und sehr

> gesellschaftstheoretisch interessiert (hat z.B. mit Erfolg *den Mythos von Homer als 'Volksdichtung'* bekämpft). Ich glaube, daß ich ihn für Mitarbeit an der Zeitschrift [*Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, A/N] gewinnen könnte. Er würde sicher eminent wertvolle Dinge beistellen, auch auf gesellschaftstheoretische Fragen der Antike eingehen; es wäre in jedem Sinn erwünscht, wenn wir über einen des Altertums Kundigen verfügten; und sein Name wäre auch äußerlich ein großer Gewinn. Ich habe ihm natürlich nichts von meiner Idee gesagt und bitte Sie um Ihre prinzipielle Stellungnahme. (Adorno-Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel 1927-1937*, 150; my italics)

The letter documents Adorno's interest in involving Bowra in the project of the *ZfS* not only on the basis of his philological expertise, but also because of his proximity to Hofmannstahl and Borchardt. Adorno feels compelled to assure Horkheimer of Bowra's political 'decency' and sociological interests in opposition to the latter, in spite of their common literary taste and cultural sensibility[79]. Bowra's affinity with the two conservative poets seems to be an argument for, rather than against his involvement in the journal. The prestige he enjoyed as a classical philologist probably made Adorno hope that his publication in the *ZfS* might gain the journal some resonance beyond its habitual progressive-minded readership, amongst the conservative literary circles that were familiar with his work. Following a 'go-ahead' signal from Horkheimer with regard to Bowra's involvement in their publishing projects, Adorno writes his colleague a few weeks later (letter dated June 25, 1936):

> Bowra: ich habe mit ihm gesprochen und er hat prinzipiell zugesagt (ich habe ihn von unseren Links-Intentionen informiert, ohne diese zu spezifizieren). Es würde ihn besonders reizen, etwas gegen die Vorstellung von der griechischen *'Volkspoesie'* usw. zu schreiben, die natürlich eine *Ideologie* ist. Ich habe den Eindruck, daß man ihn mit Geschick dahin lenken könnte, zu helfen, den *faulen Zauber* zu enthüllen, *der heute mit der Antike getrieben wird*. Man muß ihn aber dazu vorsichtig und allmählich lenken, da er natürlich an einer kulturkonservativen Erbschaft selber trägt (er steht dem Kreis von Hofmannstahl nahe und ist auch mit E. Kantorowicz befreundet, hat freilich vor all diesen eine wahrhaft kaustische Skepsis voraus) (ibid. 166, my italics).

Adorno's words are significant, as they were written to Horkheimer without attention to political correctness and rhetorical persuasion. They unambiguously testify to his intention of availing himself of Bowra as an intellectual ally for his project of de-mystification of the image of antiquity cultivated by the conservative-revolutionary authors and literary critics

[79] The conservative poets Borchardt, Hofmannstahl as well as George and the members of his *Kreis* were principally hostile to new emerging discipline of sociology (see Kruse 2005).

Hofmannstahl, Borchardt and Kantorowicz (the latter, a historian, was one of the most prominent academics to come out of the George-*Kreis*). The British philologist according to Adorno would furnish a helpful contribution in this direction, if aptly 'directed', not only due to his philological scholarship, but also because of his cultural conservative acquaintances and obligations as an old-school Oxford academic. Adorno thus seems to slyly orchestrate a targeted provocation of his conservative adversaries through a subtle manipulation of someone whom he sees as coming from their own ranks.

Unfortunately things turned out differently than Adorno had hoped, as Bowra's work did not live up to his expectations. In a letter dated November 28, 1936 his initial praise of Bowra turns into disappointment with the latter's finished article. Adorno particularly misses in it a sufficient "Kenntnis der konkreten griechischen Sozialgeschichte" (ibid. 235), and complains that Bowra seems to have only superficially appropriated Adorno's own sociological thesis on Greek literature. This negative judgment brings Adorno to a severe verdict on the present state of philological scholarship at large and motivates him to initially exclude the possibility of Bowra's publication in the *ZfS*: "All das macht die Publikation schwer möglich" (ibid.). However, despite his initial disappointment with Bowra's work, Adorno did not entirely relinquish his intention of involving the latter in the project of demystification of the conservative image of Greek antiquity. Later in the letter Adorno cites the reasons that suggest the urgency of a continuing collaboration with Bowra:

> Dem stehen nun aber eine ganze Reihe anderer Erwägungen gegenüber. *Eine Entzauberung der Antike ist unbedingt notwendig*: das ganze Handwerk hat bloß noch verhüllende Bedeutung. Diese Entzauberung kann aber verbindlich nur von einem vom Metier geleistet werden und gerade Bowra, der nicht bloß für einen der hervorragendsten englischen Gräzisten gilt, sondern der auch eine besondere ästhetische Reputation (insbesondere bei den Georgianern: er hat wunderbare Übersetzungen von George und Hofmannsthal gemacht) genießt, wäre *von uns aus gesehen, politisch*, der ideale Mann: den hier würde einer, den jene sehr geneigt sind, zu den ihren zu zählen, aus Sachkenntnis *unsere Arbeit tun*. Das war es jedenfalls, was mir bei dem Projekt ursprünglich vorschwebte. (ibid. 235-6; my italics)

In the face of Bowra's shortcoming Adorno suggests that the cooperation be accompanied through closer editorial control that might lead the author in the desired direction: "Die Frage bleibt, ob es sich nicht erreichen läßt: Bowra ist ja äußerst lenkbar, nur allzu lenkbar. Ich würde Ihnen vorschlagen, ein Rendezvous mit ihm zu verabreden ... mit ihm den Aufsatz durchzusprechen und ihm die Änderung zu *diktieren*" (ibid. 236; my italics). Adorno's

insistence on the matter, as well as the fact that Bowra's work eventually appeared (in a version that can hardly have been substantially modified by the author) with the title "Sociological remarks on Greek Poetry" in the *ZfS* (Volume 6, 1937), suggest the importance that he attributed to the project of de-mystification of the 'foul enchantment' ("faulen Zauber") perpetrated with Greek antiquity by the conservative Neo-Romantic writers Borchardt and Hofmannstahl as well as by figures coming from the George-*Kreis*. The matter apparently was so urgent for Adorno that in his epistolary exchange with Horkheimer he does not shrink from using vocabulary ("Bowra ist ja äußerst lenkbar, nur allzu lenkbar") that suggests the possibility of a 'soft' manipulation of the British philologist so as to direct him towards the cultural-political aims of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*.

Adorno's preoccupation with philological 'disenchantment' can in fact be seen as part of his broader concern in those years with conservative-revolutionary cultural politics and ideology[80]. As can be inferred from his 1936 letters to Horkheimer, a socio-historical consideration of Greek poetry should serve for him to shake the foundations of a major symbolic asset and terrain of self-stylization of the conservative intellectuals Borchardt, Hofmannstahl, and of George and his followers[81]. A critical analysis of their approach to Greek antiquity would unmask their pseudo-philological imagery (first and foremost the "Vorstellung von der griechischen 'Volkspoesie'") as a piece of ideology ("die natürlich eine Ideologie ist", ibid. 166). The critical confrontation on ancient Greek literature would therefore function for Adorno as a pretext to pursue his ideology critique of the conservative-revolutionary intellectuals of Weimar Germany.

Adorno probably expected too much in terms of theoretical and sociological insights from a classic philologist. What he found lacking in Bowra, he attempted to carry out himself – although in a non-philological, bur rather philosophical manner – some years later in his *Odyssey* chapter. Here Adorno seems indeed to have given form to the fundamental concerns that he had expressed with regard to the image of Greek antiquity in his epistolary exchange with Horkheimer in 1936.

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[80] In general this had been an important concern for the cultural politics of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* all throughout the 30s (see Großheim 1994 and Agard 2005).

[81] For Borchardt's and Hofmannsthal's poetic approach towards antiquity see Steiger 2003, 62 ff.; for George see Lacchin 2006; for philological research within the George-*Kreis* see Schuller 2005.

2.3. "Geschichtsphilosophischer Exkurs zur *Odyssee*": Approaching Greek Antiquity in post-Nietzschean Times

In order to show how Adorno's *Odyssey* reading *DA* is determined by a polemical intention towards post-Nietzschean archaistic philology and anti-modernist cultural criticism, I will avail myself of the original version of the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*, published in 1998 by Rolf Tiedemann in the *Frankfurter Adorno Blätter*, which contains substantial parts that have been edited out by Adorno-Horkheimer themselves for the work's final publication. The sheer amount of textual passages erased suggests in my opinion the necessity of a philological recuperation of the original text for the purpose of a better understanding of the intellectual-historical and discursive context in which Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter is situated. To my knowledge the original version of the chapter in question has not been taken into due account by critics of *DA* so far[82]. A belated consideration of it shall therefore help shed light on often neglected aspects of the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*.

The first version of the chapter of *DA* "Odysseus oder Mythos und Aufklärung" was entitled "Geschichtsphilosophischer Exkurs zur *Odyssee*" (here cited as *GEO*[83]). The chapter consists in a historico-philosophical interpretation of the *Odyssey* pursued within the frame of the Critical Theory project that Adorno and Horkheimer had developed from the 30s on. The excursus on the *Odyssey* in *DA* stands in a line of 'broken continuity' with the history of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*. On the one hand it reflects the early interests and concerns of the members of the institute, and of Adorno himself. On the other hand it adapts them to the dramatic historical developments of the early 40s (see Dubiel 1978, Müller-Doohm 2003). This is why in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* Adorno's earlier preoccupation with an ideology critique of the conservative writers' attitude towards Greek antiquity peculiarly mingles with a comprehensive cultural critique of Western modernity in the age of European Fascism.

Adorno's excursus on the *Odyssey* is in fact rather ambivalent, as it seems to move on a *double register* of argumentation. The 'archeology' of the modern subject's formation –

[82] Vanessa Vidal Mayor has recently dealt with this earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter it a short essay on the relation between Adorno's and Nietzsche's critique of Enlightenment (see Vidal Mayor 2004). As far as I can see, the most comprehensive treatment of Adorno's text has been provided by Stefano Petrucciani in his introduction to the Italian translation of it (see Adorno 2000, 7 ff.).

[83] I will specifically refer to the earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter as *GEO*. Since the later version of the chapter is based on this earlier one, the diction '*Odyssey* chapter' will be used to designate both, unless otherwise specified. The earlier version of the chapter is about ten pages longer than the later one. The latter's text basically corresponds to that of *GEO*, except for the parts that have been deleted. In the process of editing some passages have been slighly modified, others have been added to the earlier version. These modifications and additions, however, do not produce any remarkable changes in the chapter.

traced in terms of Odysseus' character – along with the criticism of instrumental rationality that it entails, combines here with a subterranean critique of the anti-liberal, elitist ideology and anti-modern *Zivilisationskritik* of the Weimar conservative-revolutionary intelligentsia, in particular of Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages. The two registers or levels are mutually determined in the discursive structure of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter (especially, though not exclusively, in the earlier version of it). Their entanglement explains the objective difficulties connected with the reading of this text, in which different strands of discourse proceed at parallel levels, producing complex conceptual and discursive entwinements, which is objectively hard to grasp at first.

For this reason, in order to 'unpack' the dense texture of Adorno's earlier *Odyssey* chapter I will pursue a both *close and contextual reading* of it. In doing so, I will first concentrate on the sections of the chapter deleted by Adorno and Horkheimer in the editing process[84]. As I hope will become clear in the present discussion, they happen to be the ones that contain the bulk of Adorno's confrontation with Borchardt and Klages (though as far as the latter to a lesser extent), as they present a number of later omitted or abridged references to and quotations from their works. Departing from the consideration of the deleted parts of the earlier chapter on the *Odyssey*, I will then broaden my view onto the text as whole, and re-consider it from the perspective disclosed by this new hermeneutic angle. This reconsideration will justify, I hope, the interpretative recovery of the original version of the chapter and provide an argument for surfacing it from the depths of the *Adorno-Archiv* and reintroducing it into the broader debates on *DA*.

The historico-philosophical interpretation of the Homeric *Odyssey* provided by *GEO* was intended by Adorno as a concrete 'application' of the theory set forth by him and Horkheimer in the first chapter of *DA*, entitled "Begriff der Aufklärung"[85]. For this reason Adorno calls his *Odyssey* chapter in a letter to his parents a "Beilage zu unserem Haupttext" (cited in intro to *GEO* 37), though this 'annex' eventually came to be the theoretically densest and figuratively richest chapter of *DA*. The specific object of criticism of *GEO* however is not so much the Homeric text per se, as the recent history of its reception and interpretation (or *Wirkungsgeschichte*) in Germany. The consideration of Homer's epic serves Adorno as a litmus test, to to speak, for assessing the cultural and ideological disposition of a specific,

[84] In the present study I will mainly quote from "Geschichtsphilosophischer Exkurs zur *Odyssee*" (*GEO*), not only the later abridged parts, but also the parts of the text that have been maintained in the later, abridged version of the *Odyssey* chapter. I will quote directly from this later version (*DA*) only the text excerpts that have been added to the chapter in the process of editing.

[85] The urgency to put their theory to the test by measuring it on the specific cultural objects ("an spezifischen Gegenständen", *DA* 16) reflected Adorno's idea on the necessity of an interaction between theory and practice.

conservative-revolutionary sector of its readership. In fact, it is no mere philological interest in the Greek epic, but rather in how this specific readership has interpreted them that instigates and frames Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation.

In the initial, later deleted pages of the original version of his *Odyssey* chapter Adorno takes explicit reference to the intellectual tradition and discursive context within which he sees his argument located. In the introductory part of the text he gives a brief overview of the problematic state of classical studies in turn-of-the-century and Weimar Germany. Here he sees the discipline split into two non-communicating parties: on the one hand, mainstream academic philology, whose most influential exponent in Germany had been the prominent classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848-1931); on the other hand, the aestheticizing philology that developed in Germany in the wake of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). The opposition between these two figures became manifest in the notorious controversy over Nietzsche's early publication *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* of 1872. In a harshly critical article published the same year in the polemical pamphlet *Zukunftsphilologie!*, the young Wilamowitz had fiercely reacted to Nietzsche's book by denying it the status of philological scholarship, and concluded that the author was unfit to become a university professor of classical studies[86].

On the other hand, Nietzsche's concern in *Geburt der Tragödie* had been precisely to call into question the scientific claims of official philology – indeed the legitimacy of science as such[87]. In his work he had consequently proposed a new 'enlivening' approach to Greek antiquity, which he had polemically held against the 'deadening' agency of positivist science. Nietzsche's approach was aimed at recovering the 'mythical' substance of past cultural forms. According to him, myth, as the repository of 'life' (which for Nietzsche is equal to 'tragic')

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[86] Thus Wilamowitz: "herr Nietzsche tritt ja nicht als wissenschaftlicher forscher auf: auf dem wege der intuition erlangte weisheit wird teils im kanzleistil, teils in einem raisonnement dargeboten, welches dem journalisten […] nur zu verwandt ist. […] eins aber fordere ich: halte hr. N. wort, ergreife er den thyrsos, ziehe er von Indien nach Griechenland, aber steige er herab vom katheder, auf welchem er wissenschaft lehren soll; sammle er tiger und panther zu seinen knieen, aber nicht Deutschlands philologische jugend, die in der askese selbstverläugnender arbeit lernen soll, überall allein die wahrheit zu suchen" (cited in Gründer 1989, 29).

[87] Looking back on his youth work in "Versuch einer Selbstkritik", the preface to the second, 1886 edition of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (bearing in addition the new subtitle *Oder: Griechenthum und Pessimismus*) Nietzsche summed up the gist of his youth work as follows: "Was ich damals zu fassen bekam, etwas Furchtbares und Gefährliches ... (war) ein *neues* Problem: heute würde ich sagen, daß es das *Problem der Wissenschaft* selbst war – Wissenschaft zum ersten Male als problematisch, als fragwürdig gefaßt" (Nietzsche 1954, 10).The 'problem' of science for Nietzsche was the impairment of a true knowledge of life, thereby of life itself: "Und die Wissenschaft selbst, unsere Wissenschaft - ja, was bedeutet überhaupt, als Symptom des Lebens angesehn, alle Wissenschaft? Wozu, schlimmer noch, *woher* - alle Wissenschaft? Wie? Ist Wissenschaftlichkeit vielleicht nur eine Furcht und Ausflucht vor dem Pessimismus? Eine feine Notwehr gegen - die *Wahrheit*?" (ibid. 4; italics in original). The problematization of science for Nietzsche could only occur from an aesthetic perspective: in *Geburt der Tragödie* he therefore undertook "die Wissenschaft unter der Optik des Künstlers zu sehen, die Kunst aber unter der des Lebens" (ibid. 11).

knowledge, should be regarded for Nietzsche as the ultimate goal of philologies and, further, of the humanities in general ("Absicht der Wissenschaft", Nietzsche 1954, 85)[88]. The re-awakening of myths past also implied for Nietzsche a re-mythization of the present for the purpose of life enhancement. *Die Geburt der Tragödie* could thus become in Nietzsche's wake a prime example for a new kind of aestheticizing philology aimed at fostering a re-mythologization of the 'disenchanted world' (Weber 1921) in the interest of 'life'.

The controversy between Wilamowitz and Nietzsche became almost legendary amongst academic and intellectual circles in turn-of-the-century Germany. Beyond its specific philological character it came to be emblematic of the growing tension at the time between the positivist-scientific and the hermeneutic-aesthetic approaches in the humanities[89]. The methodological problematic that the German humanities had inherited from the debates around the turn of the century provides the context of Adorno's initial reflections in *GEO* on the state of classical studies in Germany during the first decades of the 20th century. In the introductory passages of the earlier *Odyssey* chapter he seems to share Nietzsche's critique of positivist philology:

> Der herrische Ton ihrer späten Meister, Kirchhoff und gar Wilamowitz, der von der Prähistorie so wenig etwas wissen wollte wie von Nietzsche, entspringt bereits der Verzweiflung daran, das antike Erbe als Wahrheit festzuhalten ... Die Homer-Forschung der Wilhelminischen Ära kulminierte in den Funden von Schliemann und Dörpfeld, sie versicherte sich der Wirklichkeit von Troja, Tirnys und Mykene und berauschte sich nüchtern an der 'Auferstehung Homers' als dem Nachweis, daß der Dichter in der Tat lebte, in einem Geist, wie er etwa Siegrieds Kampf mit dem Drachen durch die Entdeckung von Saurierskeletten erhärtet. Die Auferstehung ist die naturalistische der älteren, vorkritisch-'unitarischen' Meinung, welche durch die Philologie seit Wolf zurückgedrängt war. (*GEO* 38)

According to Adorno, historical positivism in the fields of archaeology (Schliemann) and philology (Kirchhoff and Wilamowitz) prepares the way for a 'second-order' mythization of

[88] In other words, for Nietzsche myth ought not to be made into a mere object of philological understanding; rather, all true philological science ought to turn into a 'mythological', i.e., life-enhancing form of knowledge. In order to do this the scientist or, in Nietzsche's words, the 'theoretical' man ought to assume an aesthetic on his subject matter. Thus in *Geburt der Tragödie* Nietzsche goes as far as suggesting that "Kunst" should be considered as "ein notwendiges Korrelativum und Supplement der Wissenschaft" (Nietzsche 1954, 82), indeed the only factor able to confer a life and meaning to the fragmentary rests of antiquity left to the modern observer. In accordance with this, he declares to have posed the problem of his youth work "auf den Boden der *Kunst* - denn das Problem der Wissenschaft kann nicht auf dem Boden der Wissenschaft erkannt werden" (ibid. 10; italics in original).

[89] Exemplarily testified by Wilhelm Dilthey's attempts to found the methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften* on a theory of 'understanding' (*Verstehen*) of the 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*).

Greek antiquity. Archaeological findings and textual records were hypostasized as ultimate truths and thus made inaccessible to critical-philosophical interpretation. Whereas Friedrich August Wolf in his groundbreaking *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) had initiated modern scholarship on Homer by critically calling into question the latter's exclusive authorship of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – an insight upon which all modern philology in his wake would build upon – for Adorno the positivist obsession with factual evidence (manifest for example in Schliemann's search for the 'real' Troy) would constitute a regression to the old 'pre-critical' understanding of the poet as the only author of the epics. Philological criticism would thus regress to a pre-Enlightenment stage and become a second mythology of classical antiquity.

This observation sounds like a variation or rather transposition in the field of classical studies of the main thesis of *DA*, which says that radical enlightenment turns into mythology, while myth is in fact already a form of enlightenment. This ambivalent 'double track' thesis also constitutes the conceptual core around which the first part of the original *Odyssey* chapter revolves. Adorno here recapitulates one of the major theoretical tenets of *DA*, the mythical nature of enlightened reason, and works out its content within the specific disciplinary field of classical philology[90]. According to Adorno, the positivist belief in mere 'facts' ("krude und selbst als solche bedenkliche Faktizität", *GEO* 38) results in a fetishist cult of material findings and textual references that is no less questionable than the mythization of antiquity pursued by irrationalist cultural philosophy (*Kulturphilosophie*) in the wake of Nietzsche:

> Indem solcher Naturalismus an die Stoffschichte der mythologischen Überlieferung sich klammert, die notwendig älter sind als die Formung, die ihnen durch autonome Kunst widerfuhr, berührt er sich mit seinem extremen Gegensatz, der *Kulturphilosophie*, deren empfindlicher Geschmack den Gipsklassizismus durch die Verehrung der *wilden Ursprünge* austreiben möchte. Das Studium der 'international relations of the Greek continent in Mycenean times' und die dualistische Metaphysik der 'getrennten Kunstwelten des Traumes und des Rausches' bezeugen noch in ihrer Unversöhnlichkeit *die gleiche Tendenz* der Moderne. (*GEO* 38-39)

Adorno daringly compares a representative work of positivist philology (Walter Leaf's *Homer and History*, London 1915) with Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie* ("getrennten Kunstwelten

[90] Philological and more in general human studies seem for Adorno to be subjected to the same dialectic between enlightenment and myth that he and Horkheimer theorize at a more general level in *DA*. 'Enlightened' research and 'mythologizing' interpretation of antiquity for Adorno are entwined, just as enlightenment and myth are two faces of the same rational agency in the history of civilization.

des Traumes und des Rausches" is a literal quotation from Nietzsche, referring to his figurative opposition between the 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' aesthetic principles; cf. Nietzsche 1954, 21). In fact, the two approaches towards classical studies for Adorno are emblematic of the same tendency of the modern humanities, which he sees split in blind rationalistic positivism on the one hand, with empty romantic imagination on the other: "Treue zum Wort, die große von Wolf inaugurierte Philologie, hatte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert Forschung und Deutung zusammengezwungen ... Ihre Kraft zerging mit der der humanistischen Tradition" (*GEO* 38). Adorno here seems to already speak from a post-humanistic standpoint. The divide between 'research' and 'interpretation' ("Forschung und Deutung") for him does not concern philology alone, but rather configures itself as a general problem of the humanities in contemporary academia.

Adorno's overview of the history of classical studies in Germany frames his *Odyssey* interpretation within a specifically German philological tradition. In the first pages of *GEO* he tries to distance his own philological discourse from both the positivist and the mythologizing approaches to classical studies, as represented by Wilamowitz and Nietzsche respectively. At the same time, however, he rehearses Nietzsche's philosophical critique of official academic philology and its positivist bias. As the latter had done in *Geburt der Tragödie*, he furthermore expands his philological critique into a more thorough critical diagnosis of the state of humanistic knowledge in modernity. The introductory account of the state of German philology in *GEO* in truth serves him to pose a theoretical and methodological question about the status of human studies in the age of enlightenment's incipient 'regression' into myth, which in his view reached a point of no return in Germany with the rise to power of National Socialism in the early 30s.

Starting from these general discursive premises, one might expect Adorno to move onto a methodological exposition of *his own* approach to classical studies and the humanities, which would function as the preamble to his own *Odyssey* interpretation. Instead of this, after a one-page overview of the state of classical studies in Germany, Adorno gives a decisive turn to his text by disclosing its main polemical target, which is mythologizing post-Nietzschean philology:

> Während aber den archäologischen Entdeckern Homer als eine Art autoritärer Baedeker durch die Vorwelt hochwillkommen ist, war ihm die Metaphysik von *Griechentum und Pessimismus* niemals hold. Ihre Substanz widersprach der allzugern gepriesenen Gegenständlichkeit, Besonnenheit und Gelassenheit von Ilias und Odyssee. *Nicht ohne Recht* spürte sie dort noch die Wahlverwandtschaft mit dem Positivismus auf, dessen

> modernen Repräsentanten sie ihre eigene Konzeption antiken Lebenssinnes polemisch vorhielt. (ibid. 39)

The passage once again suggests Adorno's lack of sympathy for the dogmatic factualism ("Homer als eine Art autoritärer Baedeker") and interpretative platitudes ("allzugern gepriesenen Gegenständlichkeit, Besonnenheit und Gelassenheit") of positivist classical studies. Yet at the same time it clearly shows a shift of priority in the philological discussion of *GEO*, which from this point on begins to target the post-Nietzschean connection between mythologizing philology and cultural criticism of modernity. The phrase "Griechentum und Pessimismus" is in fact a quote from the second, 1886 edition of Nietzsche's early work on Greek tragedy, entitled *Die Geburt der Tragödie. Oder: Griechenthum und Pessimismus*. Adorno's seemingly incidental mention of this work functions as an indexical reference to Nietzsche's polemic against the unequivocal interpretation of Greek culture on the part of positivist philology[91]. Nietzsche's celebration of the Greeks' "Pessimismus der Stärke" (Nietzsche 1954, 9) was polemically directed at the prevalent classicist orientation of academic philology, whose 'correction' of the Greek past according to modern ideas amounted for him to an illegitimate imposition of bourgeois-progressive parameters and frames of mind on the cultural forms of antiquity[92]. Such rationalistic violence resulted for Nietzsche in a flattening image of Greek culture, which then was reduced to the cliché of its alleged 'Apollonian', 'solar' and 'enlightened' character and thus improperly brought under the common denominator of Attic classicism. Nietzsche himself therefore sought to challenge such ideological projection through the counter-figuration of the Dionysian as the 'other' aesthetic and cultural principle of Greek antiquity (see Reschke 2004).

In the wake of Nietzsche (whether intentionally following up on his project or not), a strand of mostly non-academic, aestheticizing and indeed 'poeticizing' studies on classical antiquity (as, for instance, those from within the George-*Kreis*) had developed in Germany

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[91] In his preface to the second 1886 edition of *Geburt der Tragödie*, entitled "Versuch einer Selbstkritik", Nietzsche had defined "de[n] gute[n] strenge[n] Wille des älteren Hellenen zum Pessimismus" as the precondition of Greek tragic art: "Wie? wenn die Griechen, gerade im Reichtum ihrer Jugend, den Willen zum Tragischen hatten und *Pessimisten* waren?" (Nietzsche 1954, 13). Further: "Ist Pessimismus *notwendig* das Zeichen des Niedergangs, Verfalls, des Mißratenseins, der ermüdeten und geschwächten Instinkte? - wie er es bei den Indern war, wie er es, allem Anschein nach, bei uns, den 'modernen' Menschen und Europäern ist? Gibt es einen Pessimismus der *Stärke*? Eine intellektuelle Vorneigung für das Harte, Schauerliche, Böse, Problematische des Daseins aus Wohlsein, aus überströmender Gesundheit, aus *Fülle* des Daseins?" (ibid. 3; italics in original).

[92] Here an example of the peculiar mixture of philological and cultural criticism in Nietzsche's provocative work: "Wie? Könnte vielleicht, allen 'modernen Ideen' und Vorurteilen des demokratischen Geschmacks zum Trotz, der Sieg des *Optimismus*, die vorherrschend gewordene *Vernünftigkeit*, der praktische und theoretische *Utilitarismus*, gleich der Demokratie selbst, mit der er gleichzeitig ist, – ein Symptom der absinkenden Kraft, des nahenden Alters, der physiologischen Ermüdung sein? Und gerade *nicht* – der Pessimismus?" (Nietzsche 1954, 11; italics in the original).

based on a criticism of the prevalent methodology and spirit of academic philology[93]. The image of Greece provided here was considered to be distorted by a philistine, petit-bourgeois mentality and a naively optimistic belief in human progress. This criticism resulted in a fundamental reorientation of the interest in the Greek past in many sectors of the philologically educated intelligentsia in turn-of-the-century Germany. This reorientation was generally characterized by a depreciation of the 'rational' and 'enlightened' aspects of Greek culture, and conversely by a revived interest in its 'dark', 'hermetic' or 'esoteric' aspects, seen as rooted in aboriginal collective rituals and cultic celebrations such as those famously stylized by Nietzsche in *Geburt der Tragödie*[94].

Homer, as the representative, already in Nietzsche, of an 'Apollonian' clarity and vividness of representation – characterized by "Gegenständlichkeit, Besonnenheit und Gelassenheit", as Adorno notes (*GEO* 39) – must become one of the main fields of exercise of such a critical revision of the traditional academic image of the Greeks[95]. Although Nietzsche had not openly called into question the aesthetic value of the Homeric epics, his judgment of them as Apollonian forms of art ("völlig apollinischen Epos"; Nietzsche 1954, 41) in *Geburt der Tragödie* implied a revision of the common Graecophile opinion that saw them as the most representative and indeed highest expressions of Hellenic culture.

In *GEO* Adorno on the one hand appears to share Nietzsche's aesthetic judgment of the Homeric epics as an 'Apollonian' form of art, and his implicit criticism of Wilamowitzian academic philology. Equating the Homeric epics with modern positivism under the sign of 'enlightened' rationality does, indeed, constitute a fundamental assumption of Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation, which in this sense stands under a clear Nietzschean influence. On the other hand, however, in the introductory section of *GEO* Adorno seeks to distance himself from Nietzsche's late followers, as shown by the following remark: "Je mehr die Forschung dem historischen Positivismus sich verschrieb, um so mehr fiel die Deutung, als abgespaltene, *der Willkür* nicht bloß sondern der *Ideologie* zu, der die Suche nach dem verschütteten Sinn zum *Lob der guten alten Urzeit* eben recht war" (*GEO* 38; my italics). The search for a lost

[93] Though in the 20s this tendency also encroached into academic philology (See Sünderhauf 2003, 267 and 294 ff.).

[94] Along with Nietzsche, Johann Jakob Bachofen's study on prehistoric matriarchy ('*Mutterrecht*') can be seen as the main inspirer of such 'mythologizing' and in fact 'primitivist' reorientation of ancient studies in turn-of-the-century Germany. For the whole thematic complex see Dörr 2007.

[95] So Nietzsche in *Geburt der Tragödie:* "Der Dichter des dramatischen Epos kann ebensowenig wie der epische Rhapsode mit seinen Bildern völlig verschmelzen: er ist immer noch ruhig unbewegte, aus weiten Augen blickende Anschauung, die die Bilder vor sich sieht" (Nietzsche 1954, 71). On the contrary Greek tragedy before Euripides represents for him "die apollinische Versinnlichung dionysischer Erkenntnisse und Wirkungen und dadurch wie *durch eine ungeheure Kluft vom Epos abgeschieden*" (ibid. 53; my italics).

truth in antiquity, as opposed to the cultural misery of the present results for Adorno in a sham fiction of the past that is not only arbitrary, but also ideological. His use of the term "Ideologie" in the passage suggests a continuity with his long-standing project of unmasking the 'foul enchantment' ("faulen Zauber") of Greek antiquity perpetrated by the conservative intellectuals Borchardt, Hofmannstahl and Kantorowitz (see 2.2.).

The argumentative shift from the faults of positivist academic philology to the irrationalist Greek cult of aestheticizing philology à la Nietzsche signals a clear critical priority in Adorno's text. This priority is set by his intention to polemically confront the post-Nietzschean connection between mythologizing philology and cultural criticism of modernity. Even though in the introductory passages of *GEO* Adorno questions the anti-philosophical tendencies of positivist philology, his focus lies on the mythologizing idealization of the ancient past, which he sets out to expose as a specific form of cultural conservative ideology. At the outset of *GEO* Adorno already points to his critical intention in the following terms:

> Die *spätromantische-deutsche Vorstellung von der Antike, die an Nietzsches frühe Schriften sich schloß*, hat den theoretischen Gegensatz des Dionysischen und Apollinischen in einen historischen, ethnischen und schließlich einen des Ranges umgesetzt. Dunkler Gesang und rationale Rede, gnomische Prägung und geläufige Kommunikation, dorische Chorlyrik und jonisches Epos sind die parteiischen Antithesen, zu welchen die *Nietzsches* in der Auslegung der griechischen Poesie sich entfaltete. (*GEO* 37-8; my italics)

The opening sentence of the original *Odyssey* chapter presents a 'hidden' polemical reference to the poet Rudolf Borchardt. Although Adorno does not yet clarify it, "[d]unkler Gesang und rationale Rede, gnomische Prägung und geläufige Kommunikation, dorische Chorlyirik und jonisches Epos" are Borchardt's juxtapositions, based on which he develops his critical revision of the traditional categories of academic philology in the afterword (*Nachwort*) to his translation of Pindar's poetry (*Pindarische Gedichte*, 1931), the text to which Adorno refers and quotes from throughout the first section of *GEO*. The very beginning of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter thus opens with a rhetorically signalled polemical targeting ("parteiischen Antithesen") of post-Nietzschean philology in the person of Borchardt, who is responsible for having brought to conservative extremes Nietzsche's figurative opposition of the 'Dionysian' and 'Apollonian' principles in *Geburt der Tragödie*. The poet's revision of Greek antiquity constitutes for Adorno the paradigmatic example of the post-Nietzschean depreciation of Homer:

> Die Geburt der Tragödie wird zum Tode Homers, dessen 'Kunstgebiet', das Epos, bei Nietzsche bereits dem Apollinischen gleichgesetzt ist. Die am Rande der deutschen Großindustrie gepflegte *Esoterik* endlich, wie sie in dem *widersinnigen Reaktionär Rudolf Borchardt* ihren bedeutendsten und darum praktisch ohnmächtigsten Ausdruck gefunden hat, schließt unter allem Gewebe der Bildung bereits die *Diffamierung von Ilias und Odyssee, den Urtexten der europäischen Zivilisation*, ein, weil die Hüter des Echten ihrer Verschworenheit mit der Barbarei innewerden. (*GEO* 39; my italics)

This is the point in the text where Borchardt is named for the first time and explicitly targeted as the exemplary and indeed most significant ("bedeutendsten") case of the late-Romantic connection between cultural criticism of modernity and mythologizing philology in the wake of Nietzsche[96]. Borchardt's disparaging re-evaluation of Homer for Adorno results from an ideological distortion of Nietzsche's philosophy for the sake of a radical *Zivilisationskritik*, based on politically ultraconservative ("widersinnigen Reaktionär") and culturally elitist assumptions ("Gewebe der Bildung"). Starting with this open reference to Borchardt, Adorno begins his polemical confrontation with him, which dominates the first (about 7-8), later almost completely deleted pages of his original *Odyssey* chapter (cf. *GEO* 37-45). Here, he undertakes to 'deconstruct' the poet's interpretation of the *Odyssey*, which is seen as having illegitimately turned Nietzsche's theoretical opposition between the Dionysian and the Apollonian into one of historical, ethnical and social order ("historischen, ethnischen und schließlich einen des Ranges", *GEO* 38). However, such deconstruction also implies an appropriation of Borchardt's literary-historical and cultural-theoretical premises on Adorno's part. Indeed, the latter's Homeric interpretation heavily relies on the poet's critical insights and poetic theory, as I will demonstrate in the following sections of the current chapter.

Before going into a close analysis of *GEO* however, it is necessary to cast a glance onto Borchardt's work as a cultural critic, poet and philologist, in order to understand what is at stake in Adorno's polemical reference to him. In doing so, I will concentrate on those parts and aspects of Borchardt's production that are *either explicitly or implicitly* referred to in Adorno's argumentation in the chapter. This procedure necessarily entails a selective

[96] Although Nietzsche was for many respects openly anti-Romantic, he also inspired much Neo-Romantic cultural movements (*Lebensreform*, *Jugendbewegung*, *Neoromantik*) of turn-of-the-century Germany: "Nietzsches Sprache hatte Züge der romantischen, seine Sehnsucht war in vielem romantisch und deshalb wirkte er auch besonders auf eine neue Romantik" (Mohler 2005, 50). Mohler also points out to the strong influence exerted by Nietzsche's philosophy on the *Konservative Revolution*, and more in general on much right-wing *Kulturkritik* of Weimar Germany (see Mohler 2005, 53 ff.).

consideration of Borchardt's production, which I will introduce through the example of his public speech "Schöpferische Restauration" (1927). I will then take a close look at his afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* (1931), the text that Adorno quotes from and explicitly confronts in "Geschichtsphilosophischer Exkurs zur *Odyssee*".

2.4. Rudolf Borchardt's 'Restorative' Cultural Politics between Cultural Criticism and Philology

Rudolf Borchardt's intellectual profile is characterized by a combination of poetic work, philological research and cultural critical essay writing. His remarkable production consists of an idiosyncratic mixture of Neo-Romantic poetry, aestheticizing philology and anti-modern *Kulturkritik*. In the present section I will consider the latter aspect of Borchardt's work, then I will target Borchardt's philological approach, in order to show how it bears on Adorno's earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. In doing so, I will have to leave Borchardt's poetic work aside, although I will cast an occasional glance on those aspects of his poetic theory that are immediately relevant for the present discussion.

As a non-academic scholar of ancient philology, Borchardt intended to bring the discipline back to what he deemed to be its original unity with poetry. Reiterating the gist of Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie*, he fancied a 'mythopoetic', re-vitalizing approach to philological studies, which he opposed to the aesthetic dullness, unimaginative rigidity and cold pedantry of academic scholarship[97]. Borchardt understood philology as the fundamental humanistic science ('Mantelwissenschaft', see Poiss 1997, 67), in which research and imagination, 'science' and 'poetry' would have to merge (see Borchardt, "Dichten und Forschen", 182 ff.). The philologist's task was for him to reconstruct a poetic totality, and thus to bring to light the spirit of an entire epoch: "Solche Arbeit an den Trümmern einer großen Produktion ... ist *schöpferisch*, der Dichter, sein Kreis, seine Zeit fügen sich vor unseren Augen zusammen" (cited in Poiss 1997, 72; my italics). The philologist's reconstruction of the cultural 'ruins' of the past for Borchardt was necessarily creative, as it was based on the work of poetic imagination[98]. The ultimate goal of such work was the restoration of the ancient cultural world of the past as a comprehensive *Lebenswelt* or, in

[97] Borchardt saw Wilamowitz as the model of a classicist philological tradition that he respected yet did not sympathize with (see Poiss 1997, 57; and Steiger 2003, 67). Moreover, although he considered Wilamowitz as a 'giant' of philological studies ("war ein Riese"), he regretted the latter's adversity towards his person and work as a philologist (see Borchardt-Jaeger 2007, 50-51). Despite his outsider status as a non-academic philologist, Borchardt was well known and in fact respected by many in the philological field. Notably, he was friends with the prominent classist philologist Werner Jaeger, the most influential representative of the so-called '*Dritter Humanismus*', who invited him to hold a lecture on Pindar's poetry at the *Gesellschaft für antike Kultur* in Berlin in 1930 (see Borchardt-Jaeger 2007). For an overview on Borchardt's philological education and his relationship with academic philology in general see Poiss 1997.

[98] Meike Steiger talks in his study on Borchardt's 'textual politics' of "Vergägenwärtigung von Geschichte durch emphatische (ästhetische) Erfahrungen" (Steiger 2003, 91). For Borchardt's poetical approach to history see Miller 1997.

Borchardt's own words, "das gesamte sichtbare und unsichtbare Leben der Antike als eines einheitlichen Kulturraumes durch Forschung zu *restaurieren*" (ibid.; my italics).

Restoration can indeed be seen as the key word of Borchardt's work as poet and philologist, essayist and public speaker. This restoration should be understood as a revival of the humanistic heritage, which Borchardt set against the 'decadence' of modern culture. His large-scale ambition was to 'save' the Western, particularly the German, cultural memory and literary tradition from a process of decay set in motion in his view by the immanent socio-economical and cultural-political dynamics of post-Enlightenment modernity[99]. His interest in classical studies was thus accompanied throughout his intellectual career by a relentless critical confrontation with the state of German culture during the first decades of the 20th century.

A telling example of Borchardt's project of cultural restoration is his speech "Schöpferische Restauration" (here cited as *SR*), held 1927 at Munich university, the same place where barely two months earlier Hugo von Hofmannstahl had first set forth his notion of '*konservative Revolution*'[100] to an academic audience in a lecture entitled "Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation" (see Schmidt 2007-I, 202). Borchardt's "Schöpferische Restauration", held at the time of his most intense activity as a public speaker, is an emblematic document of his conservative elitism and restorative late-Romanticism and as such rather in tune with his friend Hofmannstahl's notorious speech on literature and conservative cultural politics[101].

The bulk of "Schöpferische Restauration" consists in a rhetorical lamentation about the "Katastrophe des alten Europa" (*SR*, 230) prepared by the "französischen Eiszeit" (ibid. 236) of 18th century rationalism and eventually precipitated by the French Revolution. The speech directs its polemic gist against the putative cultural diseases brought about by the age of Enlightenment: abstraction, mechanization, materialism and commodification ("Die Hölle

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[99] His admitted objective was "Restauration deutscher Kulturtotalität aus ihren gesamten geschichtlichen Beständen" (cited in Breuer 1995, 159). For Borchardt's idea of culture see Kraft 1961, 431 ff.

[100] The term had already been used by Friedrich Engels, Charles Maurras and especially Thomas Mann in "Russische Anthologie" (1921) with reference to Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemäßen Betrachtungen:* "Seine Synthese ist die von Aufklärung und Glauben, von Freiheit und Gebundenheit, von Geist und Fleisch, 'Gott' und 'Welt'. Es ist, künstlerisch ausgedrückt, die von Sinnlichkeit und Kritizismus, politisch ausgedrückt, die von Konservatismus und Revolution. Denn Konservatismus braucht nur Geist zu haben, um revolutionärer zu sein als irgendwelche positivistisch liberalistische Aufklärung, und Nietzsche selbst war von Anbeginn, schon in den "Unzeitgemäßen Betrachtungen", nichts anderes als *konservative Revolution*" (Mann, 2002, 341). Thomas Mann might have taken the concept '*konservative Revolution*' from Moeller van der Bruck's edition of Dostojewski's complete works (see Breuer 1995, 226-227). For further reference see Mohler 2005, 93-94.

[101] For Borchardt's relation to the *Konservative Revolution*, see Breuer 1997. In his essay Breuer lucidly shows the fundamental points in common as well as the equally remarkable differences between Borchardt and other important conservative-revolutionary intellectuals. Furthermore, he makes a convincing argument that Borchardt's restorative vision is best described by the phrase '*schöpferische Restauration*', which defines the poet's personal inflection of the conservative-revolutionary project.

(des) hoffnungslosen Mechanismus und Determinismus, ibid. 236; "Diese gesamte Welt ist käuflich", ibid. 233). Borchardt considers these historical tendencies responsible for the callousness, impiousness and immorality of a 'godless' European modernity[102]. The technical-material and socio-economic achievements ("'Entwicklung'", as Borchardt disparagingly bundles them in quote) of the 19th century are depicted by him as the result of a growing "Mißachtung und Zerstörung des Menschen und der Welt" (ibid. 232), in which none of the pillars of the old, pre-Revolutionary world is spared in the end ("der verlorene Gott, der verlorene Mensch, die verwirkte Erde", ibid. 235).

Borchardt's fierce accusation of the 'bourgeois' 19th century, the age of liberalism and progressive ideology, avails itself of the traditional argumentative patterns of a long-standing anti-modern rhetoric which can be traced in Germany as far back as Julius Langbehn and Paul de Lagarde[103]. Equating Enlightenment and Liberalism, abstraction and materialism, intellectualism and commodification is part in fact of the established polemical arsenal of German *Kulturkritik* from the turn of the century onwards[104]. Borchardt's bitterly indignant and woeful tone, however, reflects the general radicalization of cultural critical discourses in the age of Weimar, marked by a widespread sense of epochal crisis and the shared urgency for a deep-ranging reformation of society (see Bollenbeck 2007). An excerpt from Thomas Mann's *Deutsche Ansprache. Ein Appell an die Vernunft* (1930) will help clarify this situation:

> Mit dem wirtschaftlichen Niedergang der Mittelklasse verband sich eine Empfindung, die ihm als intellektuelle Propheterie und Zeitkritik vorausgegangen war: die Empfindung einer Zeitwende, welche das Ende der von der Französischen Revolution datierenden bürgerlichen Epoche und ihrer Ideenwelt ankündigte. Eine

[102] "In der Religion hat ... die Nüchternheit Gott und die Heiligen ... zu ohnmächtigen Zuschauern und Zierstücken eines entseelten Getriebes gemacht"; "die Liebe zerfällt ... in nüchterne Zweckgemeinschaften, oder allgemein zugestandene Ausschweifungen" (ibid. 233).

[103] Paul de Lagarde's *Deutsche Schriften (1878)* and Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890) count as cultural critical best-sellers in Germany well into the Nazi period. See Bollenbeck 2007 (199 ff.) and Stern 1961.

[104] Already in Nietzsche the critique of the Enlightenment – understood as the intellectual principle of modernity – combined with a criticism of liberalism, considered as the epochal 'resultant' of the Enlightenment. As Bollenbeck notes: "Bis 1880 bleibt die Aufklärung als verlaufende Aktualität und noch zu erreichendes Ziel anerkannt. Erst mit dem 'Ende der liberalen Ära' rückt sie vollends in das pejorative Begriffsfeld 'Rationalismus-Westen-Utilitarismus-Zivilisation' ein. Wenn Nietzsche gegen den Geist der Aufklärung einen 'allerletzten Kriegs- und Reaktionszug' unternehmen will und wenn er sich in seiner mittleren Phase auf den 'Geist der Aufklärung' beruft, dann äußert sich darin jene ambivalente Konstellation von Anerkennung und Abwertung. Zudem lebt seine Polemik gegen den Liberalismus *und* die Aufklärung aus der Einsicht in ideengeschichtliche Gemeinsamkeiten. Ist doch der deutsche Liberalismus ein Kind der Aufklärung, das von dem Trauma der Französischen Revolution gezeichnet bleibt. Sein Glaube an die evolutionäre Neugestaltung der Gesellschaft durch einen reformbereiten Staat, an Vernunft, Fortschritt und Modernität, an die Zukunft und den Rückenwind der Weltgeschichte löst sich nicht auf, aber verliert um 1880 im Gefolge einer neuen Fortschrittsskepsis an Gewissheit und Breitenwirkung" (Bollenbeck 2007, 155; italics in original).

> neue Seelenlage der Menschheit, die mit der bürgerlichen und ihren Prinzipien: *Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit, Bildung, Optimismus, Fortschrittsglaube, nichts mehr zu schaffen haben sollte*, wurde proklamiert und drückte sich ... philosophisch als Abkehr vom Vernunftglauben, von der zugleich mechanistischen und ideologischen Weltanschauung abgelaufener Jahrzehnte aus. (Mann 1990, 876; my italics)

Borchardt's aggressive jeremiad about the perverse state of culture, the decadence of mores and the death of God in post-Revolutionary modernity is a representative instance of the exacerbated cultural critical climate of the Weimar period succinctly described by Thomas Mann. In his speech Borchardt summons up science and technology, the free market and the cultural industry, parliamentary democracy and the mass-media in a comprehensive derogatory picture of urban, liberal and capitalist Western European civilization[105]. Echoing widespread cultural critical topoi of his time, he depicts "Warenhaus, Kino, Massenzeitung" as agents of cultural "Nivellierung", responsible for the creation of the "Durchschnittsmenschheit" characteristic of urban mass society (ibid. 233)[106]. Further, he takes recourse to the traditional rhetoric of the conservative-Romantic, anti-Enlightenment reactionary view (see Mannheim 1984) when he condemns the baseness of urban life by invoking divine and natural laws[107], and goes so far as to prophetically interpret the catastrophe of the Great War as the inevitable judgment of God on an 'unrepented' European humanity ("Feuerregen auf alle Sodomien ... Simonien, auf alle Babeltürme . ... Europas und Deutschlands", ibid. 245).

Borchardt's speech, however, goes beyond a moralist indictment of the putative symptoms of Europe's and Germany's cultural decadence. He also attempts to understand these symptoms in 'structural' terms (in the Marxist sense of the word), that is to say as the result of the economic processes that determine the structure of modern capitalist society. In his view, the specific, qualitatively new predicament of the modern age in comparison to past

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[105] "Wirtschaft, Technik, öffentliche Meinung und große Teile der angewandten Wissenschaften" (*SR*, 244); "Naturwissenschaften ... Industrie und ... die Demokratie der Westvölker" (ibid. 245).

[106] As is typical of conservative *Kulturkritik* in his time (think of Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes*) Borchardt regards the big city as the centre of cultural and moral corruption. City life for Borchardt is responsible for the emergence of the "Menschentypus der Großstädte", which he sees as a debased form of life ("ethnologisch gewandelt ... bestialisiert", *SR* 243). Moreover, the cultural forms that are typical of the city, from cinema to variety show and popular literature, are branded by Borchardt as "Volksverderber" and seen as the product of modern "Entartung" (*SR*, 241-2). The word '*Entartung*' (meaning 'degeneration') became popular amongst conservative bourgeois circles around the turn of the century in the wake of Max Nordau's cultural critical work *Entartung* (1892-3). The term here referred to contemporary developments in modern art, and was later vulgarized by the Nazis through their notion of 'degenerate art' ('*entartete Kunst*'). For an overview of the debates about cultural modernism and avant-garde between turn-of-the-century and Weimar Germany see Bollenbeck 1999.

[107] "Der Mensch ist ja nicht von Gott und der Natur dazu geschaffen, in den Formen des heutigen Lebens die Arbeitervorstädte ... zu bewohnen" (*SR*, 243).

ones "besteht darin, daß ein fast unübersehbarer Teil unserer *Wirtschaft* auf fortgesetzter Vernichtung und fortschreitender Depravation unseres *Volkes* und der Gesellschaft aufgebaut ist" (ibid. 241; my italics)[108]. Thus, Borchardt's cultural criticism addresses the economic preconditions of what he describes as the spreading proletarization of society ("die Verwandlung eines großen und sittlichen *Volkes* in einen unabsehbaren Pöbel"), regardless of class and income, indeed up to "die tragenden Stände" (ibid. 242; my italics). Yet instead of further developing such critical insights of the economy, Borchardt then resorts to a retrospective idealization of past forms of life. His severe judgment of modernity culminates in "Schöpferische Restauration" in a nostalgic return to the Romantic age. His ultimate diagnosis of Germany's cultural decadence contrasts the organic and earthbound *Volk* – imagined as a no-longer existing entity – to the modern urban masses, who are described as the inevitable 'scum' of the economic dynamics set in motion by the intrinsic logic of bourgeois society ("Der historische Begriff des *Volkes* ist zersprungen. Er ist *wirtschaftlich* durch den der neuen *Massen* ersetzt", ibid. 241; my italics).

"Schöpferische Restauration" is in fact not only a tirade against modern civilization, but also an elegy on the spirit of German Romanticism, which Borchardt depicts as the counter-revolutionary response to the 'rationalist' revolution of Western modernity[109]. In his speech Hamann and Herder, Novalis and Hölderlin, Fichte, Schelling and Schleiermacher feature as the 'stars' of an intellectual constellation that, starting from the German heartland, overflowed the whole of post-Revolutionary Europe with a 'restorative' light: "Zwischen 1820 und 1848 trägt die europäische Gesellschaft das Gepräge eines deutsch reformierten Lebens ... Poesie, Philosophie, Wissenschaft, Unterricht *germanisierten* sich in allen Kulturländern" (ibid. 239). Borchardt defines such "restituirende Romantik" (ibid. 239) as a movement of spiritual and cultural restitution of natural 'rights' and historical 'privileges' that had been destroyed by the socio-economic and cultural developments of the Enlightenment in Europe.

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[108] In his speech Borchardt criticises the economic elite of Germany, and complains "daß ein großer Teil gerade derjenigen Mächte, deren das Volk zur Wiederherstellung seiner wirtschaftlichen Kraft bedürfte, zugleich mit allen ihren Lebensfäden davon abzuhängen scheinen, daß der Geisterwert eben dieses Volkes unaufhaltsam gesenkt und vereitelt wird" (*SR* 242). The industrial bourgeoisie for Borchardt is co-responsible for the spiritual corruption of the German *Volk*. It appears that Borchardt shares the anti-economic bias that was characteristic of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* from the 19th century onwards (see Bollenbeck 1994, 99 and 146 ff.). Meike Steiger provides in her study an informative introduction to Borchardt's social and cultural self-understanding, based on the idea of Germany as a *Kulturnation* (as opposed to *Staatsnation*) and of the special role played in it by the *Bildungsbürgertum* (as opposed to the *Wirtschaftsbürgertum*; see Steiger 2003, 18 ff.).

[109] He defines German Romanticism in heroic terms as "jene[...] zweite[...] allgemeine[...] Reformation, durch die Deutschland den Erdteil im Präzipitieren aufgegriffen und seinen Weg noch einmal von neuem zu beginnen gezwungen hat" (*SR*, 235).

Borchardt's historical retrospect, however, not only serves as a nostalgic revival of the past, but also entails a moral call to national renovation. In accordance with his construction of a German alternative to post-Enlightenment, West European modernity, he calls for a "Restauration Deutschlands" on Neo-Romantic cultural premises:

> Wir ergreifen die deutsche nationale Tradition dort wo ihre zerfaserten Enden halten, in der geistesgeschichtlichen Entwicklung des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts als einem Mandate der deutschen Poesie und setzen das Werk der Romantik schöpferisch and den Stellen fort, an denen sie es unter die Erde tauchend den Wissenschaften überließ. (ibid. 250)

The Romantic 'restitution' should be further pursued from the moment in which it was interrupted by the penetration of 'scientific' rationalism, pragmatism and materialism into all realms of European life and culture. Borchardt understands this "Arbeit der Restauration, da wir sie schöpferisch anfassen, nicht als Reaktion ... sondern ... als eine Reformation an Haupt und Gliedern" (ibid. 252). Given the differences between present conditions and the Romantic era, such spiritual 'reformation' (reminiscent of that of Luther) necessarily has to be pursued by an select minority ("aus dem Goetheschen 'kleinsten Kreis'", ibid. 250), a true national elite whose task would be "Zerstreutes zu sammeln, Zerrissenes herzustellen, unser gequältes und gemartertes Volk ... als eine Ganzheit zu restaurieren, durch eine restitution in integrum" (ibid. 252).

The idea of a cultural "restitution in integrum" of the German *Volk* can be seen as Borchardt's personal inflection of Hofmannstahl's conservative-revolutionary slogan[110]. In "Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation" the latter had demanded a new engagement of the conservative literary intelligentsia in the spiritual life of the German nation, thus defining the literary part to be played in the conservative-revolutionary movement (see Mohler 2005, 372 ff.). This engagement for Hofmannstahl should serve to revive the spirit of Romanticism at a new, cultural-political level. Consequently, he had conjured up the oncoming *Konservative Revolution* as the communal work of a spiritual elite – he uses the Nietzschean term of 'Suchenden' – aimed at leading a "nicht mehr zur *Kultur* gebundenes *Volkstum* ... zur Bildung einer wahren *Nation*" (Hofmannsthal 1979, 40; my italics). In order to conceptually frame his demand Hofmannstahl had further defined the '*Schrifttum*' (as the German

[110] In fact Borchardt had already conceived his program of "restaurierende Revolution" or "revoltierende Reformation" before Hofmannstahl's speech in his *Eranos-Brief* of 1924. See Breuer 1995, 153.

equivalent of the French-Romance notion of '*Literatur*'[111]) as the spiritual space of a restricted 'nation', one in which its best tradition-conscious intellectuals would form into a community united by a strong sense of national belonging ("hier werden diese Einzelnen zu Verbundenen, diese verstreuten wertlosen Individuen *zum Kern der Nation*") and a cultural-political mission, which Hofmannstahl describes as "politische[...] Erfassung des Geistigen und ... geistige[...] des Politischen" (ibid.; my italics). The *Konservative Revolution* of Germany for Hofmannstahl indeed presupposed the creation of such a Nietzschean aristocratic community, self-appointed to spiritually lead Germany to a national rebirth on the grounds of its Romantic tradition[112].

Hofmannstahl's idea of the nation as a cultural conservative community of 'believers' ("Glaubensgemeinschaft") held together by a common literary-poetic space ("durch ein unzerreißbares Gewebe des Sprachlich-Geistigen zusammengehalten", ibid. 27) translates in Borchardt's speech into the poetic idea of a linguistic belonging to the 'true' German nation. Borchardt depicts the spreading 'proletariat' (including in fact the majority of the urban population, regardless of class and income) as lacking a proper language:

> Das Volk der Romantik besteht nicht mehr ... wir haben in Deutschland fünfundvierzig Großstädte ... und sie sind ausnahmslos auf das Proletariat gegründet, das der Romantik unbekannt war und ... im Sinne der *alten deutschen Kultur* ... eine Abfallsmenschheit und ein Menschheitsabfall ist ... ein Halbmenschen- und Viertelsmenschenwesen ohne Nationalität, ohne Erinnerung. ... Dieser schreckliche Zustand wird durch das geringe Quantum an Sprache, das dem deutschen Proletariat zur Verfügung steht ... zu einer drohenden Katastrophe, denn man besitzt nationale

[111] The comparison and contrast with the Romanic 'West', particularly with France, structures the first part of Hofmannsthal's speech. The neighboring country is thereby taken as a model of unitary culture held together by a literary tradition which the educated identify themselves with – in opposition to Germany, where the cultural unity guaranteed by an old literary tradition according to Hofmannsthal was missing and therefore had to be created anew through an active poetic and political engagement of the literary elite of the nation. At the same time Hofmannsthal underlines the essential difference of Germany's society and culture from its Western neighbor, and consequently seeks to provide apt concepts in order to define and indeed promote this sense of diversity. This is rather typical of German cultural conservatism during the first decades of the 20th century, when anti-modern and anti-Western cultural criticism mingled with a fascination for the 'old' cultures of Western Europe and their classical heritage. A similar affect is expressed in Borchardt's "Schöpferische Restauration", where he complains about the lack of a true vernacular language of the German lower classes – as compared to the French, Italian and English ones – resulting in a gap between spoken and written language, which contemporary German literature in his opinion is no longer able to bridge (see *SR* 248).

[112] Hofmannstahl signals in his speech a continuity and a break at the same time with the spirit of Romanticism: "Wohl ist die Form, in der sich dieses neue Suchen und Ringen vollzieht, scheinbar die gleiche geblieben: der leidenschaftlich-einsame Dienst an der eigenen Seele als einziger Daseinsinhalt. ... Aber ... an Stelle jenes damaligen verantwortungslosen Wesens ... an Stelle eines Rausch- und Schwärmerwesens ist bei unseren Suchenden ein strengeres, männlicheres Gehaben unverkennbar getreten, eine Bescheidung, in der Tapferkeit liegt, eine fast grimmige Festigkeit gegenüber der Verführung, sowohl ans Begriffliche als an das Schwärmerische sich zu verlieren" (Hofmannsthal 1979, 38-39).

> Existenz nur durch das *Quantum an Nation, das in der Sprache zu äußern ist*. (*SR*, 247-8; my italics)

Since Borchardt understands language in Romantic terms as both the medium and substance of the cultural nation (*Kulturnation*), he sees its 'proletarization' as an indication of national degeneration. The issues raised by the inner dynamics of modern industrial and urban society are 'spiritualized' and reduced by Borchardt to a matter of linguistic development, as the above passage exemplifies. Borchardt's idea of a Romantic 'restoration' of the nation in truth configures itself as a wholesale Neo-Romantic regeneration of the German *language*: "Wir sind entschlossen die Sprache und die Mittel, um sie im ganzen zu restituieren, im einzelnen revolutionär zu behandeln" (ibid. 252). With this linguistic turn Borchardt betrays his inmost concerns and interests, which are indeed of a poetic, rather than socio-cultural nature. This is also the point where the common Neo-Romantic presuppositions of both his and Hofmannstahl's speech become manifest. Their imagined national reformation does not rest on political and social, but rather on spiritual and 'cultural' arguments. Their cultural-political proclamations are in fact the expression of the rather apolitical culture of vast parts of the German, particularly conservative, literary intelligentsia of the time, emblematically exposed in one of the first documents of the *Konservative Revolution*, namely Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (1918).

Borchardt's plea for a 'Romantic' restoration of Germany reveals the mental habitus of both his and Hofmannstahl's conservative audience at Munich University, as well as of the broader conservative literary audience in Germany. Speaking in the name of "deutsche Kultur" and "deutsche Poesie" (ibid. 247 and 249), Borchardt urges his academic audience to restrict the notion of 'nation' to those few who recognize themselves in these two 'deities' of the German *Bildungsreligion*:

> Es gibt in Fragen des Geistes keine Mehrheit, und wo es Mehrheit gibt, herrscht der Ungeist und der Widergeist. ... Wie die Romantik ... ihren Volksbegriff erweiterte, ihn liberal und allgemein machte, genau so ist es die Pflicht unserer historischen Sendung, ihn von dort, wo er nicht mehr hingehört zurückzunehmen und zu *verengen* ... der Mehrheit zu versagen und ... in der strengen Minderheit wieder zu ordnen und ehrlich zu machen. ... Wir ersetzen den Begriff des Volkes durch den von ihm streng geschiedenen der *Nation*, und haben ... niemandem die Zugehörigkeit zur Nation [zu] konzedieren, der nicht wie in Urzeiten ... mit seinesgleichen eins ist, im Gebete zu den allgemeinen *Volksahnen, Volksgöttern, Volksheiligen* ... dadurch daß er *den Geist der deutschen Geschichte und die Geschichte des deutschen Geistes* in sich wieder erlebt ... selber zu einem lebenden Stücke deutscher Geschichte und

> deutschen Geistes, deutscher Art wird. Die ist die Forderung, die die deutsche Poesie an Sie alle stellt. (ibid. 249; my italics)

Taking recourse to a traditional repertoire of Romantic topics and arguments (from the "Volksahnen" to "deutscher Art"), Borchardt reduces the idea of 'nation' to those whom he sees as the conscious descendants of a Germanic cultural tradition of Romantic-Idealistic descent ("deutsche Poesie", "Geschichte des deutschen Geistes"). The organic *Volksgemeinschaft* thus becomes in his discourse a national elite: the rhetoric of Romanticism ultimately serves Borchardt to discursively underpin his exclusivist cultural poetics and politics. His restorative project, far from involving the actual nation in its entirety, instead entails the wishful creation of a select community bound by a conservative sense of language and a willfully aristocratic cultural ethos.

Borchardt's both elegiac and polemical speech "Schöpferische Restauration" is significant in at least two ways. On the one hand, it is a representative instance of the anti-modern *Kulturkritik* and 'culturalist' ideology of the *Konservative Revolution*, which such different intellectual figures as Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Oswald Spengler, Ludwig Klages and Stefan George (not to mention the young Thomas Mann) had a share in. On the other hand, it is a telling document of the general rejective (or 'reactionary') attitude towards modernity taken by numerous adherents of the conservative *Bildungsbürgertum* in Germany starting at the turn of the century, and with particular intensity in the crisis-ridden age of Weimar (see 1.1. and 1.2.). This class, made up of the educated bourgeoisie (teachers, professors, artists, but also doctors, lawyers and state clerks), had exerted a crucial function throughout the 19th century in providing the foundations for the cultural unification of the country. Its class-specific semantics, centered on the normative notions of '*Bildung*' and '*Kultur*', had then informed a process of symbolic socialization, which was able to create a common platform of national identification across all sectors of German society (cf. Bollenbeck 1994, 194 and 221).

The unifying force of the *bildungsbürgerliche* semantics and ideology, however, while apparently consolidated by the creation of institutions by the newborn national state (particularly in the field of education: the famous Prussian *Gymnasium* and university), paradoxically started to fade in the wake of the *Reichsgründung*, faced with the new economic and cultural dynamics of a growingly industrialized, technological and bureaucratic society. The cultural hegemony of the *Bildungsbürgertum* thus increasingly eroded away, along with the 'communicative success' (ibid. 186) of its semantic apparatus and ideal norms (the

nuclear constellation of '*Bildung*' and '*Kultur*'; see 1.1.). This caused a widespread sentiment of socio-cultural dispossession amongst the educated bourgeoisie (see Breuer 1993, 21), resulting in a shared resentment towards the dynamics of social transformation and cultural diversification that were changing Germany's physiognomy[113]. This is why many members of the conservative German intelligentsia, unable to mentally adapt to the new conditions, turned to radically anti-modern positions, quite often self-stylizing themselves as 'the final bastions' and 'rescuers' of the nation from its present state of decadence (cf. Breuer 1993, 21). Particularly in the interwar period such an attitude frequently resulted in a fierce criticism of liberal society, whose political, cultural and economic presuppositions were made responsible for the state of crisis of Weimar Germany. This comprehensive cultural criticism, moreover, went along with a decisive turn to cultural aristocratism, on the side of the conservative *Bildungsbürgertum*, which functioned as a palliative to its sentiment of social degradation and cultural disorientation (see Bollenbeck 1994, 236-7).

This brief socio-cultural outlook should serve to give an idea about the socio-cultural conditions and discursive-intellectual context of Borchardt's "Schöpferische Restauration". The speech is, indeed, a paramount example of the aggressive, anti-modernist turn of cultural critical discourses in Weimar Germany, where the full-blown process of 'reflexive modernization' (see Breuer 1993, 16) heightened the perception of an acute socio-political and cultural crisis, driving many conservative-minded intellectuals to exacerbated nationalist, elitist or authoritarian positions (frequently all three at the same time; see Bollenbeck 1994, 235 ff.)[114]. For Borchardt the socio-cultural and economic dynamics characterizing German society in the 30s betrayed the ideals of the German *Kultur*, romantically understood as the unifying substance of the nation. The former *Kulturnation* therefore should be restored, in his view, through the dedicated work of a poetically inspired national aristocracy. His speech "Schöpferische Restauration", held in the name of German 'poetry' and 'culture', is in fact an

[113] "In einer zunehmend binnendifferenzierten Gesellschaft schrumpft die Fähigkeit des Deutungsmusters ['*Bildung und Kultur*', A/N] verschiedenartige Diskurse und neue Praxisbereiche zu überwölben. Seine Fähigkeit zur symbolischen Vergesellschaftung nimmt ab, was auch bedeutet, daß die Definitionsmacht des Bildungsbürgertums abnimmt. Diesem Funktionsverlust folgt jedoch keine unmittelbare sozialgeschichtliche Entwertung. In Sprache eingebaute Relevanzstrukturen sind häufig zählebiger als der realgeschichtliche Verlauf. Das Deutungsmuster wirkt jedenfalls weiterhin. Doch entwickelt es sich mit der entfalteten Moderne von einem Aktivposten der Modernisierung zu einem *Faktor der Modernisierungskrise*. Es erhöht die Diskrepanz zwischen alten Vorstellungen und neuen Verhältnissen" (Bollenbeck 1994, 232; my italics).

[114] The weakening of liberalism as a cultural formation and political ideology in the last decades of the 19th century had gone along in Germany with an increasing support on the side of the conservative-minded *Bildungsbürgertum* to the new *Machtstaat*, seen as the only possible guarantor of its fading cultural hegemony. Moreover, whereas throughout the 19th century cultural nationalism in Germany had been the field of explication of bourgeois liberalism, as opposed to the localistic interests of the surviving ancient regime, starting at the turn of the century, and with intensified force after WWI, it got to be growingly 'occupied' by national-conservative and right-wing ideological parties (from the *Altdeutsche* and *Deutschnationale* to the *Völkische*; see Bollenbeck 1994, 234).

exhortation to an imagined cultural conservative elite, which for him amounted to the only true 'Germany' (not unlike the '*Geheimes Deutschland*' of his competitor Stefan George)[115].

Borchardt's loathing for the uncultivated urban masses results not only in the Romantic idealization of the pre-industrial *Volk*, but also in the projection of a cultural-political elite to lead the nation. The apparent contradiction between *völkische* idealization and elitist projection is appeased in the wishful idea of a *restricted cultural nation*[116]. This seeming paradoxical position is in fact in tune with the anti-modernist disposition of many conservative *Bildungsbürger* in the Weimar period, when the Romantic notion of the *Volk* was appropriated – albeit to different extents and in different fashions – by a number of right-wing political groups, and became one of the pillars of the anti-democratic and anti-liberal ideology of Weimar Germany: "Der antiliberale Staatsgedanke ist in Deutschland von der Idee des Volkes nicht zu lösen" (Sontheiemr 1962, 308). Moeller van den Bruck – one of the most prominent ideologues of the *Konservative Revolution* and author of *Das Dritte Reich* (1923) – well exemplifies this position, when he affirms: "Das Problem des deutschen Volkes [ist] das Problem einer deutschen Kultur" (cited in Bollenbeck 1994, 230). Similarly, the metaphysical and meta-political notion of '*Volk*' served Borchardt to conceptualize a lost cultural order that ought to be recovered for the sake of national unity and political stability[117].

Though bearing no practical political consequences at first, the cultural demands resulting from the political ideology of the *Konservative Revolution* unquestionably partook of and contributed to the intellectual climate that enabled the rise to power of National

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[115] Significantly, this argument closely resembles the position of one of the fathers of the *völkische* ideology, Julius Langbehn, who in his cultural critical best-seller *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (1890) demanded that true *Bildung* ("rechte Bildung") be restricted to a "echten Aristokratie", and that culture become the task "eines leitenden Generalstabes von Kunstpolitikern" (cited in Bollenbeck 1994, 237). Langbehn's writings testify to the encroachment of an authoritarian and militarist mentality into the cultural semantics of the German *Bildungsbürgertum*.

[116] This is a fundamental ideological position of the *Jungconservativen* around Moeller van der Bruck, von Gleichen and, later, Edgar Julius Jung. The intrinsic contradictoriness of the conservative-revolutionary idealization of the *Volk* has been shown by Sontheimer in his groundbreaking work on anti-democratic thought in Weimar Germany (see Sontheimer, 1962, 308 ff.). For Borchardt's fundamental affinity with these positions see Breuer 1997.

[117] The mythization of a lost original community functioned in the conservative cultural critical literature of the Weimar period as a sort of cover ideology, apt to compensate a resentful bourgeois intelligentsia for its lost social status and cultural prestige: "Seine Verlorene Vormachtstellung hoffte es ['das Bildungsbürgertum', A/N] sich mit Hilfe des völkischen Gedankens wieder sichern zu können, wenn auch unter Verleugnung der liberalen Ideen, mit denen es groß geworden war" (Sontheimer 1962, 308). Indeed, it was the conservative-revolutionary bourgeoisie intellectuals that helped popularize the *völkisch* ideas in Weimar Germany. As Sontheimer notes, "nicht den 'Völkischen' war es in erster Linie zuzuschreiben, wenn der Volks- und Gemeinschaftsgedanke im deutschen Bürgertum und unter den Intellektuellen der Republik große Verehrung genoß: es war weithin die Wirkung jener selben Publizisten, die auch mit den Ideen des autoritären Staates schwanger gegangen waren und im Liberalismus den Todfeind gesehen hatten: *die Neukonservativen*" (Sontheimer 1962, 309).

Socialism in Germany[118]. Borchardt's ultraconservative, radically anti-modern cultural criticism combines with a pronounced cultural elitism that is manifestly prone to political authoritarianism[119]. As a matter of fact, the far-reaching political implication of his elitist mindset is that since the modern 'masses' are no longer *Volk*, but rather formless matter prone to anarchy and cultural decay, they have to be guided by a strong *Führung* in the figure of an authoritarian personality[120]. Like many conservative intellectuals of the time, Borchardt believed in the necessity of an authoritarian political solution that would lead Germany out of its state of social crisis and cultural confusion. This is not the place to debate whether Borchardt ought to be considered a proto-fascist author. More important is to underline how he shared fundamental ideological, political-ideological and cultural-theoretical presuppositions not only with such prominent poets as Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Stefan George – with whom the connection is rather obvious (see Osterkamp 1997-II and Breuer 1995, 148) – but also with major (meta-)political thinkers of the conservative-revolutionary movement such as Moeller van der Bruck and Edgar Julius Jung[121] (who was friends with Borchardt, see Mohler 2005, 373 and Breuer 1997).

Borchardt's political inclination and cultural orientation also testify to the peculiar combination of apolitical mindset and meta-political aspirations that generally characterized the conservative bourgeois intelligentsia of turn-of-the-century and particularly Weimar Germany. This combination often determined a spiritualist approach towards political issues, emblematically documented by Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. Despite

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[118] As Rolf Peter Sieferle remarks: "Viele der konservativen Kritiker am Kapitalismus und der technischen Zivilisation versprachen sich vom Sieg des Nationalsozialismus eine Wende, eine Umkehr zu einer Politik, die die alten Werte wieder einsetzen sollte, die von Relativierung, 'Kulturbolschewismus', sozialdemokratischer 'Bonzenherrschaft', von Oberflächlichkeit und Materialismus bedroht waren" (Sieferle 1984, 210); "Der Nationalsozialismus versprach nichtnur eine Rettung des bedrohten sozialen Status, sondern die Verwirklichung des utopischen Traums von einer gesellschaftlichen, rassischen und kulturellen Einheit in der Volksgemeinschaft. Wuschzielt vieler seiner Anhänger war die ,'Rückkehr' in die vermeintliche Identität einer nicht-zerrissenen, d.h. nicht inautnomen Subsysteme differenzierten Lebenswelt, mit dem Versprechen von Einheit, Gemenscihfat, Rücknhame der psychischen und kulturellen Irritationene und Zumutungen der Moderne" (ibid. 211).

[119] What Steven E. Aschheim says about the George-*Kreis* also holds for Borchardt: "Whatever the internal differences, all adherents of the circle were overtly critical of the democratic system, especially the Americanized Weimar brand. They were patricians far removed from the vulgar Nazi sensibility. They contributed to an antiegalitarian, antidemocratic discourse that nevertheless aided the rise of a force they despised" (Aschheim 1992, 76).

[120] Cf. his essay "Führung" of 1931, in which he uses the word in a spiritual sense, yet with clear political overtones. Borchardt's attraction for authoritarian leadership explains his lifelong sympathy for Mussolini, even after his early break with German National Socialism.

[121] Edgar Julius Jung was ideologically close to Moeller van der Bruck and became the principal political thinker of the *Konservative Revolution* after the latter's death in 1925. He became friends with Borchardt (see Breuer 1997) after the publication of *Die Herrschaft der Minderwertigen* (1927), a book in which Jung gave vent to his contempt for mass society, parliamentarism and liberal democracy. The leveling '*Ideen von 1789*' for Jung had resulted in the impossibility in Germany to form true national elite. The result of this was the self-empowerment of the 'inferiors' ("Minderwertigen", as Jung says, in a way that is intentionally reminiscent of Nietzsche; see Weißmann 2004).

– or rather due to – its distance from real politics, such apolitical attitude was prone to support different forms of anti-parliamentary and anti-democratic, nationalist and authoritarian politics, as became manifest in the Weimar era. Borchardt's notion of cultural 'restoration' is accordingly ambivalent, political and apolitical at the same time. As early as 1909, at the time of his open rejection of George's aestheticism (see Osterkamp 1997-II), Borchardt had formulated this ambivalence, affirming "daß der Begriff der Kultur, wenn er unter den heutigen Umständen der nationalen Existenz zu Recht bestehen soll, nur ein *politischer Begriff* sein kann, oder zum mindesten eine politische Möglichkeit haben muß" (cited in Breuer 1995, 151; my italics). Along the same lines, in a later essay, entitled "Die Entwertung des Kulturbegriffs. Ein Unglück und ein Glück" (1928), he had tried to conceptually 'cleanse' the German notion of *Kultur* from its aestheticist overtones, and attempted to redefine it in ethical-religious and meta-political terms.

Within the same time frame, Borchardt had developed an understanding of poetry that emphasized its prophetical character, and consequently the poet's meta-political function within the national community (see Breuer 1996, 151 ff.). The poet becomes, particularly in the essays written before and during WWI, a prophet, a political and religious authority at once, and a mediator between God and *Volk* (see Borchardt, "Erbrechte der Dichtung", and Breuer 1995, 164). In Borchardt's poetic essays of the 20s poetry is furthermore defined as a sacred form of knowledge, the work of the poet as a holy recreation of God's own creation (see Borchardt, "Über den Dichter und das Dichterische" and "Dichten und Forschen"; also Breuer 1995, 159). The poet thus becomes something of a substitute for the godly in a growingly godless world. However, this godly essence is not so much religious as it is ethical and poetical. Both aspects converge in a metaphysical notion of national *Kultur*, which the poet should work to preserve from the political and social developments of the present. Poetry therefore becomes the last refuge of a threatened national genius, the work of the poet a foremost cultural-political activity:

> Wo Dynastien nicht mehr, wie in meinem armen Lande, die historische Continuität des Volkes darstellen und enthalten, wo die Gesellschaft zu zertrümmert ist, um sie zu bewahren, bleibet die Poesie die einzige Zuflucht und die einzige Vertreterin des nationalen Genius und seiner, wenn es sein muß, hoffnungslosen Intransigenz. (Borchardt, letter to Henri Buriot-Darsiles, cited in Breuer 1996, 166)

Such quasi-religious transfiguration of poetry makes Borchardt regard it as a special kind of artistic creation. In his 1924 essay "Über den Dichter und das Dichterische" he defines poetry as a transcendental, both secret and prophetic ur-language that is comparable to other, particularly visual, arts. For Borchardt these are basically forms of handicraft, characterized by a 'technical' mode of production and quality. Notably, Adorno took issue with such an understanding of poetry in a 1967 essay entitled "Die Kunst und die Künste", which is one of the major documents of his lifelong confrontation with the conservative poet. In the essay, designed for a public speech at the *Berliner Akademie der Künste*, Adorno tries to conceptualize art as a dialectical concept. To the question of whether 'art' can be thought of as a conceptual unity, Adorno responds affirmatively, though this unity contains a plurality of arts that are not reducible to each other. Adorno's dialectical argument in the essay avails itself of Borchardt as the representative of a radically conservative aesthetic position, which denies the unity of the arts and proclaims a special status for one of them, namely poetry:

> Versuche, die Frage nach dem Vorrang der Kunst oder der Künste bündig, für jene oder für diese, zu beantworten, stammen meist von *Kulturkonservativen*. Denn deren Interesse ist es, Kunst auf Invarianten zu bringen, die, offen oder latent nach Vergangenem gemodelt, zur *Diffamierung von Gegenwärtigem* und Zukünftigem taugen. Allenthalben neigt *konservatives, vollends reaktionäres Denken* zu Alternativen von Schafen und Böcken und zuckt zurück vorm Gedanken objektiver Widersprüchlichkeit in den Phänomenen. ... Der entschlossenste deutsche Fürsprecher einer qualitativen Differenz zwischen den Künsten, die kaum einen Begriff von Kunst mehr zuläßt, [war] *der zu extremem Archaismus neigende Rudolf Borchardt*. … Borchardts eigene Intention, niedergelegt in dem Essay "Über den Dichter und das Dichterische", ist von keiner Dialektik angekränkelt. Er möchte, unter Berufung auf Herder, das Dichterische als den Künsten gegenüber transzendente Ursprache, als 'seherisches Vermögen' aller Kunst entrücken. Kategorien wie Unanrührbarkeit, Götterschutz, Ausgenommensein, Heiligung seien der Dichtung eigen und nur ihr. ... Auf weniger nicht als auf die *unmetaphorische Apotheose der Dichtung* hat Borchardt es abgesehen. (*GS* 10.1, 442-443; my italics)

As might be expected, Adorno in the essay dismantels Borchardt's transfiguration of poetry by arguing that "auch das Medium der bildenden Kunst ist, wovon Borchardt sie distanzieren möchte, Sprache" (ibid. 444-445). However, Adorno does not spare words of admiration for Borchardt, presenting him as a "Sprachvirtuose ... [der] Pindar, Dante und mit Meisterschaft Swinburne ins Deutsche [übertrug" (ibid. 445). This admiration for Borchardt's poetic talent must have begun much earlier than Adorno's essay *Die Kunst und die Künste*, as testified by the number of Borchardt's volumes found in Adorno's personal library (see Schmidt 2004,

436 ff.). However, despite all admiration, in the 30s and 40s Adorno was not so much interested in a poetic evaluation of Borchardt, as he was concerned with the dangerous political inclinations of the restorative poet, as a short excerpt from the third part of *Minima Moralia* (1946-1047) shows:

> Unter den Formen, die Borchardt ausprobte, fehlt es nicht an Umbildungen von volksliedhaften. Er scheut sich 'Im Volkston' zu sagen, und nennt sie dafür: 'Im Tone des Volkes'. Das aber klingt wie: 'Im Namen des Gesetzes'. Der wiederherstellende Dichter schlägt in den preußischen Polizisten um. (*GS* 4, 218)

Adorno's poignant comment illuminates his attitude towards Borchardt in the time before and around WWII. For Adorno, Borchardt is not only a restorative and archaistic poet, but also a partisan right-wing conservative, who as such sympathizes with authoritarian politics. As the passage from *Minima Moralia* suggests, in the early 40s Adorno was familiar not only with Borchardt's poetry, but also with his cultural-political project of cultural restoration[122]. Against this background, the terms of Adorno's confrontation with Borchardt in *GEO* will, I hope, become clearer. Here the *Odyssey* is not only an object of philosophical interpretation, but also functions as the platform for a literary-critical as much as cultural-theoretical dispute with the political ideology and cultural politics of Rudolf Borchardt, whom Adorno treats as a foremost poetic representative of the *Konservative Revolution*. In order to show how this is the case, it will be necessary to take a closer look at Borchardt's afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* and see how Adorno relates to this text in the earlier version of his *Odyssey* chapter.

[122] According to Schmidt the formulation "wiederherstellende Dichter" in the passage suggests that Adorno knew of Borchardt's speech "Schöpferische Restauration", although the essay was published only in 1955 (see Schmidt 2004, 436).

2.5. The Polemical Backdrop of Adorno's "Geschichtsphilosophischer Exkurs zur *Odyssee*": Borchardt's Afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte*

The text by Borchardt which Adorno repeatedly refers to and quotes from in "Geschichtsphilosophischer Exkurs zur *Odyssee*" is the afterword (*Nachwort*) to *Pindarische Gedichte* (*PG*), the poet's transposition of Pindar's poetry into German. As can be inferred from the numerous and rather extensive quotations that are to be found in *GEO*, Adorno had carefully read this text, and consequently used it as a backdrop for his own *Odyssey* interpretation. The manifest polemical confrontation with Borchardt's afterword in fact not only opens Adorno's early excursus on the *Odyssey*, but also determines the argumentative structure of its first part (around 7-8 pages), which lays the interpretative foundation for the whole of Adorno's chapter – *both* in its earlier *and* final version. However, whereas in the former the references to and quotations from Borchardt's Pindaric afterword are explicit, in the final version the poet himself is mentioned only once, while excerpts from his work are completely missing. *Nevertheless* Adorno's argumentative construction in the edited version of the *Odyssey* chapter basically remains the same. Thus, in this later version as well Borchardt's text functions as a hidden 'foil' or polemical backdrop to Adorno's Homeric interpretation[123].

In order to see how Adorno uses Borchardt's arguments in *GEO* and in fact builds on them for his own argumentative construction, it will first be necessary to give a detailed picture of Borchardt's afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* and show how it bears, either explicitly or implicitly, on Adorno's original *Odyssey* chapter[124]. The treatment of Borchardt's activity as a public speaker served me in the preceding section to provide a historical and intellectual contextualization for his work as a literary scholar and philologist. Borchardt declaimed "Schöpferische Restauration" (1927) at the time when he was working on the translation of Pindar's poetry, which was first published in 1931. The speech displays remarkable similarities with his afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte*. The proof of the close

[123] In other words, even in the edited, final version of the *Odyssey* chapter Borchardt's Pindaric afterword remains a major source of inspiration for Adorno's Homeric interpretation. In the later version Borchardt's text has been either completely erased (particularly as far as quotations from his work are concerned) or shrewdly 'concealed', i.e., tacitly incorporated into Adorno's argument. The obliteration of Borchardt in the later version of the *Odyssey* chapter amounts to a true self-erasure of the context of reference and polemical motivation of Adorno's own text. I will not provide a close comparison of the two versions of this chapter, yet always point to the differences whenever needed to support my discussion.

[124] Quotations from Borchardt are given from the afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte*. I will specify whenever I quote Borchardt from Adorno's excursus on the *Odyssey*.

connection between the two texts is another public speech, entitled "Die Pindarische Restauration", which Borchardt held in 1930 at the *Gesellschaft für antike Kultur* in Berlin on invitation of the prominent Greek philologist Werner Jaeger (see Borchardt-Jaeger 2007). In the speech, Borchardt attempted to bridge the cultural-political project already presented in "Schöpferische Restauration" with his philological work, which he then put in a final form in the Pindaric afterword of 1931[125].

Borchardt's quite lengthy foreword is not just an appendix to the author's German rendition of Pindar's poetry, but rather constitutes a work of philological scholarly on its own. The work presents the results of his long-standing research in the field of ancient Greek poetry, and reflects the general "Interesse am Archaischen und Ursprünglichen" of German classical studies in the 1920s (Schmidt 2007-I, 197). As Esther Sophia Sünderhauf has shown in her study on the connection between the cult of Greece and cultural criticism in modern German intellectual history, the reception of Greek antiquity in the 20s and 30s was strongly influenced by the polarized political climate that dominated German society at the time. A number of classical philologists then attempted to establish classical studies as a conservative 'discipline of values' ("Wissenschaft der Werte", Sünderhauf 2003, 267), which they opposed to the 'liberal' relativism and values-free approach of mainstream 'science'. In doing so, they availed themselves of organicist-metaphysical arguments of Romantic-Idealistic descent, based on which they exerted a general criticism of 'neutral' scientific practice, which they saw as the expression of liberal market society. This criticism was much in the spirit of Borchardt, who in fact partakes, as a para-academic scholar, in the general reconfiguration of ancient philology at his time. Sünderhauf notes how this programmatically anti-modern "wissenschaftliche Semantik konkret gegen die liberale Kultur der Weimarer Republik gerichtet [war]" (ibid. 294). In fact, the search for "'Ganzheit' und 'Synthese' sowie die Verkündigung einer geistigen Erneuerung machte die betreffenden Altertumswissenschaftler zu Verbündeten der konservativen Revolution einerseits und der außerakademischen antidemokratischen Reaktion andererseits" (ibid.). This general cultural critical re-orientation

[125] As the title suggests, in the speech Borchardt seeks to make use of the notion of 'restoration' that he had worked out in "Schöpferische Restauration" by adapting it on a philological subject that he had a special predilection for, namely Pindar's poetry. The speech thus functions as a sort of discursive link and historical connector between the public speech "Schöpferische Restauration" and the philological afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte*. As Schmidt remarks – admittedly, in a quite convoluted manner, reflecting the idiosynchratic nature of Borchardt's own project – "Schöpferische Restauration ist damit ein Unternehmen, in dem sich kritische Philologie oder philologische Kritik, Geschichte bzw. Altertumswissenschaft und dichterische Schöpfung vereinen, oder anders gesagt, in welchem existentielle Geschichtshermeneutik aus der Not der Zeitgenossenschaft sich in den Dienst der Schöpfung aus Lieben für die Not der Zeitgenossenschaft stellt" (Schmidt 2007-I, 203).

of classical studies in the 20s explains the growing interest of many classical scholars in Greek archaic culture, where they could find (or imagine) the wished-for order that they missed contemporary society. It is within this context, characterized by a connection between anti-modern cultural criticism and a revaluation of Greek archaic culture ("Moderne-Kritik und Aufwertung der griechischen Archaik", ibid. 257) that Borchardt's work should be seen.

In his afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* Borchardt exposes his vision of an archaic Greek culture, which in his opinion has been forgotten already in Hellenistic times by mainstreat philology in the wake of the Ionian expansion throughout the Greek peninsula and the Aegean costs of Asia. Modern classical philology, according to Borchardt, would only have perpetuated this deceiving historical perspective, which he therefore intends to 'correct' through his own alternative cultural history of ancient Greece. This is how Borchardt's afterword programmatically begins: '

> Gerade weil auf den vorgehenden und nachfolgenden Seiten der dringend nötig gewordene Versuch gemacht wird, die Vorzeichen der geschichtsdialektischen Polaritäten der griechischen Völkergeschichte zu verkehren und Alt-Hellas nicht ausschließlich als dummen Grundstoff für die von immergleicher Seite kommende 'Kultur' oder als *demütige Folie für Homer und Athen anzusehen*, ist es nicht unnütz daran zu erinnern bis vor wie kurzer Zeit noch Griechenland von Asien aus gesehen worden ist, Althellas von den Theodolithen *ästhetischer Formen, wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse und attischer Kalligraphie* her, als ob es andere Seelen- und Erdenmächte als diese durchaus nicht gäbe, – die Dorier durch die ionische und philoionische Haßpropaganda derjenigen antiken Literatur, die man seelenruhig eine Presse nennen kann – denn auch diese hat echt griechische Ahnen –, die griechische Lyrik durch die Linsen des zufällig aufgeschriebene gerade auf uns Gelangten. *Das ist keine Geschichte*, und der Grundfehler hat sich an der Betrachtung aller griechischen Poesie, der Tragödie wie der Lyrik, gleichmäßig gerächt. (*PG* 105; my italics)

Borchardt's polemics against the one-sidedness of academic philology and its reduction of Hellenic cultural diversity to Homer and Attic classicism ("Folie für Homer und Athen") is based on literary-historical and cultural-theoretical assumptions which are reminiscent of Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie*. Not only the criticism of official academic philology, but also the identification of the latter with its privileged object of study – Homer and Attic classicism – reiterate and expand on Nietzsche's arguments in his early work. Although Borchardt does not openly base this stance on Nietzsche – in fact he did not sympathize with

him[126] – he embarks on a kind of critique of philology that is indeed genuinely Nietzschean in style and intention, in so far as it entails a criticism of 19th century progressive ideology and modern scientific culture[127] as well as their encroachment into philological and human studies:

> Zu so schlimmen Ärgernissen wie den eben angeführten, hat die *wissenschaftliche Betrachtungsweise des bürgerlichen Fortschrittes* durch ihr vitium originis verfürt werden müssen, alle Epochen der Weltgeschichte von dem Hauptquartier derjenigen Mächte aus zu klassieren, die sie ihrem eigenen Fortschritte gleichsetzt. (ibid. 103; my italics)

As was already the case in Nietzsche, in Borchardt's afterword the criticism of modern philology and its bourgeois-progressive bias translates into an attempt at a revision of the traditional academic image of ancient Greece[128]. His aim, therefore, is to sketch an *alternative* history of Greek literature, in order to 'amend' the "wertlose Blendwerke des gelehrten Euhemerismus, der in die Wissenschaft geflüchteten letzten Phase des Unheils unserer einseitigen Tradition, der konsequenten *ionischen Fälschung der echte Geschichte von Hellas*" (ibid.; my italics). His project thus configures itself as the writing of a 'minority' literary and cultural history, aimed at correcting the long-standing Ionian, i.e., classicist (or, in Nietzsche's terms, 'Apollonian') and rationalist distortion of the Greek past. Borchardt consequently sets out to recover the aboriginal cultural specificities and diverse subterranean tendencies of Hellenic culture, which the dominant philological tradition from the Hellenistic period on in his opinion had misleadingly come to reduce to a univocal teleology that culminates in Attic culture[129].

Indeed, for Borchardt an essential constituent of the 'ideological' delusion ("Blendwerken") of most modern or 'progressive' philology is the unjustified appreciation of the Homeric epics as the foremost original documents of ancient Greek literature and culture. One of the main tasks of the afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* is to question the legitimacy

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[126] "Für Borchardt war Nietzsche schlicht ein Hysteriker, auf den er sich kaum anders als negativ bezog" (Breuer 1995, 228). In spite of this, Borchardt was closer to Nietzsche than he himself might have admitted.

[127] 'Science' for Borchardt becomes questionable as soon as it turns into an automatic mechanism, which "die Grundfrage unerörtert lässt, die … im Herzen der Menschheit nicht zur Ruhe kommt, die Frage nach dem Wert des Lebens" (Schmidt 2007-I, 201). Science then merely proceeds by force of habit, following its current informing paradigm (in Kuhn's sense; see Schmidt 2007-I, 201), and thus forgets its original reasons. Borchardt's criticism is obviously directed above all at philological science.

[128] For Borchardt's critique of classical philology see Steiger 2003, 67 ff.

[129] Borchardt thus in a way intends to write a 'secret' history – a history of the repressed and forgotten – of ancient Greek culture.

of this long-standing philological cliché. The text therefore offers an unorthodox revision of the 'myth' of both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (particularly the latter) as representative forms of Hellenic *Volksdichtung*:

> Das ein Lied? Gesang? Musik und Muse? ... das der Anfang einer Urpoesie menschlicher Heroenalter? ... es ist teils ihre herrliche blühende, teils überblühte Reife, teils schon ihr barocker und gelegentliche kernloser Luxus, nicht die fünfte und zehnte, die unzähligfache Formstufe, eine wenn das Wort irgend einen Sinn hat, *moderne*, siegreich weltmäßige und geistreich *zeitfähige* poetische *Literatur* im souveränen Besitz unfaßbar allseitiger Mittel und schon völlig *ohne Bindung* and die dunklen Schmerzens- und Pflichtenreiche der Seele, in denen das Wort spärlich wird wie die Perle, und die sich *nicht der Aufklärung* durch hübschen Ausdruck erschließen, sondern nur in Tönen, durch den Ton, der das Wort bricht, verklären. (ibid. 107; also cited in *GEO* 42)

Borchardt's evaluation of Homer's epics is based on a set of oppositions ('modern' vs. 'ancient'; 'mundane' vs. 'spiritual'; 'open' vs. 'close'; 'enlightened' vs. 'obscure'; 'narrative' vs. 'tragic') that are strongly reminiscent of Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie*. This similarity is particularly evident in Borchardt's contrast between the 'enlightened' and 'frivolous' formalism of the Homeric epics ("Aufklärung"; "hübschen Ausdruck") and the "Schmerzens- und Pflichtenreiche der Seele" of heroic poetry[130]. The Homeric epics are depicted by Borchardt as a 'prosaic' form of poetry, that is an artful (in Nietzschean terms: 'Apollonian') literary elaboration and indeed 'distortion' of a supposedly older mythical substratum. Contrary to long-standing opinion, they would thus by no means constitute a form of original poetry representative of ancient Greek culture, but rather be the epigonic result of a manifold artistic elaboration born out and reflective of the 'public sphere' (markets and courts) of the Greek Mediterranean and as such contaminated with the language of commerce, exchange and dissimulation[131]. Particularly the *Odyssey* for Borchardt would be "im Ursinne überhaupt

[130] In the "Versuch einer Selbstkritk" preposed to his second edition of his youth work Nietzsche had eulogized the Greek "Willen zum Tragischen" (Nietzsche 1954, 13) and "Pessimismus der Stärke", defined as "eine intellektuelle Vorneigung für das Harte, Schauerliche, Böse, Problematische des Daseins aus Wohlsein, aus überströmender Gesundheit, aus *Fülle* des Daseins ... ein Leiden an der Überfülle selbst?" (ibid. 9).

[131] In particular, according to Borchardt's philological reconstruction the Homeric epics ought to be seen as the product of a late formalist codification developed by a guild of professional rhapsodists for the purpose of entertainment of the urban masses in such places as fairs and markets. In the following passage Borchardt explains his viewpoint in detail, remarking his distance from the common notion of the Homeric epics as folk poetry – that is, according to his own notion of poetry, as poetry tout court – through the apt use of quotations: "das Epos, die 'homerische Poesie' ... aus dem die Schullehre von altersher Poesie und Geist Griechenlands ableitet, ist eine Schöpfung der helleno-asiatischen Auswanderung, entstanden in den rasch emporgeschossenen und *auf jungen Reichtum gelagerten Kauf- und Schifferstädten* der Küste Kleinasiens ... getragen von Gilden fahrender Spielleute, die in langsam gewohnter Technik der Sprache eine tradierbare stehende Form, dem Stil

nicht mehr Mythos" (*PG* 109) – in the emphatic sense of earth-bound, faith-driven national poetry – but rather a kind of entertaining, i.e., 'commercial' narration, in which "die mythische Voraussetzungen ... in der totalen Umgestaltung aller Motive ... auf *höfische und Marktideale* zu fast weniger als Vorstufen stofflicher Motive geworden [sind]" (ibid.; also cited in *GEO* 42). The polemical reference to 'court' and 'market' (the 'public sphere' of the times) is revealing of the ideological-political presuppositions of Borchardt's aesthetic-poetic judgment. The critique of 'capitalist' market economy and 'liberal' democratic society is in fact part of the consolidated array of the conservative-revolutionary *Kulturkritik* of Weimar Germany (see 1.2.).

In *GEO* Adorno explicitly quotes the above passages as telling examples of Borchardt's 'ideological' use of Nietzschean categories for his revisionist Homeric interpretation. According to Adorno, in Borchardt's philological work Nietzsche's mythical figuration of opposed aesthetic principles ('Apollonian' vs. 'Dionysian', 'enlightened' vs. 'obscure') has been turned into a natural, i.e., qualitative distinction supported by historical, ethnical and class arguments. Borchardt accordingly had transformed "den theoretischen Gegensatz des Dionysischen und Apollinischen in einen historischen, ethnischen und schließlich einen des Ranges" (*GEO* 37). This biased interpretation ("parteiischen Antithesen", ibid.) results in the belief that the 'Dionysian' (cultic, irrational and esoteric) principle of 'tragic' poetry is superior to the expressive composedness, rational clarity and 'enlightened' mastery of form that much official 19th century philology had generally attributed to Greek art[132]. This willful contraposition is the reason for Adorno's polemical confrontation with Borchardt throughout the first section of *GEO*, which aims at a substantial critical revision of the latter's disparaging Homeric interpretation.

In the afterword to his German translation of Pindar's poetry, Borchardt brings Nietzsche's aesthetic and theoretical categories to extremes of poetic intransigence and rigor. In doing so, the poet also clearly manifests the strong ideological assumptions of his literary-historical revision of Homer. A longer quote from Borchardt's reconstruction of the historical development of the Homeric epics might help further clarify this position:

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feste Mittel zugeschnitten haben, vom einzelnen Spielmann bei den großen *Messen und Märkten* dieser Mittelpunkte des Warentausches und der Landesverteidigung vorgetragen, in Stücken mäßigen Umfanges, nach kurzem Harfenvorspiel zu gesungenen Götteranrufung ins deklamierte Rezitativ übergehend, das sich durch die künstliche Akzentuierung, wie im serbischen 'Volkslied', das auch nicht gesungen, sondern skandiert gesprochen wird, hinlänglich von der Tagessprache abhob" (*PG* 99).

[132] This 'Dionysian' cult became a widespread phenomenon in German post-Nietzschean culture during the first decades of the 20th century (see Aschheim 1992).

> Die Welt der homerischen Poesie ist von seinen alten auf neue menschliche Träger transponiert worden, von den Formen einer verschollenen *Nationalpoesie* auf die Vorstellungen, Bedürfnisse, Anlagen, 'Kulturformern' neuer Nationen und neuer geschichtlichen Räume. Nur in den alten, verschollenen hatten sich Ausdrucksmaß und Lebensgehalt wirklich gedeckt, Charakter und Vorgang, Erinnerung und Auffassung, Ethos und Pathos, nur in ihnen war es *Lied* gewesen, hatte Einer es vor den Seinen singen, es von den Seinen singen lassen können, nicht um sie zu unterhalten oder zu spannen, sondern feierlich im allverbindenden Festsinne, geschlossen an einen einmalige, *so und nicht anders beschaffene Gliederung der Gesellschaft* nach allen Seiten, im Raum- und Zeitsinne, nach vorn und hinten, oben und unten. Mit der völligen Umgliederung der Gesellschaft auf dem Boden der asiatischen Auswanderung war alles, was durch ihren Bau bestimmt gewesen war, geschichtlich *entwurzelt*, im Mutterlande lebte es zwar länger aber ebensowenig wie dort über die Schwellen der *Demokratie* hinaus. Der gemeinsame Urbesitz wird in Asien, zugleich sich abgründig *denaturierend*, zum 'Epos' ... des schrankenlos entwickelten, *Heimat*sitten entfremdeten, redemächtig und wortbeseligt rauschenden Sprach-, Literatur- und Menschenwesens. (*PG* 108; my italics)

The passage reads as a piece of historical *Kulturkritik* of Greek colonial 'modernity' ("asiatische Neuzeit", ibid. 110). The implicit references to Borchardt's own present are clearly evinced by the lamentation about the decadence of mores ("Heimatsitten entfremdeten") and the criticism of the 'entertainment' industry ("unterhalten oder ... spannen") of Greek 'democratic' society. The strong conservative assumptions that Borchardt projects onto early Greek antiquity ("so und nicht anders beschaffene Gliederung der Gesellschaft") determine his negative portrayal of the socio-cultural dynamics brought about by the cultural 'modernization' of Greece within the homeland – through society's 'democratization' – and abroad, through Asian colonization. Seen as representative of a mundane, 'civilized' sensibility and sensation-seeking urban culture, the Homeric epics are for Borchardt a document of the incipient cultural decadence of ancient Greece, reflecting that of present Germany[133].

This picture of decadence of the democratic and colonial phase of Greek civilization combines in Borchardt's historical retrospect with the backward idealization of a plant-like and earth-bound state of culture manifest in the original forms of a 'national' Greek poetry ("Nationalpoesie"). Along with his aesthetic revision of the Homeric epics, his afterword aims at restoring the aboriginal 'choric' poetry of mainland Greece to its putative central position within the history of Hellenic culture. Borchardt understands this poetic form as a national-

[133] "In etwas schematischer Form läßt sich das Pindarnachwort so charakterisieren: Borchardt verbindet Karl Ottfried Müllers Bild der Dorer mit Walter Paters Polarität der ionische-asiatischen zentrifugalen und der echt hellenisch dorischen zentripetalen Kräfte im antiken Griechentum im Kontext der altertumswissenschaftlichen Neubeurteilung der Archaik und des neuen Interesses an Pindar im Deutschland der Zwischenkriegszeit und übersetzt dies in die Sprache konservativer Kulturkritik der Weimarer Epoche" (Schmidt 2007-I, 199).

mythical chant, "am Boden haftend[e] ... Heldensage und Heldenlied" (ibid. 107), sung before the community by a priest-poet in ritual gatherings of cultic import and religious character[134]. Whereas the Homeric epics for Borchardt are no more myth at all, the "mutterländische Poesie ist ... überhaupt nichts als Mythos ... dichterischer Anfang der heroischen Menschheit Griechenlands und des Abendlandes" (ibid. 108-109).

Borchardt's conception of Pindar as the representative national poet of an old aristocratic Greece serves to give a specific physiognomy to this cultural-historical projection. The contrast to Homer as a rhapsodic market narrator and impious debunker of the mythical beliefs of ancient Greece, he sees Pindar as the last heroic representative and 'anachronistic' restorer[135] of the "altfestländische Lyrik" (ibid. 108), as a true aristocratic poet preserving the core of Doric culture and its religious mythology[136]. Borchardt's depiction of Pindar as a 'noble' poet, frugal in his verbal economy, hardcore conservative in his social ideology and religious beliefs, clearly expresses his own project of cultural restoration:

> Den in solche Zucht gebundenen Mann, der auch all seine praktische Äußerung bewußt und im Sinne seiner *Standesethik* bindet, um sie nur als ideale Äußerung, nur *festlich und feierlich im Gesange* zu befreien, hat die *ionische Rhapsodie* ebenso überwinden wie die *ionische Demokratie* unbegreiflich finden und im Hohlspiegel ihrer Verzerrung historisch vernichten müssen. 'Wes das Herz voll ist, des geht der Mund über', sagt der wortreiche Orient. 'Was man am meisten begehrt' antwortet Pindar für sein altes Volk, 'der Mund verschweigt es'. (*PG* 103; cited in *GEO* 39-40; my italics)

Pindar is for Borchardt the model of an original poetic form and aristocratic cultural ethos which was overshadowed by the developments of Hellenic society following democratization

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[134] This is how Borchardt stylizes Greek choric chant in his Berlin speech "Die Pindarische Restauration": "Ein griechisches Chorlied ist *keine Literatur und kein Buch* sondern eine in vorgeschriebenen Formen vollzogene *heilige Handlung* uralt sinnbildlichen Charakters" (Borchardt, "Die Pindarische Restauration", 95). Borchardt constructs Greek choric chant as a form of community ritual, as such diametrically opposed to all forms, ancient and modern, of entertaining 'literature' ("keine Literatur und kein Buch") produced for 'mass' consumption in urban settings (as is the case of Homer's epic poetry). Borchardt's construct obviously reflects his own notion of poetry as a quasi-ritual activity (which as such should be 'restored'). For the nexus between literature and ritual in modern literature and poetry see Braungart 1996.

[135] As Ernst A. Schmidt notes with regard to Borchardt's speech *Pindarische Restauration*, the latter phrase means "wohl mehr als Pindar der Restaurator: Sie deutet auch auf das Programm heutiger Restauration nach Pindars Weise" (Schmidt 2007-I, 194). This program is paradoxical, because "Pindar ist, was er ist, nämlich altgriechische Lyrik, als causa victa sowohl wie als Restaurator" (ibid. 192), as such "eine moderne Figur und eine geschichliche Unmöglichkeit" (ibid. 195). It seems plausible to conclude that this is the situation of Borchardt himself.

[136] Borchardt's notion of Doric culture was influenced by a classical work of 19th century German philology, namely Karl Otfried Müller's two-volume *Die Dorier*, published in 1824 (see Wyss 1997, 120). Besides, Borchardt's ideas on poetry, language and culture owe much to Johann Gottfried Herder's Romantic philosophy, which the poet became acquainted with already in his youth (see Kraft 1961).

within the homeland and Asian colonization abroad. Ionic rhapsodic poetry, as the expression of 'market' culture, overcame the national *Heimatkultur* of mainland Greece. The original poetic forms of the Greek peninsula were uprooted ("entwurzelt") and denaturated ("abgründig denaturier[t]", ibid. 108) through migration and contamination with other cultural forms abroad, resulting in a vulgarizing epic form and a 'democratic chattering of the letters' in market forums and spaces of public congregation[137].

Against this backdrop, it becomes clear why Adorno opens *GEO* with an implicit reference to Borchardt as a 'partisan' late-Nietzschean: "Dunkler Gesang und rationale Rede, gnomische Prägung und geläufige Kommunikation, dorische Chorlyirik und jonisches Epos sind die *parteiischen* Antithesen, zu welchen die Nietzsches in der Auslegung der griechischen Poesie sich entfaltete" (*GEO* 37-8). In *Die Geburt der Tragödie* Nietzsche had already occasionally stretched the contrast between the visual-rational quality of the epics ('solar', 'enlightened', 'Apollonian') and the musical-sensual character of tragic poetry ('dark', 'obscure', 'Dionysian') to a point of mutual incomprehensibility: "Vom Standpunkte des Epos ist diese ungleiche und unregelmäßige Bilderwelt der Lyrik einfach zu verurteilen" (Nietzsche 1954, 41). The "fortwährend gebärende ... ursprüngliche Melodie" of tragic chant, producing a wild "Buntheit ... jähen Wechsel ... tolles Sichüberstürzen" of poetic images and moods, was for Nietzsche essentially opposed to the 'pictorial' self-containedness and clarity of the "völlig apollinischen Epos" (ibid.).

Although he does not explicitly refer to Nietzsche, Borchardt emphasizes this irreconcilable difference and infuses it into his own strongly evaluative reconstruction of the history of Greek poetry. Throughout his afterword he elaborates on the emphatic opposition between the prosaic quality of the Homeric epics – which he refers to as '*Rede*', meaning entertaining market chit-chat – and the musical character of the original Greek *Volksdichtung*, which he defines as '*Lied*' ('true' poetic chant). Borchardt depicts an historical evolution of

[137] I borrow the phrase 'democratic chattering of the letters' from Jaques Rancière's essay "The Politics of Literature" (Rancière 2004). 'Politics of literature' in Rancière's understanding means that "literature is involved in [a] partition of the visible and the sayable, in [a] intertwining of being, doing and saying that frames a polemical common world" (ibid. 10). In this sense, 'literature' in the modern, i.e., post-Enlightenment understanding of the term (as opposed to the old '*belles-lettres*') signifies for Rancière "a new regime of writing, and another way of relating to politics, resting on this principle: writing is not imposing one will on another, in the fashion of the orator, the priest or the general. It is displaying and deciphering the symptoms of a state of things", since "in the times of literature, mute things speak better than any orator" (ibid. 18). Rancière refers to the novel (particularly to Flaubert) as the defining genre of this new "democratic literariness" (ibid. 21), opposed to the "representational hierarchy" presupposed by the old '*belles-lettres*' genres (mainly tragedy and poetry). It is against this quintessentially 'modern' connotation of literature, which constitutionally upsets "any steady relationship between manners of speaking, manners of doing and manners of being" (ibid. 14), that Borchardt develops his anti-modernist poetic theory, aimed at restoring a normative "connection between meaning and willing" (ibid. 16) as well as the old "principle of appropriateness between a style and a subject matter" (ibid. 13).

poetic forms that is based on this stark juxtaposition: "In dieser Gegensätzlichkeit drückt sich ein *geschichtlicher Vorgang* aus ... der Sieg Ioniens über Griechenland ist ... *ein Sieg des Mundes gewesen*" (*PG* 102, ibid. ; my italics). '*Mund*' here means the 'chatting' epic form, which, according to Borchardt, in ancient Greece was clearly distinguished from the original 'musical' poetry of mainland Greece: "Hellas hat das fremde Kunstmaß ... nicht als eine *musikalische* Ordnung im Sinne *seiner eigenen dichtenden Musik* empfunden und übernommen, sondern als eine redende, redemächtige, überredende, als Bericht und Erzählung" (ibid.; my italics).

Borchardt turns Nietzsche's qualitative opposition between the prosaic 'Apollonian' epics and the poetic 'Dionysian' tragedy into an historical development, while maintaining and indeed exacerbating the former's critical evaluation of Homer. Through such a stark aesthetic contraposition he thus paradoxically (that is counter to the common philological *doxa* or opinion) portrays the Homeric epics as a poetic form that is essentially 'foreign' to mainland Greece, where it would putatively have been retro-imported from the urban locations of the Greek Asian colonization. Peculiar to and original of archaic continental Greece would, instead, be a 'choric' form of folk poetry, characterized by a strong musical order ("musikalische Ordnung") reflective of that of the community, and starkly opposed to the non-musical, gabbling and entertaining prose of the Greek colonial epics, which mirror the moral and aesthetic anarchy of a proto-democratic civilization[138].

As I have already mentioned, Borchardt's belittling aesthetic judgment of the Homeric epics and his contrastive evaluation of Pindar's archaic poetry involve unmistakable political-ideological as well as cultural-theoretical implications. His hardcore Romantic-conservative dictum combines a denigrating picture of urban civilization, the public sphere and market society with an underlying criticism of official philology and its progressive-bourgeois bias. Seen from this perspective, Adorno's summary account of the gist of Borchardt's arguments in *GEO* appears understandable: "Homer, die kolonialgeschichtliche Erzählung, wird zu der von *Fahrer und Händlern* gestempelt, die dem Hofpoeten der Fabrikherren [Borchardt A/N] verächtlich sind. An den Mantel des Epikers ist der *gelbe Fleck* geheftet" (*GEO* 39; my italics). In other words, Homer is made into a Jew by Borchardt, into someone tainted with the sphere of circulation and exchange, faithless and cunning: the representative of an intellectual

[138] Borchardt's ideal construction of the choric poetry also closely reminds of Nietzsche's derivation of Greek tragedy from the 'spirit' of music (*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*). Nietzsche identified the original core of the tragedy in the choir, a form which he saw strictly related to, indeed deriving from the *Volkslied*. This quintessentially 'Dionysian' form, which he described as a "musikalischer Weltspiegel" of the community, represented for him already "eine dem epischen Scheine und seinem ruhigen Fortströmen wildfremde Kraft" (Nietzsche 1954, 41).

and mercantile, cosmopolitan civilization that in diverse right-wing political groups of the Weimar period (from the *Jungkonservative* to the *Völkische* and the *Nationalrevolutionäre*) was generally branded as 'Jewish'[139].

Adorno's polemical remark has a broader scope than Borchardt's contemptuous judgment of Homer. Here the "widersinnige[r] Reaktionär" (*GEO* 39) Rudolf Borchardt stands for an ensemble of conservative-revolutionary thinkers, "die organologisch-realpolitischen Nutznießer Nietzsches von Spengler über Klages bis hinaus zu Borchardt" (ibid. 40). Despite their (at times remarkable) political-ideological as well as philosophical-aesthetical differences, all these figures share two fundamental cultural-theoretical *as well as* poetical assumptions: 1) a late-Romantic understanding of *culture as an organism* grounded on nature as both its genetic origin and defining conceptual limit; 2) a corresponding notion of art, and of poetry in particular, as a symbolic 'excrescence', so to speak, of this original *natural substratum*, furthermore, as the predestined task of a cultural elite of exceptional individuals.

The philosophies of culture of both Spengler (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*) and Klages (*Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*) mix historical, ethnical and class arguments in a comprehensive picture of history with strongly conservative features and anti-modernist implications[140]. Borchardt's idea of the development of Greek poetry from original Doric culture to decadent Ionic (colonial) civilization is reminiscent of Spengler's philosophy of history in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, which is articulated through a meta-historical scheme of development from original, earth-bound *Kultur* to boundless, nomadic and cosmopolitan *Zivilisation*[141]. Paraphrasing Spengler's then notorious categories, the

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[139] See Mohler 2005, 99 ff.; Mosse 1991, 139. For the German controversy about modernist art and literature in the interwar period see Bollenbeck 1999, 194 ff. The polemic against the sphere of circulation was also a cultural critical topos within the George-*Kreis* (see Kolk 2005, 45).

[140] The most representative philosophical work of the *Kultur*-ideology of the *Konservative Revolution*, Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes*, exemplarily elaborates the widespread anti-modern *topoi* of Weimar's conservative *Kulturkritik* into a comprehensive organic theory and elitist metaphysics of culture (see 1.3.). According to Spengler, cultural history basically corresponds to the history of specific ethnic groups, defined not so much by blood, as rather by a common cultural fate and belonging. Particularly the leading individuals of these groups incarnate the specific *Kulturseele* of their 'race', seen as a quasi-natural substratum persisting in the face of all historical change. The term 'race' was not understood by Spengler in racial-biological terms, as the Nazi later did, but rather in cultural-historical terms.

[141] Significantly, in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* Oswald Spengler seems to share on his part Borchardt's view of the Homeric epics: "Man muß sich ... klar machen, daß die erst in der *Kolonialzeit* schriftlich fixierten Gesänge nur in einer *städtischen Literatur* – und nicht in der höfischen Umgangssprache vorliegen können, in welcher sie zuerst vorgetragen worden sind" (*UA* 744, footnote 46; my italics). As in Borchardt, so too in Spengler real poetic 'chant' can only emerge in a courtly environment, from which it would later spread over to cities, thereby degenerating into 'literature'. In the following passage, Spengler offers a world-historical panorama that is very similar to Borchardt's portrayal of the cultural and linguistic conditions from which Homer's poetry emerged: "Es entsteht in der Oberschicht weltstädtischer Bevölkerungen eine gleichförmige, intelligente, praktische, *den Dialekten und der Poesie abgeneigte κοινέ*, wie sie zur Symbolik jeder Zivilisation

cosmopolitan Homeric epics are depicted by Borchardt as an indication of the decay of Greek *Kultur* and its representative national 'lyrics' to decadent pan-Hellenic *Zivilisation* and its entertaining literature for the 'masses':

> Chöre, die zum Liede tanzten, und denen ein Mann Lied und Tanz eingeübt hatte, gab es auch in Asien, und Homer kennt ihre Urformen, aber die Entwicklung der Gemeinden zu *neustädtischen Typen der Menge* ... ihre Mischung mit einheimischer, kaum flach hellenisierter, Bewohnerschaft war der Entwickelung dieser altheiligen Formen, von denen gemessene Reize ausgingen und die keine Neugier spannten, nicht günstig gewesen: die Institution hatte die *Verpflanzung* nicht lange überlebt. Wie im Oriente ... lief die Menge zum Erzähler. Noch erfand er [Homer, A/N] nicht: er überlieferte, und malte breit aus, ein Heldenbuch, Waffentaten, Irrfahrten, konsolidierte Bestände, die aus der Gestaltenflut des Väterreichtums langsam zu Vereinzelung abgetrocknet waren, Verknüpfung gewonnen hatten bereits in der Andeutung einer charakterethischen Linie liefen und zu etwas Geschichtsähnlichem mit *Romanfäden* strebten. Aus dem Nichts aber stammte an diesen Soffen und ihrem ursprünglichen Pragmatismus nicht viel. Sie waren als erbe älter als die Einwanderung und einmal urheimisch-gemeingriechisch gewesen, als Heldensage und Heldenlied. (*PG* 106; also quoted in *GEO* 41; my italics)

Borchardt traces an evolution of poetic genres that actually reads as a history of organic decadence, set in motion by a process of cultural uprooting and transplantation ("Verpflanzung"). At the final stage of this development he places the Homeric epics, which he sees as a freestyle literary elaboration of age-old Doric mythological poetry. In this view, the latter decayed in Homer to a 'novel' genre, featuring novelistic qualities in terms of style and structure ("malte breit aus ... Romanfäden"), topic and content ("Waffentaten, Irrfahrten"), reception modes and conditions of consumption ("Reize ... Neugier ... wie im Oriente ... lief die Menge zum Erzähler"). Borchardt's criticism of Homer is also unmistakably one of his own present: "Der Sieg der Demokratie ist hier wie in Mittelalter und Neuzeit *das Ende der Poesie*. Was übrig bleibt, hier wie dort, ist *Literatur*, die der neuen Gesellschaft das Bild ihrer Misere liefert" (ibid.; my italics).

The historical revision of the Homeric epics is programmatically pursued by Borchardt with a radical critical intention towards the culture of post-Enlightenment modernity, which

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gehört, etwas ganz Mechanisches, präzis, kalt und mit einer auf ein Minimum beschränkten Geste. Diese letzten, *Heimat- und wurzellosen Sprachen* können von jedem Händler und Lastträger gelernt werden, das Hellenische in Karthago und am Oxus, das Chinesische auf Java, das Englische in Schanghai, und das 'Sprechen' ist für ihr Verständnis bedeutungslos. Fragt man nach ihrem eigentlichen Schöpfer, so ist es nicht der Geist einer Rasse oder einer Religion, sondern lediglich der *Geist der Wirtschaft*" (*UA* 745; my italics).

he associates in spirit with the early 'modern' developments of Greek civilization[142]. In truth, his attempt at a historical assessment of ancient Greek poetry serves him to legitimate his own present-related poetic theory and cultural politics. The rediscovery of Pindar as the 'noble' poet of the Doric homeland fuels his restorative fantasy of an intact pre-social as well as pre-modern, *communal and primitive* originality, and establishes a counter-image to the misery that he attributes to modern democratic, urban mass society. The primitivist impetus towards a poetic restoration of the original cultural community furthermore explains his verdict on the Homeric epics as a 'modern' elaboration of the mythical *Volksdichtung* following migration and cultural contamination. Borchardt belittles the Homeric epics precisely because they are not organic, i.e., *Heimat*-poetry – impregnated with an original ethnic 'ethos', born within the *Volksgemeinschaft* and sung before it by a poet-priest – but rather the result of a late artistic elaboration following migration, cultural transference and re-settlement: all processes which he considers to be unfavorable to true cultural flowering[143].

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[142] Borchardt's cultural criticism of the 'novelistic', i.e., social and enlightened, anti-mythical and disenchanted character of the Homeric epics reminds of Nietzsche's anti-novelistic sentiment in *Geburt der Tragödie*. Though here the negative emphasis is more on the rational-dialectical, rather than social-enlightened aspect of 'Apollonian' art – from Homer to Euripides and Plato – the argument is basically the same as in Borchardt: 'literature' subordinates poetry and poetic experience (what Borchardt calls 'myth') to rational thinking. The 'novel' is in Nietzsche, as in Borchardt, the foremost literary genre of such 'rationalistic' disenchantment of the world: "Wirklich hat für die ganze Nachwelt Plato das Vorbild einer neuen Kunstform gegeben, das Vorbild des *Romans*: der als die unendlich gesteigerte äsopische Fabel zu bezeichnen ist, in der die *Poesie* in einer ähnlichen Rangordnung zur dialektischen Philosophie lebt, wie viele Jahrhunderte hindurch dieselbe Philosophie zur Theologie: nämlich als *ancilla*. Dies war die neue Stellung der Poesie, in die sie Plato unter dem Drucke des dämonischen Sokrates drängte. Hier überwächst der philosophische Gedanke die Kunst und zwingt sie zu einem engen Sich-Anklammern an den Stamm der Dialektik. In dem logischen Schematismus hat sich die *apollinische Tendenz* verpuppt ... denn wer vermöchte das optimistische Element im Wesen der Dialektik zu verkennen, das in jedem Schlusse sein Jubelfest feiert und allein in kühler Helle und Bewußtheit atmen kann: das optimistische Element, das, einmal in die Tragödie eingedrungen, ihre dionysischen Regionen allmählich überwuchern und sie notwendig zur Selbstvernichtung treiben muß – bis zum Todessprunge ins bürgerliche Schauspiel" (Nietzsche 1954, 80-81; my italics). As is the case with Borchardt, Nietzsche's cultural criticism is directed towards the present, though it is disguised in the form of an argument about the past. Nietzsche's definition of the Platonic dialogues as 'novels' is not entirely new: already Friedrich Schlegel had defined them as the novels of their time (see Bachtin 1981, 22).

[143] In *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* Spengler describes the 'old-new' man of civilization and its culture ("dialektisch, praktisch, plebejisch"; *UA* 460) in a way that is strongly reminiscent of Borchardt: "Angesichts dieser neuen, rein geistigen Bildungen darf man über ihren lebendigen Träger nicht im Zweifel sein, den 'neuen Menschen' als der er hoffnungsvoll von allen Niedergangszeiten empfunden worden ist. Es ist der formlos durch alle Großstädte flutende *Pöbel an Stelle des Volkes*, *die wurzellose städtische Masse*, οί πολλοί, wie man in Athen sagte, an Stelle des mit der Natur verwachsenen, selbst auf dem Boden der Städte noch bäuerlichen Menschentums einer Kulturlandschaft. Es ist der Agorabesucher Alexandrias und Roms und sein 'Zeitgenosse', der moderne Zeitungsleser; es ist der 'Gebildete', jener Anhänger eines Kultus des geistigen Mittelmaßes und der Öffentlichkeit als Kultstätte, damals wie heute; es ist der antike und abendländische Mensch der Theater und Vergnügungsorte, des Sports und der *Literatur des Tages*", ibid.; my italics). Classist and racist arguments mingle in Spengler in a way that is typical of radical cultural conservatism in his time. Rolf Peter Sieferle has pointed to the central role played by anthropological and cultural racism (as opposed to its biological and eugenic version) in conservative cultural critical discourses of early 20th-century and Weimar Germany: "Die Rassentheorie bildete eine häufig wiederkehrende Erklärungsfigur der romantisch-konservativen Zivilisationskritik. ... Ihr Kern bestand zunächst nur in der Annahme, dass es genetisch unterscheidbare Menschenrassen gibt, die nicht nur physiologische Unterschiede aufweisen, sondern auch unterschiedliche kulturelle Vorlieben und Ausdrucksformen besitzen. Ein Zustand 'reiner Rasse' was daher auch einer *kultureller*

Borchardt's wholesale rejection of cultural modernity[144] and its representative (from mass to avant-garde) artistic as well as literary forms is not unique in the intellectual panorama of his time. It well reflects the anti-modernist mood of vast sectors of the *bildungsbürgerliche* literary intelligentsia both before and after WWI (see 1.1.). To equate literature (especially novel writing) and *Zivilisation* was a common feature of the conservative-revolutionary (but also national-conservative and *völkische*) *Kulturkritik* in the Weimar period, as testified by Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (1918)[145]. '*Dichtertum*' and '*Schriftstellertum*' became in the 20s the terms of such an intense literary, aesthetic and cultural-political debate that it even regarded the Prussian Academy or Arts[146]. At that time, the opposed notions "vom deutschen Dichter und vom unvölkischen Schriftsteller" (Herden 1984, 1942) were common currency. Moreover, the talk of modern civilization as a state of existential '*Heimatlosigkeit*', ontological '*Entwurzelung*' and transcendental '*Obdachlosigkeit*' – which Lukács in his influential work *Theorie des Romans* (1916) designated as the epochal precondition of the model novel form, as opposed to the ancient epics – constituted a firm *topos* of cultural and literary discourses of the time, regardless of political preferences and ideological orientation.

Eigenständigkeit, völkischer Besonderheit und Bodenständigkeit. Die Einheit von rassisch geschlossenem 'Volk' und des ihm eigenen, von ihm gestalteten 'Bodens' manifestierte sich dann in einer widerspruchsfreien, *geschlossenen und starken Kultur*. Die Rassentheorie liefet hier also eine biologische Umschriebung und Fundierung des älteren '*Heimat*'-Begriffs. ... Auf dem Gegenpol sah sie ['romantisch-konservative Zivilisationskritik', A/N] einen Zustand der totalen *rassischen Vermischung*, des *Untergangs kultureller Eigenart*, der *gesellschaftlichen Egalisierung* und der Homogenisierung von Land und Stil. Von dieser Folie konnte die Entwicklung der vergangenen 200 Jahr einigermaßen plausibel erklärt werden: Es gab eine vordringende Tendenz zur Einebnung rassischer Unterschiede, aus der ein Schwund kultureller Differenzierungen, moralischer Universalismus und allgemeine Gleichgültigkeit stilistischer Normen folgen mußte. Vermassung und kultureller Identitätsverlust waren daher ebenso aus dem Kern der Rassenverschlechterung ableitbar, wie die äußeren Manifestationen einer Gleichförmigkeit der Siedlungen, einer Reduktion von Natur und Landschaft zu bloßen Ressourcen, der Verfall von Tradition, Sitte und Familie, Massenkultur, Materialismus und das Vordringen kapitalistischer Erfolgsgesinnung" (Sieferle 1984, 194; my italics).

[144] Borchardt was indeed hostile to the very notion of 'modernity': "Welcher Art immer die Kunstübung sein mag, an der er [the term 'modern', A/N] entwickelt worden ist, zunächst und vor allem enthüllt er den chaotischen Zustand einer Gesellschaft" whose "Produktion verwildert, und mit wachsender Verwilderung zückströmend, sie überflutet" (*PG* 54).

[145] In this work Mann writes: "Zivilisation und Literatur sind ein und dasselbe" (Mann 1968, 38). In a chapter entitled "Der Zivilisationsliterat" one reads: "die Kunstform des Romans ... ist *überhaupt nicht eigentlich deutsch*, der Roman selbst keine recht deutsche Gattung; vorderhand ist es nicht vorstellbar, daß hierzulande – im 'unliterarischen Lande' – ein Schriftsteller, ein Prosaist und Romanschreiber im Bewusstsein der Nation zu repräsentativer Stellung aufsteige, wie der Poet, der reine Synthetiker ... es vermag" (Mann 1968, 52).

[146] The '*Sektion für Dichtkunst*' of the academy was dominated between 1926 and 1930 by a controversy between its progressive and conservative members over the definition of 'literature'. The controversy culminated in the resignations of its conservative and *völkische* members, who did not accept that such writers as Alred Döblin, Heinrich Mann und Thomas Mann were able to propagate within the section their 'cosmopolitan', and as such '*unvölkische*' ideas about literature ('*Schriftstellertum*'). The schismatic members opposed to these 'modern' literary ideas a notion of '*Dichtung*' as national art (Herden 1984).

Yet, Borchardt's position is made peculiar by his elitist exacerbation of the radical *Kultukritik* of his time, leading to a complete, uncompromising rejection of modern literature on strong Neo-Romantic premises. Significantly, his liteary ideas were to some extent influenced by the work of the conservative, later Nazi literary scholar Joseph Nadler. His major three-volume *Literaturgeschichte der deutschen Stämme und Landschaften* (1912-18), postulating ethnicity and landscape as the founding principles of literary history, found strong resonance in Borchardt, who became friends with him and even persuaded him to collaborate in his editorial projects (which can be regarded as a great honour, considering the poet's selectiveness with regard to his collaborators and friends[147]). Tellingly, what Borchardt found particularly enticing in Nadler's work was an understanding of literature as consisting "nicht mehr aus *Büchern und Belletristik*, sondern aus der gesamten seelischen Voraussetzung und der gesamten geistigen Filiation des Schrifttums als des Ausdrucks einer innerlichen *Nationaltendenz*" (cited in Wyss 1997, 119; my italics). Literature as the expression of a national or ethnical *Volksseele* was thus no longer reduced to mere literary craftsmanship, but on the contrary raised to a matter of general national import.

Borchardt's idea of poetry is representative of a hardcore conservative cultural theory and poetics of Romantic descent[148]. For him poetic language is the foremost expression of the community's life, which is seen as the quasi-natural substratum and meaningful horizon of all individual life: "wo wir Namen geben und Leben durch Sprache äußern, treiben wir nur über dem *unterirdischen Organismus*, an dem es wächst, sein vornehmstes Organ ins Sichtbare auf, wie die abgründig wuchernde und saugende Pilzmasse den Kelch des Edelschwammes, ihre einzige Bezeugung im Lichte" (cited in Bernhauer 1997, 259; my italics). Through his linguistic creation the poet transfigures nature while preserving it, as the mushroom metaphor suggests[149]. The positive, i.e., productive demand resulting from such Romantic poetic assumptions is that the poet, as the principal bearer of the cultural memory and identity of the community, look back and delve into the past, in order to retrieve the culture's point of inception in nature[150]. The negative consequence of such assumptions, on the other hand, is a

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[147] Borchardt came into contact with Nadler through Hofmannsthal. Their ways parted upon the Nazi seizure of power (see Wyss 1997, 117-119).

[148] For Borchardt's idea of poetry see Kraft 1961, particularly the chapter "Idee der Poesie", 490 ff. Borchardt's organicist notions of poetry and language owe much to Herder, of which Borchardt had been a passionate reader in his youth.

[149] Also significant in this respect is Borchardt's idea of poetic 'style': "einen Organismus, die durch nichts von außen her zu erweiternde Begrenzung eines Weltbildes und einer Vorstellungsform nennen wir Stil" (cited in Bernhauer 1997, 259; my italics).

[150] The practical consequence of this for Borchardt's own poetic production is the study and reactivation of past poetic styles and regional languages, which resulted in his remarkable translation of Dante's *Divina Commedia* into a language reminiscent of *Mittelhochdeutsch*. For an overview of Borchardt's poetic production and

radical opposition to modern society and a fierce criticism of modern urban culture, resulting in a project of archaistic restoration of a marked elitist nature.

Within this context of reference, it becomes understandable how Borchardt could build a *theory of literary genres* centered on lyric poetry as a master genre. In this scheme, wherein the novel figures at the lowest level of the scale due to its fundamental 'social' preoccupation and 'realist' orientation, its structural dialogism and polyphonic stylization (see Bachtin 1981) as well as its status as a genre of popular 'consumption' in modernity (which it in fact was well into the 20th century). Borchardt's critical revision of the *Odyssey* reflects his ideas about literature in a comprehensive historical judgment of the developments of ancient Greek poetry. He projects on Homer his own judgment of modern literature – particularly of the novel, the quintessential 'modern' genre – as "populäre Literaturunsittlichkeit" (cited in *GEO* 43), which reflects the moral anarchy and lack of aesthetic order of modern society. Stretching Nietzsche's evaluation of Homer as an Apollonian, that is solar and 'enlightened', poet to the point of 'defamation' – cf. Adorno's remark in *GEO*[151] – in his afterword Borchardt consequently belittlingly depicts the poet (or rather the different poets of both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) as a mundane 'litterateur' and novel writer ante-litteram, his epics as "Bericht und Erzählung, das Buch, die Bücher, was französich mittelalterliche 'romans', deutsch mittelalterlich 'maere' heißt, pulcherrimae ambagines, wie Dante sagt" (*PG* 102).

The historical picture of the incipient decadence of Greek civilization in its early colonial age, which the Homeric epics are considered to be evidence of, is complemented in Borchardt by the idealization of an autochthonous Greek culture and aristocratic society that secretly survived the upheavals of Hellenic civilization as a historically besieged, yet not completely eliminated spiritual 'minority' in the Greek heartland. This retrospective projection is a construct of Borchardt's own idiosyncratic project of cultural restoration, as already revealed in 1927 in his speech "Schöpferische Restauration". His idealization of Pindar as the 'anachronistic' restorer of the "altfestländische Lyrik" (*PG* 108) of archaic Greece indeed amounts to a rather self-contradictory apology of a timeless cultural aristocracy representing the 'true' *Volksgemeinschaft*. Proof of this contradiction is that, at the end of his Pindaric afterword, he completely replaces the dubious metaphysical construct of the *Volk*

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intellectual profile see Osterkamp 1997-I.

[151] "Die Geburt der Tragödie wird zum Tode Homers, dessen 'Kunstgebiet', das Epos, *bei Nietzsche bereits* dem Apollinischen gleichgesetzt ist"; "*Diffamierung* von *Ilias* und *Odyssee*, den Urtexten der europäischen Zivilisation" (*GEO* 39; my italics).

with the idea of an exclusive poetic aristocracy, whose right to exist, in Borchardt's own view, is first of all based on its communal function[152].

It is not surprising then that the Neo-Marxist Adorno, though certainly fascinated by Borchardt's erudite poetic enterprise, condemned his cultural politics, subjecting it to a sharp ideology critique ("die am Rande der deutschen Großindustrie gepflegte *Esoterik* ... wie sie in dem widersinnigen *Reaktionär* Rudolf Borchardt ihren bedeutendsten ... Ausdruck gefunden hat", *GEO* 39; my italics). Commenting on Borchardt's identification of Homeric decadence with the misery of contemporary democratic society, Adorno notes peremptorily: "Die trotzig erneute humanistische Einfühlung in die Vorzeit terminiert in der Preisgabe der Humanität; die ästhetische Kritik des Klassizismus in der politischen Apologie der heraufziehenden Diktaturen" (ibid. 40). Adorno's succinct judgment targets Borchardt's elitist project of archaistic restoration, which in his opinion involves obvious authoritarian implications. The disparaging rejection of the urban masses and the cultural industry, market economy and democratic society – in other words, of the whole sphere exchange and circulation – is a constitutive feature of the conservative-revolutionary ideology and in general of the anti-liberal thought of Weimar Germany (see Sontheimer 1962, Bollenbeck 1994), which Adorno makes the target of fierce criticism in the *Odyssey* chapter[153].

Though participating in the cultural critical climate of his time and sharing a fundamental critical attitude towards mass culture and the cultural industry, capitalist economy and liberalism with the poet Rudolf Borchardt (as testified by his "Odysseus oder Mythos und Aufklärung" as well as "Aufklärung als Massenbetrug", both products of Adorno's pen – cf. Schmitt Noer 2002 and Müller-Doohm 2003), Adorno saw Borchardt's late-Nietzschean Neo-Romanticism not only utterly unfit to face the intellectual challenges of modernity, but also reflective of the cultural climate that led to the Nazi seizure of power. Though politically impotent, as Adorno suggests ("ohnmächtigsten Ausdruck", *GEO* 39), Borchardt's cultural theories – as much as those of Spengler and Klages – appear

[152] As Ernst A. Schmitd notes, Borchardt's construction of Pindar is wilfully contradictory: "Kann man sich zwar den modernen Restaurierer nach verlorener Sache als einsamen Kämpfer, als 'Retter' ... vorstellen, so ... gibt es den Dichter nur als Repräsentanten des Volkes und ist Lied nur als Gemeinschaftsausdruck der Volksseele als eines heiligen Stammesindividuums möglich. ... Das Fehlen dieses Bodens gleicht Borchardt gegen Ende des Essay mit einer anderen selbst- oder hofmannstahlbezüglichen Denkfigur aus: der inneren Präsenz des Volkes, der idealen Gemeinschaft, des wahren Vaterlandes im Dichter. Griechenland bestehe 'nirgend außer' Pindar" (Schmidt 2007-I, 195). Pindar is imagined by Borchardt as a quintessentially aristocratic figure. This is why "an die Stelle des Volkes, das es einerseits, nach der Rekonstruktion der frühgriechischen Lyrik, als deren Bedingung geben muss, dass andererseits, nach der Diagnose des ionischen Sieges über Griechenland, zu Pindars Zeit schon verschwunden war, tritt im letzten Teil des Nachworts der Adel" (ibid. 196).

[153] For Adorno"[die] deutsche[...] Verschränkung von Barbarei und Kultur ... liegt auf dem Grunde des neueren Philhellenismus" (*DA* 98, footnote 61). Though Adorno refers to Wilamowitz in the passage, his comment applies to the prevalent tendencies of German classical studies in the 20s and 30s, of which Borchardt's Pindaric afterword is for him a representative instance.

retrospectively, at the time of the work on *DA* (1942-1944), as intellectual foreboders of Fascism[154].

For this reason, Adorno takes it upon himself to counter a-posteriori (from the chronological and spatial distance of the American exile) the "Stellung der Kulturfaschisten zu Homer" (*DA* 62). He therefore challenges them on their battlefield, as it were, by giving a historico-philosophical interpretation of the *Odyssey*. In this confrontation not only Homer and his novel-like qualities are at stake, but also, departing from this, ideas on the relationship between national belonging and cosmopolitan civilization, 'culturalist' *Heimat*-bondage and nomadic *Heimatlosigkeit* – in the vocabulary of the time, between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*[155], along with their representative poetic forms: 'mythical' poetry (or 'national' lyrics) on the one hand, 'enlightened' (urban and social) novelistic narration on the other. The specific ways this confrontation takes place will be the topic of the following sections of this chapter.

[154] This appears even more manifestly in the final version of the chapter – most likely due to Horkheimer's revision of it – where the reactionary intellectuals of Weimar Germany are branded as proto-fascists.

[155] The German Neo-Romantics set the notion of *Kultur*, meaning the organic manifestation of an autochthonous national soul – epitomized in the metaphysically transfigured idea of *Heimat* – against a primarily Western *Zivilization*, disparagingly understood as the sphere of exchange and circulation, artificiality and dissimulation in the fields of politics (parliamentary democracy), economics (the free market) and culture (modernism and the cultural industry) alike.

2.6. Adorno's Use of Borchardt's Afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* for his *Odyssey* Interpretation: between Inspiration and Criticism

In the preceding section we have seen how 'mythical' poetry and 'enlightened' narration are the terms of Borchardt's cultural-historical reconstruction of Greek poetry in his afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte*. 'Chanted' national lyrics and the 'spoken' urban novel are for Borchardt the opposing literary genres that Pindar and Homer stand for, respectively. The poet's evaluative assessment of the two is not impartial, clearly siding with Pindar's aristocratic poetry, which in Borchardt's view stands in 'heroic' opposition to the historical tendencies of its time: colonial expansion, market circulation, cultural exchange and political democratization. Adorno challenges Borchardt's project of historical rewriting, which he sees as the intellectual expression of a proto-fascist ideology that is fundamentally hostile to the progressive achievements of post-Enlightenment, Western European liberal modernity. His severe criticism of Borchardt comes to the fore particularly through his use of a heavily polemical rhetoric and vocabulary, aimed at depicting the conservative poet as a reactionary and Neo-Romantic, aristocratic and post-Nietzschean, esoteric and archaistic cultural ideologue and, indeed, 'mythologist'[156].

At the same time, however, Adorno also appropriates important points of Borchardt's cultural-historical reconstruction of Greek poetry and weaves them into his own philosophical interpretation of the *Odyssey*[157]. Borchardt's influence on *GEO* is particularly evident in the historical as well as aesthetic assumptions that structure the first part of the chapter: 1) the discrimination between democratic, colonial epic and aristocratic, national poetry; 2) the contraposition between 'enlightened' and 'mythical' poetic forms; 3) finally, following the above-mentioned categories, the consideration of the *Odyssey* as a proto-novelistic, that is prosaic and 'spoken' literary form ('*Rede*'), as opposed to the lyrical 'chant' ('*Lied*') of Pindar. Borchardt's afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* thus not only provides an opposing

[156] "Die *spätromantische-deutsche* Vorstellung von der Antike, die an *Nietzsches* frühe Schriften sich schloss, hat den theoretischen Gegensatz des Dionysischen und Apollinischen in einen historischen, ethnischen und schließlich einen des *Ranges* umgesetzt" (*GEO* 37); "die am Rande der deutschen Großindustrie gepflegte *Esoterik* ... wie sie in dem widersinnigen *Reaktionär* Rudolf Borchardt ihren bedeutendsten ... Ausdruck gefunden hat" (ibid. 39); "die heutigen *Mythologen*" (ibid. 52); "der heutigen *Archaiker*" (ibid. 41).

[157] It is no mere chance that Adorno's earlier *Odyssey* chapter is entitled "Geschichtsphilosophisher Erkursus zur *Odyssee*". As the title suggests, the chapter intends to be a historico-philosophical interpretation of the Homeric epic. As I will show in the present section, this interpretation follows in many respects Borchardt's theory of Greek cultural history and the resulting Homeric interpretation.

‘foil’, but also a *conceptual framework* for Adorno’s *Odyssey* chapter (both in its earlier and final versions).

In the present section of this chapter, I will first attempt to show how Adorno relies on Borchardt’s cultural-historical and aesthetic reflections on the Homeric epics in constructing his argument in *GEO*. In doing so, I will furthermore consider the way in which Adorno relates to Borchardt’s Pindaric afterword in his text. The theoretical assessment of Borchardt’s contribution to Adorno’s *Odyssey* reading will therefore be accompanied by an analysis of the *rhetorical strategies* by which Adorno takes recourse to Borchardt as his source of inspiration and object of criticism at the same time. For this purpose, I will rely on some basic considerations of the mechanisms at work in discourse appropriation as revealed by Michail Bachtin in his essay “Discourse in the Novel”. This work will also provide a useful reference for a better understanding of the theoretical gist of Adorno’s polemical confrontation with Borchardt’s Homeric interpretation and poetic theory in *GEO*. I will therefore use Bachtin’s work as a tool for comprehending *both the explicit*, rhetorical aspects of Adorno’s dispute with Borchardt, *and the implicit*, content-related aspects of it.

First of all, as already anticipated, Adorno is fundamentally inspired by Borchardt as regards the consideration of the Homeric epics, particularly the *Odyssey*, as late literary elaborations of an old mythical substratum, to which the former would be essentially antagonistic, yet intrinsically, i.e., genetically tied. Let us consider the following passage from *GEO*, in which Adorno weaves full-length quotations from Borchardt’s Pindaric afterword into his own argument:

> Die odysseysche Erzählung in ihrer ältesten Schicht, wie sie von Kirchhoff herausgehoben ward, zeigt jene *stoffliche Gebundenheit an den Mythos*, die Hegel an aller Aufklärung zu konstatieren weiß. *Borchardt charakterisiert Homer*: ‘Noch erfand er nicht: er überlieferte, und malte breit aus, ein Heldenbuch, Waffentaten, Irrfahrten, konsolidierte Bestände, die aus der Gestaltenflut des Väterreichtums langsam zu Vereinzelung abgetrocknet waren, Verknüpfung gewonnen hatten, bereits in der Andeutung einer charakteristischen Linie liefen und zu etwas Geschichtsähnlichem mit *Romanfäden* strebten. Aus dem Nichts aber stammte an diesen Stoffen und ihrem ursprünglichen Pragmatismus nicht viel. Sie waren als Erbe älter als die Einwanderung und einmal urheimisch-gemeingriechisch gewesen, als Heldensage und Heldenlied’. *Aber* der homerische Geist, der der Mythen sich bemächtigt oder, wie Borchardt treffend es nennt, sie ‘organisiert’, tritt eben damit *in Widerspruch zu ihnen*: ‘das der Anfang einer Urpoesie menschlicher Heroenalter? Es ist teils ihre herrliche blühende, teils überblühte Reife, teils schon ihr barocker und gelegentliche kernloser Luxus, nicht die fünfte und zehnte, die unzähligfache Formstufe, eine wenn das Wort irgend einen Sinn hat, *moderne, siegreich weltmäßige und geistreich zeitfähige poetische Literatur* im souveränen Besitz unfaßbar

> allseitiger Mittel und schon *völlig ohne Bindung and die dunklen Schmerzens- und Pflichtenreiche der Seele*, in denen das Wort spärlich wird wie die Perle, und die sich *nicht der Aufklärung* durch hübschen Ausdruck *erschließen*'. (*GEO* 41-42; my italics)

This passage well exemplifies how Adorno makes use of Borchardt's historical and aesthetic judgment of Homer in order to support his own argumentation. As the long excerpts from Borchardt testify, Adorno follows the poet's understanding of the *Odyssey* as an almost novelistic ("Romanfäden") elaboration of the mythical material that they contain and indeed are based on[158]. As for Borchardt, so too for Adorno Homer's epic poetry 'opens up' and thus 'enlightens' the world of myth through the work of literary form ("'der Aufklärung ... erschließen'", as Borchardt notes). While for Borchardt, the high degree of literary formalization of the *Odyssey* is an indication of its epigonic and derivative character – in other words, of its lack of originality and therefore poor poetic quality ("Noch erfand er nicht") – for Adorno, on the contrary, the virtue of the Homeric narrative resides precisely in its 'enlightening' quality, which disenchants and thus disrupts the mythical worldview of archaic Greek culture through the work of literary 'organization' ("sie 'organisiert'", as Adorno says quoting Borchardt, though without giving any reference for the quote).

Adorno avails himself of a peculiar argumentative strategy with respect to Borchardt, as he extensively quotes from and relies on him in order to argue against his poetic theory and negative judgment of Homer[159]. In the above-mentioned passage, the adverb '*aber*' that introduces the sentence containing the second quotation from Borchardt subtly signals Adorno's polemical stance towards the poet ("Aber der homerische Geist ..."). Upon close consideration of the passage, however, it appears that Adorno's adversative intention does not relate to the *theoretical assumption* of Borchardt's Homeric interpretation – the 'enlightened' character of the epics – but rather the *ideological entailments* of the former's aesthetic

[158] Adorno's consideration of the Odyssey as a 'novel', which feeds upon and yet transforms the ancient Greek myths, might have also been inspired by Wilamowitz (cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1988, 177 and 182).

[159] The polemic against Borchardt gets completely lost in the final, revised version of the *Odyssey* chapter. This later version begins with the following sentence: "Das Epos zeigt, zumal in seiner ältesten Schicht, an den Mythos sich gebunden: die Abenteuer stammen aus der volksmäßigen Überlieferung. *Aber* indem der homerische Geist der Mythen sich bemächtigt, sie 'organisiert', tritt er in Widerspruch zu ihnen" (*DA* 61; my italics). In consideration of the earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter, it is clear how Adorno opens the later version of it in medias res, so to speak, tacitly referring to Borchardt's afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte*. The long quotation from Borchardt, which in the early chapter precedes Adorno's commentary on the myths-organizing formal quality of the Homeric epic, is missing in the final text. The adversative adverb 'aber', introducing Adorno's implicit polemic against Borchardt, on the contrary is present both in the early and in the final versions of the chapter. Yet, whereas in the former the adverb clearly refers to the aforegoing quotation from Borchardt, in the latter the adverb changes its function, as the quotation it originally referred to has been deleted. The abridgement in this case produces an ambiguity that can only be resolved through a confrontation of the two text versions.

judgment of the Greek poet. The adversative particle '*aber*' in this case does not so much express an open opposition to Borchardt, but rather functions as a *polemical specification* of his argument, which Adorno discursively 'bends' according to his own interpretative and ideological intention. Its gist can be summed up as follows: while the *Odyssey* is indeed based on myth, its formal elaboration of the mythical material as such inevitably subverts the mythical substance that it forms. In other words, the agency of form in the *Odyssey* immanently tends towards 'enlightenment'. This is a merit rather than a fault of the Homeric epic, as it mirrors a progressive tendency of Greek culture towards emancipation from mythical belief and from the archaic order of society that is informed by myth.

Adorno thus seems to develop his argument *with* and *yet against* Borchardt at the same time. The philosopher avails himself of the poet's insights for his *own* discourse on the *Odyssey*. Acceptance of Borchardt's interpretation of Homer and correction of the ideological connotations of his critical evaluation of the epic mingle in the above passage in a manner that is indeed typical of the whole first part of *GEO*. Here Adorno does not speak 'alone' when he polemically *speaks of* Borchardt, but rather *through Borchardt* himself. In doing so he appropriates and then semantically re-charges the poet's philological theory, articulated as we have seen through the opposition of such historical and aesthetic concepts as social enlightenment and communitarian mythology, colonial 'epic' and national 'poetry', prosaic 'novel' and musical 'chant'. Adorno achieves this effect by providing a dialogical contextualization of Borchardt's own concepts, with the aim of bending them towards his own ideological interests. As Bachtin notes,

> The speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is – no matter how accurately transmitted – always subject to certain *semantic changes*. The context embracing another's word is responsible for its *dialogizing background*, whose influence can be very great. Given the appropriate methods for framing, one may bring about fundamental changes even in another's utterance accurately quoted. Any sly … polemicist knows very well which dialogizing backdrop he should bring to bear on the accurately quoted words of his opponent. … The formulation of another's speech as well as its framing (and the context can begin preparing for the introduction of another's speech far back in the text) both *express the unitary act of dialogical interaction* with that speech, a relation determining the entire nature of its transmission and all the changes in meaning and accent that take place in it during transmission. (Bachtin 1981, 340; my italics)

Bachtin's reflections on dialogism and interdiscursivity are of high relevance for the present discussion, because they are fundamentally concerned with the ideological implications of the

act of appropriating others' words and discourses. In "Discourse in the Novel" the Russian scholar shows how the (discursive) transmission and (linguistic) representation of another's utterances is never neutral, but always takes place as a *dialogical confrontation* between two (or more) ideological standpoints and worldviews. In this process, the original meaning of the appropriated terms usually undergoes an imperceptible yet decisive transformation.

Adorno's polemical 'use' of Borchardt in *GEO* is dialogic in Bachtin's understanding of the term. The treatment of Borchardt's Homeric interpretation in *GEO* is fundamentally 'double-voiced', consisting in "a mixture of two ... languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses" (ibid. 358) and ideological standpoints. This double-voicedness in *GEO* results in a discursive *hybridization*, understood as "the mixing of linguistic forms", leading to a "*collision* between differing points of views on the world that are embedded in these forms" (ibid.). In this sense, Adorno's use of such terms as "[d]unkler Gesang und rationale Rede, gnomische Prägung und geläufige Kommunikation, dorische Chorlyrik und jonisches Epos" (*GEO* 38), already in the opening sentence of *GEO*, is not an 'authentic' transposition, but rather the product of an intentional semantic hybridization of Borchardt's categories. The effect of such hybridization is a *polemical representation* of Borchardt's poetic and philological discourse. In *GEO*, Adorno uses Borchardt's Pindaric afterword not only as a scholarly support for his *Odyssey* interpretation, but also with the intention of showing the ideology "lying behind the ... utterances" of the poet (Bachtin 1981, 356). The 'stylization' of Borchardt's language serves Adorno to depict the latter as an 'authoritative' and 'reactionary' poet. Through Borchardt, Adorno thus creates a characteristic 'image' of the conservative-revolutionary intellectual of Weimar Germany[160].

Such linguistic and ideological stylization, however, does not prevent Adorno from substantially relying on Borchardt's Pindaric afterword in *GEO*. Borchardt's assessment of the 'prosaic' and 'public', 'civilized' and 'enlightened' character of the Homeric epic indeed

[160] Bachtin argues that the novel uses as one of its main artistic devices the stylized *representation* of discourses – which thus become ideological 'images' of specific social, professional, cultural languages – whereas in everyday life and rhetorical genres one has to do rather with a mere *transmission* of others' discourses. He does not deal with the philosophical, theoretical or essayistic report of other's discourses. My contention is that Adorno's treatment of Borchardt can be legitimately seen as a form of representation, for it is not only concerned with the mere transmission of Borchardt's poetic theory and Homeric interpretation, but also sets out to provide an 'ideological' image of Borchardt's poetic language and cultural-theoretical discourse. This is why in my opinion Borchardt functions in *GEO* as a sort of 'ideological' character, representing the cultural politics of the *Konservative Revolution* of Weimar Germany. This 'characteristic' stylization of Borchardt is perceivable in Adorno's branding the poet as 'reactionary' and 'archaistic'. Such concise definition certainly does not do justice to Borchardt's work as a poet and philologist, but serves Adorno's polemical and ideological intentions in the *Odyssey* chapter.

lays the foundation for Adorno's *own reading* of the *Odyssey*[161]. In this sense, Borchardt's reflections on Greek poetry determine Adorno's Homeric allegoresis, despite his polemical confrontation with the poet[162]. Adorno appropriates Borchardt's interpretation of Homer in order to give substance to the philosophical core of his *Odyssey* chapter, consisting in the exposition of the entanglement of myth and enlightenment in the history of civilization. Adorno's theoretical discourse in *GEO* develops by way of emplotment and contrastive elaboration of Borchardt's Homeric interpretation and cultural history of Greek poetry.

Following Borchardt, yet subjecting his judgment to ideological inversion, Adorno considers the 'enlightened' poetic quality of the *Odyssey* as the reflection at the level of literary history of the progressive development of Greek culture in Homer's time. A further excerpt from *GEO* helps clarify the gist of Adorno's interpretative appropriation:

> Die traditionell-romantische Gleichsetzung von Epos und Mythos, wie sie noch der *Theorie des Romans* von Lukács zugrundeliegt, wird von der *späten Romantik* gesprengt. Beide Begriffe sind als Phasen eines historischen Prozesses aufgefaßt, der an den Nahtstellen der homerischen Redaktion selber noch sich erkennen läßt: 'Das Epos ist im Ursinne überhaupt *nicht mehr Mythus*. Seine mythischen Voraussetzungen sind oft in der totalen Umgestaltung aller Motive und der Umrechnung des Ganzen auf höfische und Marktideale zu fast weniger als Vorstufen stofflicher Motive geworden'. Im Epos, sonst dem geschichtsphilosophischen Gegenbegriff zum Roman, werden die romanähnlichen Züge entdeckt und der ehrwürdige Kosmos der sinnerfüllten Welt als Leistung der ordnenden Vernunft, die den Mythos zerstört vermöge eben der *Allgemeinheit*, zu der ihre Ordnung ihn erhebt. (*GEO* 42; my italics)

Through the use of a passive construction in both sentences of the quoted passage ("wird... gesprengt", "sind ... aufgefaßt", "werden … entdeckt") Adorno seems to intentionally avoid naming Borchardt as the inspiring source of his argument. By availing himself of an

[161] It is hard to assess how much the acquaintance with Borchardt's text might have inspired Adorno's Homeric reading and interpretation in *DA*. The latter is substantiated by a number of other sources and materials, not only strictly theoretical or philosophical in character, but also from the fields of anthropology, ethnography and classical studies. Adorno was notoriously an omnivorous thinker, able to appropriate scholarly contributions from a number of fields in the humanities and use them productively for his own theoretical work. However, given the amount of Borchardt's text excerpts in the earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter, as well as the measure of Adorno's relying on the poet's Pindaric afterword for his own theoretical discourse, it is legitimate to speculate that the reading of Borchardt was fundamental for the conception of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter, and certainly decisive for the form of its written exposition.

[162] Bachtin remarks the importance of "the play of boundaries" in the textual transmission of others' words and discourses, which he describes as "the distance between that point where the context begins to prepare for the introduction of another's word and the point where the word is actually introduced (its 'theme' may sound in the text long before the appearance of the actual word)" (Bachtin 1981, 346). In other words, the presence of another's discourse might long be latent – or kept implicit – in the text before it actually comes to the surface and becomes apparent as an object of discourse.

anonymous construction and general reference to late Romanticism ("späten Romantik") he downplays Borchardt's influence on his own theory. However, the quotation from Borchardt in the passage ("'Das Epos … geworden'") leaves no doubt as to the source of the conception of the Homeric epics as a literary work bearing traces of the historical confrontation between mythical 'substance' and enlightened 'form'[163]. In the ensuing explanatory sentence ("Im Epos … zu entrinnen"), Adorno does nothing but paraphrase Borchardt's notion of the Homeric epics – particularly the *Odyssey* – as a proto-novelistic form, in which the ordering agency of reason has brought to order and thus 'altered' ("Umgestaltung" in Borchardt's words) the mythical material that it is based on[164].

The above passage gives us a hint as to the underlying reasons for Adorno's affinity for Borchardt's cultural-historical interpretation of the Homeric epics. Both thinkers converge in the historico-philosophical understanding of enlightenment as a universal and universalizing – in the sense of equalizing and homogenizing – force, opposed to myth, conceived as the expression of cultural specificity, i.e., of original bonds and natural ties, historically grown forms and durable affiliations. Yet this opposition is charged by Adorno with an ideological affect that is radically different from that of Borchardt[165]. Tellingly, in the above-quoted passage Adorno takes recourse to the Marxist-Hegelian concept of '*Allgemeinheit*' ('commonality', 'universality', 'generality') in order to characterize the myth-disenchanting, i.e., enlightening quality of the Homeric epic[166]. For Adorno, this quality does

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[163] Significantly, this quotation, as much as *all other quotations* from Borchardt's afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* have been expunged in the final version of the *Odyssey* chapter. The consequence is that in the latter Adorno's reliance on Borchardt's thesis remains concealed, although it is *as fundamental* for his argumentation as in the earlier version. In this sense the erasures produce a sort of unwilled plagiarism. A further consequence is that Adorno's critical-polemical confrontation with Borchardt in the final version disappears, so that the chapter results at the same time more vaguely suggestive and obscure.

[164] Interestingly, Adorno uses Borchardt 'late-Romantic' theory in order to overcome Lukács' 'Romantic' equalization of epos and myth in his influential *Theorie des Romans* (1920). Lukács had been a youth reading of Adorno, who claimed to have been influenced by him as much as by nobody else in his early years (see Müller-Doohm 2003, 59 and 142). Lukács' equalization of myth and epos however goes as far back as Hegel's philosophical aesthetics and Schiller's work on naive and sentimental poetry. Hegel in particular had defined the novel as the "moderne bürgerliche Epopöe" – as such itself 'epic' in character, yet with a crucial difference from the old epic genre: "Was jedoch fehlt ist der urprünglich poetische Weltzustand, aus welchem *das eigentliche Epos* hervorgeht. Der Roman im modernen Sinne setzt eine bereits zur Prosa gewordene Wirklichkeit voraus" (George WIlhelm Firedirich Hegel, *Ästhetik*, cited in Vietta 2010). Such observation is evidence of the long-standing naturalization in the German aesthetic tradition of the literary-theoretical notions underpinning Adorno's and Borchardt's discussion on Greek literature. If for Hegel the novel was no longer authentically epic, Adorno, following Borchardt, reverses the historical perspective: some old epics, such as the Homeric, are already 'novels'.

[165] Adorno's critique of enlightenment remains dialectical. As such it does not go so far as to consider 'mythical' poetry superior to Homer's 'prosaic' narration. Translated into theory: enlightenment might have its flaws, yet the return to myth is not only impossible, but also dangerous. Archaicism is both theoretically untenable and politically disastrous (more to this in the following chapter).

[166] 'Universality' is for Adorno an essential quality of enlightenment, understood as a universal and universalizing tendency in the history of human civilization. Enlightenment is thus conceived by Adorno in Hegelian terms, as a sort of universal movement of the 'spirit' – whereby this movement in *DA*, unlike the

not primarily pertain to the content of the *Odyssey*, but rather to its language. 'Universality' is the linguistic virtue of Homeric poetry, as Adorno further explains, leaning once again on Borchardt's Pindaric afterword:

> Die homerische Rede schafft *Allgemeinheit der Sprache*, wenn sie sie nicht bereits voraussetzt; sie löst die hierarchische Ordnung der Gesellschaft durch die *exoterische* Gestalt ihrer Darstellung auf, selbst und gerade wo sie jene verherrlicht; vom Zorn des Achill und der Irrfahrt des Odysseus Singen ist bereits sehnsüchtige Stilisierung dessen, was sich nicht mehr singen läßt *aber* 'der Sieg der Demokratie ist hier wie in Mittelalter und Neuzeit *das Ende der Poesie*. Was übrig bleibt, hier wie dort, ist *Literatur*, die der neuen Gesellschaft das Bild ihrer Misere liefert, und Romantik, die das der alten rekonstruiert, bis die Geschichte den Volkskehricht in die Sklavenecken neuer Herren räumt.' Die trotzig erneute humanistische Einfühlung in die Vorzeit terminiert in der Preisgabe der Humanität; die ästhetische Kritik des Klassizismus in der politischen Apologie der heraufziehenden Diktaturen. (*GEO* 40; my italics)

This dense, indeed rather elliptical passage shows both the similarities and the differences between Adorno's and Borchardt's Homeric interpretations. In the first part of the sentence, Adorno states how the virtue of the Homeric epic consists not only in the capacity to organize the mythical material that it relies on into a narrative plot, as we have already seen, but also to 'loosen up' and thus (at least potentially) dissolve the hierarchical order of ancient Greek society ("löst die hierarchische Ordnung der Gesellschaft ... auf") through its 'exoteric' poetics ("durch die exoterische Gestalt ihrer Darstellung"). Homer's poetry avails itself of the prosaic, common (in German: '*allgemein*') language in use in the public spaces of the Greek polis ("Die homerische Rede schafft Allgemeinheit der Sprache, wenn sie sie nicht bereits voraussetzt"). Adorno praises the democratic, public and social character of the Homeric epic, which for Borchardt on the contrary – yet for the same reasons – lacks poetic quality (as compared to Pindar's aristocratic and heroic poetry).

Adorno's citation, in the above sentence, of a further passage from Borchardt's afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* – once again introduced, as if in passing, by the adversative particle '*aber*' – leaves no doubt as to the cultural-political and ideological implications that Adorno sees at play in Borchardt's disparaging Homeric evaluation ("*aber* 'der Sieg der Demokratie ist *hier wie in Mittelalter und Neuzeit das Ende der Poesie ...*'", ibid.; my italics). Modern mass democracy and liberal market economy, cultural exchange and circulation all count for Borchardt as phenomena of contemporary degeneration and

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Phänomenologie des Geistes, is not necessarily a guarantor of human emancipation, but also of enslavement and regression (see Geyer-Ryan/Lethen 1987 and Helmling 2009).

decay that are already visible in the colonial stage of Greek civilization and its representative literary form, Homer's epic poetry. Adorno's final comment on Borchardt's words in the above-quoted passage ("Die Einfühlung ... Diktaturen") clearly brings to light what is at stake in his polemical appropriation of and antagonistic confrontation with Borchardt's theory of Greek poetry. The poet's post-Nietzschean criticism of official philology (and its 'classicist' bias) is for Adorno the expression of an aristocratic cultural ethos and elitist cultural politics that he sees as an anticipation of Fascist culture. This becomes clear in an explanatory passage that has been added to the one quoted above in the final version of the *Odyssey* chapter:

> Während ... Nietzsches Verhältnis zur Aufklärung, *und damit zu Homer*, selber zwiespältig blieb; während er in der Aufklärung sowohl die universale Bewegung souveränen Geistes erblickte, als deren Vollender er sich empfand, wie die lebensfeindliche, 'nihilistische' Macht, ist bei seinen *vorfaschistischen Nachfahren* das zweite Moment allein übriggeblieben und zur Ideologie pervertiert. Diese wird zum blinden Lob des blinden Lebens, dem die gleiche Praxis sich verschreibt, von der alles Lebendige unterdrückt wird. Das kommt an der Stellung der *Kulturfaschisten* zu Homer zum Ausdruck. Sie wittern in der homerischen Darstellung *feudaler Verhältnisse* ein *Demokratisches*, stempeln das Werk als eines von *Seefahrern und Händlern* und verwerfen das jonische Epos als allzu rationale Rede und geläufige Kommunikation. (*DA* 62; my italics)

In this passage, as elsewhere in the final version of the *Odyssey* chapter (with one notable exception, see *DA* 63), the direct reference to Borchardt is removed and substituted with a general allusion to the post-Nietzschean 'cultural fascists' ("Kulturfaschisten"). Adorno's polemic against Weimar cultural conservatism therefore becomes more vague, and more aggressive at the same time, while its actual target strangely disappears[167]. However, a confrontation with the early version of the *Odyssey* chapter leaves no doubt as to whom Adorno refers in the above-quoted passage. In contrast to Borchardt's disparaging judgment of the Homeric epics as a literary agent of 'disruption' of archaic Greek culture, Adorno *appreciates* the *Odyssey* (and also the Iliad, though to a lesser extent, see *GEO* 45-6 and *DA* 64) as a work that testifies to the progressive development of Greek society, its overcoming of feudalism and emancipation from mythical superstition.

[167] This is in general a characteristic of the last version of the *Odyssey* chapter, which is both more philosophical and political, and less literary and ideology critical than the earlier version of it. In this latter version, Borchardt is branded by Adorno as 'reactionary', yet not as 'fascist'. In the final version of the chapter Borchardt's name disappears, and his Homeric interpretation (which however does not appear to be *his*) is labeled as 'fascist'. These slight changes might be due to Horkheimer, who probably elicited the abridgements of the earlier version of the text (see *GEO* 37).

In order to fully grasp what is at stake in Adorno's re-evaluation of the Homeric epic in the face of Borchardt's judgment, it is useful to call to mind the theoretical premises of Adorno's philosophy of language (and therefore of literary language), which are to be found in the first chapter of *DA*. Here Adorno-Horkheimer consider linguistic signification against the background of power relations. In accordance with their progressive assumptions, they regard the primitive, i.e., symbolic stages of language development as the reflection of a pre-enlightened, archaic social order, in which man was still subjected to the power of nature and its social correlate, that is to say direct domination. Linguistic codification then was regulated by a cast of priests and magicians, who functioned as the earthly 'administrators' of the metaphysical realm: "Schon wenn die Sprache in die Geschichte eintritt, sind ihre Meister Priester und Zauberer. Wer die Symbole verletzt, verfällt im Namen der überirdischen den irdischen Mächten, deren Vertreter jene berufenen Organe der Gesellschaft sind" (*DA* 37). In other words, according to Adorno-Horkheimer's anthropology-based vision of primitive culture, priests and magicians explained the cosmic order through myths and sanctioned it through rituals. Both were based on a 'symbolic' use of language[168], which pertained not only to the cosmic, but also to the *social order* that was reflected in the mythical worldview of primitive peoples.

For Adorno-Horkheimer, symbolic language, mythical belief and ritual performance are thus tied to the social organisation of power that regulated the economy of violence in archaic cultures[169]. Man's increasing ability to understand nature and use its resources through the social division and specialization of labor entails on the other hand a growing 'formalization' of language (in structuralist terms, its use as a 'system of signs'). Within Adorno-Horkheimer's dialectical-materialistic framework, the latter changes as man's relationship with the external world develops along the lines of a growing capacity to dominate nature and make it functional to human purposes with the means of instrumental rationality and technological disposition[170]. Adorno-Horkheimer thus underline the mutual

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[168] In *DA* Adorno and Horkheimer refer to anthropological, religious and ethnological studies from the early 20th century, such as Eduard Westermarck's *Ursprung und Entwicklung der Moralbegriffe* (Leipzig 1913), Salomon Reinach's *Cultes, Mythes et Religions* (Paris 1912), and Heinrich Zimmer's *Maja* (Stuttgart and Berlin 1936).

[169] "Der Schauder, aus dem das Mana geboren wird, war überall, wo es in der Ethnologie begegnet, zumindest von den Stammesältesten, schon sanktioniert. Das unidentische, zerfließende Mana wird von Menschen konsistent gemacht und *gewaltsam* materialisiert. Bald bevölkern die Zauberer jeden Ort mit Emanationen und ordnen der Vielfalt der sakralen Bereiche die der sakralen Riten zu. Sie entfalten mit der Geisterwelt und deren Eigenheiten ihr zünftiges Wissen und ihre *Gewalt*. Das heilige Wesen überträgt sich auf die Zauberer, die mit ihm umgehen" (*DA* 37).

[170] This capacity on its turn is socially mediated, that is to say determined by the historical development of the 'forces' and 'conditions' of production in society (in Marxist terms, as '*Produktionskräfte*' and '*Produktionsverhältnisse*'). One of the basic tenets of Adorno-Horkheimer's dialectical materialism in *DA* is the mutual implication of domination of nature and social domination (see Schmid Noerr 1990, 44 and 50).

bond of the process of linguistic enlightenment with social-material enlightenment, implying emancipation from the mythically informed order of archaic society (along with its 'violent' laws) and development onto a new, more complex level of power relations (through a more efficient division of labor).

Thus, in the history of language Adorno-Horkheimer find the evidence for the dialectical relationship of socio-material progress (as enabled by 'enlightenment') and domination (as sanctioned by 'myth'). For them, the history of language reflects a history of power, but also of overcoming the power relations that inform the sanctioned order of society at any given historical stage. This is the reason why, despite all enlightenment critique, Adorno is bound to praise the 'rational' aspect of the Homeric epics, in opposition to Borchardt. Their 'enlightening' virtue results from the formal elaboration of, and thereby liberation from the mythical material that they incorporate, thus both transcending and preserving it (as in dialectical *Aufheben*). Adorno indeed considers the epic narratives of Homer in terms of such a historical dialectic of 'matter' and 'form': "In den *Stoffschichten* Homers haben die Mythen sich niedergeschlagen; der *Bericht* von ihnen aber, die Einheit, die den diffusen Sagen abgezwungen ward, ist zugleich die Beschreibung der Fluchtbahn des Subjekts vor den mythischen Mächten" (*GEO* 45-46; my italics)[171].

As we have seen, according to Adorno's socio-anthropological theory of the origin of culture, 'mythical' beliefs reflect the objective power relations that structure society. These become modified from within in the historical process of civilization through the agency of 'subjective' reason (as incarnated in the *Odyssey* by the proto-bourgeois and enlightened subject Odysseus; more on this in the following chapter). This agency for Adorno is fundamentally a *formal* one, finding paradigmatic expression within the history of Greek poetry in the epic language of Homer, which for Adorno bears the traces of the subjective emancipation of reason from the mythical world. This explains why he asserts that the Homeric epics disenchant myth through their 'exoteric' mode of representation of reality ("die exoterische Gestalt ihrer Darstellung", *GEO* 40), which disrupts the archaic-feudal order of society through the enlightening power of literary representation. As Borchardt himself

[171] The passage continues with an interesting comparison of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which serves Adorno to further specify his historico-philosophical argument about the Homeric epics: "Das gilt im tieferen Sinne bereits von der *Ilias*, in welcher der Zorn des mythischen Heros und Sohns einer Göttin gegen den Heerkönig und Organisator, die disziplinlose Untätigkeit des Helden, endlich die Erfassung des siegreich Todverfallenen durch die gesamthellenische, nicht länger mehr stammesmäßige Not, vermittelt durch die mythische Treue zum toten Gefährten, Prähistorie und Geschichte im fruchtbaren Moment ihres Übergangs zum Einstehen zwingt. Es gilt um soviel drastischer für die *Odyssee*, wie diese der Form des Abenteurerromans nähersteht, die als solche bereits im 'unpsychologischen' Gegensatz des einen überlebenden Ich zum vielfältigen, gefahrvollen, auswendigen Schicksal, den Prozess zwischen Aufklärung und Mythos ausprägt" (*GEO* 45-6).

remarks in his cultural-historical reconstruction of Greek poetry, epic language is no more the privilege of a sedentary caste of priests (or priests-poets, as in Borchardt's notion of national poetry, see *PG* 108-109), but rather the domain of a group of travelling rhapsodists giving their poetic performances in open spaces of public congregation:

> Das Epos, die 'homerische Poesie' ... aus dem die Schullehre von altersher Poesie und Geist Griechenlands ableitet, ist eine Schöpfung der helleno-asiatischen Auswanderung, entstanden in den rasch emporgeschossenen und auf jungen Reichtum gelagerten Kauf- und Schifferstädten der Küste Kleinasiens ... getragen von Gilden *fahrender Spielleute*, die in langsam gewohnter Technik der Sprache eine tradierbare stehende Form, dem Stil feste Mittel zugeschnitten haben, vom einzelnen Spielmann bei den großen *Messen und Märkten* dieser Mittelpunkte des Warentausches und der Landesverteidigung vorgetragen, in Stücken mäßigen Umfanges, nach kurzem Harfenvorspiel zu gesungenen Götteranrufung ins deklamierte Rezitativ übergehend, das sich durch die künstliche Akzentuierung, wie im serbischen 'Volkslied', das auch nicht gesungen, sondern skandiert gesprochen wird, hinlänglich von der Tagessprache abhob. (*PG* 99)

According to Borchardt's reconstruction of the conditions of production and reception of the Homeric epics, the 'literary' space the latter pertain to is not that of an elite of rulers and landowners – as is the case with Pindar – but rather a public forum accessible to the majority of the (male) population of the Greek polis. Homer's democratic character thus stands in correlation for Borchardt – as for Adorno in his wake – to the 'commonality' ('*Allgemeinheit*') of language that epic poetry presupposes and indeed promotes. Yet while for Adorno this character is an indication of the positive ('civilized') quality of Homer's work – as the product of a city environment and urban culture – for Borchardt the same distinguishing trait is a symptom of poetic decadence and cultural degeneration.

Through his positive assessment of the enlightening and exoteric character of the Homeric epics, Adorno thus seems to indirectly oppose Borchardt's restricted notion of poetic language as a matter of a few aristocratic individuals, as well as the conservative-revolutionary idea of literature as the 'spiritual' space of a national elite (as Hofmannstahl conceives of it in "Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation"; see 2.4.). Adorno's positive evaluation of the '*Allgemeinheit*' of Homer's language and the exoteric, i.e., 'open' form of his poetry is in diametric opposition to the exclusivist understanding of poetic language implicit in Borchardt's afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* and explicit in his programmatic essay "Schöpferische Restauration" (see 2.5. and 2.4.). Adorno himself underlines this antagonistic relationship when he brands Borchardt as an 'esoteric' poet and

condemns his cultural politics for being 'reactionary' ("die am Rande der deutschen Großindustrie gepflegte *Esoterik* ... wie sie in dem widersinnigen *Reaktionär* Rudolf Borchardt ihren bedeutendsten ... Ausdruck gefunden hat", *GEO* 39; my italics).

Such decidedly polemical rhetoric is the manifestation of a critical opposition to Borchardt that is theoretical and ideological at the same time. Adorno provides in GEO a sort of 'Bachtinian' critique of Borchardt and his exclusivist understanding of poetic language. In Adorno's critical discourse, the poet functions as the representative of a normative and conservative poetic monoglossia172, that is to say of a notion of poetry as a "unitary and singular 'own' language" (Bachtin 1981, 269). Adorno contrasts Borchardt's poetic monoglossia with the fundamental heteroglossia, i.e., the plurality and openness (or 'exoteric' character) of the Odyssey as a proto-novelistic narrative.

The arguments that Adorno uses in his polemical confrontation with Borchardt in *GEO* bear remarkable similarities to Bachtin's treatment of the novel as a genre in "Discourse in the Novel". For Bachtin, the quintessential characteristic of the novel is its heteroglossia, that is to say its pluralistic orientation and mode of linguistic representation of the world:

> The novel is the expression of a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language ... the novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic *decentring of the ideological world*, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought. (Bachtin 1981, 366; my italics)

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[172] Bachtin's considerations on poetic language as the realm of linguistic monoglossia in "Discourse in the Novel" come in handy for a better literary-theoretical understanding of the point in question in Adorno's critique of Borchardt's poetic theory, and consequently of his disparaging Homeric interpretation: "The world of poetry, no matter how many contradictions and insoluble conflicts the poet develops within it, is always *illumined by one unitary and indisputable discourse*. Contradictions, conflicts and doubts remain in the object, in thoughts, in living experiences – in short, in the subject matter – but they do not enter into the language itself … The poet is not able to oppose his own poetic consciousness, his own intentions to the language that he uses, for he is completely within it and therefore cannot turn it into an object to be perceived, reflected upon or related to. Language is present to him only from inside, in the work it does to effect its intention, and not from outside, in its objective specificity and boundedness. Within the limits of poetic style, *direct unconditional intentionality*, language at its full weight and the objective display of languages (as a socially and historically limited linguistic reality) are all simultaneous, but incompatible. The *unity and singularity of language* are the indispensable prerequisites for a realization of the direct (but not objectively typifying) intentional individuality of poetic style and of its *monological steadfastness*" (Bachtin 1981, 286). Bachtin's is an ideal-typical construction, which as such cannot be taken at face value. His description of poetic monoglossia however holds true for a pre-modern(ist), quintessentially Romantic understanding of poetry as the expression of subjective 'genius', which Bachtin (himself a Marxist theorist of style and language) was in fact polemicizing against in his study on heteroglossia in the novel. Bachtin exerts a criticism of the traditional 19th-century, *bildungsbürgerliche* idea of poetry (as well as of the poetic theory and stylistics that result from such an understanding) from a (broadly speaking) Marxist perspective on language and style, which is the one that Adorno – with all due differences between the two thinkers – also brings to bear on his critical confrontation with Borchardt.

As I have shown, such ideology and myth-disruptive universalism of language is also at the core of Adorno's appraisal of the *Odyssey*[173]. Adorno's Marxist interpretation of Homer mirrors Bachtin's understanding of the novel as a form of linguistic representation that effects a "verbal-ideological decentring" of "a unitary, canonic language, of a *national myth* bolstered by a yet-unshaken unity" (ibid. 370). Such decentring for Bachtin

> will only occur when a national culture loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character, when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among other cultures and languages. It is this knowledge that *will sap the roots of a mythological feeling for language*, based as it is on an absolute fusion of ideological meaning with language; there will arise an acute feeling for language boundaries (social, national and semantic) and only then will language reveal its essential *human character*. (ibid.)

Similarly to Bachtin, Adorno underlines the 'human character' of the Homeric language by pointing its 'universality' ('*Allgemeinheit*'), which he implicitly contrasts to the aristocratic mood of Pindar's 'mythical' poetry. Borchardt on the contrary criticizes the Homeric epics precisely for not being truly 'epic' – that is, no longer epic or not epic enough – but rather too modern, that is linguistically 'enlightened' and therefore anti-mythical[174]. Heteroglossia, seen as the result of 'civilizing' social and cultural dynamics, is bound to destroy the 'national' myths of the close community, as Bachtin notes:

> Such external multi-languagedness strengthens and deepens the internal contradictoriness of literary language itself; it undermines the authority of custom

[173] "Die homerische Rede schafft *Allgemeinheit* der Sprache, wenn sie sie nicht bereits voraussetzt; sie löst die hierarchische Ordnung der Gesellschaft durch die exoterische Gestalt ihrer Darstellung auf, selbst und gerade wo sie jene verherrlicht" (*GEO* 40; my italics).

[174] In *Epic and the Novel* Bachtin gives a definition of the epic genre that approximates Borchardt's understanding of mythical poetry. Particularly the temporal index of the epic differentiates it from the novelistic mode of representation. The traditional epic forms deal with "an absolute past of national beginnings and peak times. The absolute past is a specifically evaluating (hierarchical) category" since "all the really good things (i.e., the 'first' things) occur only in this past. ... The epic past is called the 'absolute past' for good reasons: it is both monochronic and valorized (hierarchical); it lacks any relativity, that is, any gradual, purely temporal progressions that might connect it with the present. It is walled off absolutely form all subsequent times, and above all form those times in which the singer and his listeners are located. This boundary … is immanent in the form of the epic itself and is felt and heard in its every word. To destroy this boundary is to destroy the form of the epic as a genre" (Bachtin 1981, 15-6). Accordingly, Borchardt complains that the Homeric epics destroy the epic-mythical *Volksdichtung*, by relating its subject matter to the immediate present of the hearers and thus 'novelizing' it. Ancient choric poetry on the contrary "hebt die Gegenwart auf und bricht Zeit und Raum. Nichts was Gegenwart Zeit und Raum wäre, ist ihr unterzulegen. ... Daher wird sie starr gegen alles erhalten und verteidigt was von Gegenwart Zeit und Raum her sie zu verwandeln streben könnte, und dieser Mächte sind viel" (Borchardt 2007, 97).

> and of whatever traditions still fetter linguistic consciousness; it erodes that *system of national myth that is organically fused with language*, in effect *destroying once and for all a mythic and magical attitude to language and the word.* A deeply involved participation in alien cultures and languages ... inevitably leads to an awareness of the disassociation between language and intentions, language and thought, language and expression ... By 'disassociation' we have in mind here a destruction of any absolute bonding of ideological meaning to language, which is the defining factor of mythological and magical thought. (ibid. 369; my italics)

In light of Bachtin's reflections, it is understandable how in his cultural critical essays the conservative poet Borchardt could call for a restoration of a national and mythical, natural and archaic (i.e., asocial and primitive) poetic space, where "all activity ... is completely exhausted by the play between the word ... and ... the object itself, with its 'virginal', still 'unuttered' nature" (ibid. 278). As Bachtin shows, however, this 'natural' space of language "is not … given but is always in essence posited" (ibid. 270). This position is affected by "forces that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world", and that therefore are fundamentally "opposed to the realities of heteroglossia" (ibid.). Adorno avails himself of a similar Marxist perspective in his criticism of Borchardt's poetic theory. The poet is for Adorno a foremost representative of the bourgeois 'forces' mirrored throughout the 19th century – and well into the 20th century – in the ideal image of Germany as a *Kulturnation*. Borchardt's autocratic, i.e., self-positing and exclusivist idea of poetic language as a "unitary and singular 'own' language" (ibid. 269), manifests for Adorno a *bildungsbürgerliche* resentment towards cultural modernization (see 1.1.). This attitude explains Borchardt's criticism of the novel as the expression of a quintessentially 'social' and 'modern' – in Bachtin's terms: 'heteroglot' and 'relativistic' – linguistic consciousness. Such criticism betrays for Adorno a more general opposition to the liberal democracy of Weimar and its modernist and avant-garde culture[175]. Bachtin's remarks on the *political-ideological entailments* of a strictly conceived poetic monoglossia are particularly relevant for the present discussion, since they clarify the reasons for Adorno's critique of Borchardt in *GEO*:

> The language of poetic genres, when they approach their stylistic limit, often becomes *authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative*, sealing itself off from the influence of extra-literary social dialects. Therefore such ideas as a special 'poetic language', a 'language of the gods', a 'priestly language of poetry' and so forth could flourish on poetic soil. It is noteworthy that the poet, should he not accept the given

[175] Such critical attitude was typical of large parts of the conservative *bildungsbürgerliche* intelligentsia of Weimar (see Bollenbeck 1999, 194).

> literary language, will sooner resort to the artificial creation of a new language specifically for poetry than he will to the exploitation of actual available social dialects. (Bachtin 1981, 287; my italics)

Similarly, Borchardt undertook to create his own specific, restorative poetic language in opposition to the decadence of contemporary language and the literary genres of modernity – particularly the novel, where "the diversity of speech, and not the unity of a normative shared language … is the ground of style" (ibid. 308)[176]. Adorno takes issue with Borchardt's understanding of poetry as the emanation of "one unitary and indisputable discourse" (ibid. 286), which results in a criticism of the Homeric epics as linguistically 'open' and 'exoteric' poetic forms, developed by travelling rhapsodists in public spaces of congregation of the Greek colonial polis[177]. In this sense, Borchardt's Pindaric afterword functions not only as a source of inspiration, but also as a *polemical target* in Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter. While Adorno follows many of Borchardt's theoretical intuitions and historical cues, he develops a philosophical reading of the *Odyssey* that is *ideologically antagonistic* to that of Borchardt, as it turns his negative cultural conservative judgment of the *Odyssey* as a 'democratic' as well as 'artificial' poetic form in a wholly other, progressive direction.

It is therefore all the more noteworthy that Adorno heavily relies on Borchardt's literary-historical insights in order to build his argument in the *Odyssey* chapter, which can be regarded – along with the first chapter on the concept of enlightenment – as the philosophical core of *DA*. This reliance might be explained by the fact that Adorno shares the same *bildungsbürgerliche* background and aesthetic sensibility as Borchardt[178]. However much this

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[176] In "Discourse in the Novel" Bachtin goes as far as to ascribe the function of exclusion of social heteroglossia from poetic genres to the musical, more precisely rhythmic component of poetic language: "the very rhythm of poetic genres does not promote any appreciable degree of stratification. Rhythm, by creating an unmediated involvement between every aspect of the accentual system of the whole … destroys in embryo those social worlds of speech and of persons that are potentially embedded in the word … Rhythm serves to strengthen and concentrate even further the unity and hermetic quality of the surface of poetic style, and of the unitary language that this style posits" (Bachtin 1981, 297). This observation might help explain Borchardt's emphasis on the musical component of choric poetry, which he misses in the Homeric epics.

[177] Conversely, judging the same phenomenon from his Marxist point of view, Bachtin notes: "a sealed-off interest group, cast or class, existing within an internally unitary and unchanging core of its own, cannot serve as socially productive soil for the development of the novel unless it becomes riddled with decay or shifted somehow from its state of internal balance and self-sufficiency. This is the case because a literary and language consciousness operating from the heights of its own incontestably authoritative unitary language fails to take into account the fact of heteroglossia and multi-languagedness. ... It is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture's awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naive absence of conflict" (Bachtin 1981, 368).

[178] It is significant in this respect that Adorno even published an anthology of Borchardt's poetry in 1968 (see Borchardt, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*). Adorno's introduction to this anthology – which was included in *Noten zur Literatur IV* with the title "Die beschworene Sprache: zur Lyrik Rudolf Borchardts" (*GS* 11, 536 ff.) – is probably the clearest evidence of Adorno's lifelong interest and profound affinity for Borchardt's poetry (see Schmidt 2004, 436 ff.).

argument might serve to justify Adorno's interest in Borchardt's Pindaric afterword – and more generally in his poetic work – it ought to be complemented with a more practical and prosaic explanation. The reason for Adorno's heavy reliance on Borchardt is to be found in Adorno's peculiar style of thought, which appropriates the discourses and ideas of others in order to 'feed' his own dialectical philosophy.

Adorno's reflections on the dialectic of myth and enlightenment are inseparable from his reading of the Homeric epic as a poetical allegory of the historical process of civilization. If one considers this, Borchardt's important contribution to *GEO* consists above all in having provided Adorno with valuable aesthetic tools that enable him to apply his dialectical theory to a literary subject. Sure enough, these tools in *GEO* function as 'semantic hybrids' (see Bachtin 1981, 360), since they are not used by Adorno in the same manner as the poet uses them, but rather in a way that is intentionally antagonistic to that of Borchardt. Nevertheless, Borchardt's contribution to Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* can hardly be overestimated. The philosopher needs the poet's philological intuition in order to give concrete shape to his dialectical philosophy in the introductory, i.e., discursively framing part of the earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter. Borchardt's influence on *GEO* in fact not only regards literary-historical and aesthetic matters, but rather the *theoretical core* of Adorno's Homeric interpretation. A longer excerpt testifies to this deeper level of influence:

> Die Kameraderie mit aller unmittelbaren Herrschaft und der Hass gegen Vermittlung, den 'Liberalismus' jeglicher Stufe, wie sie die organologisch-realpolitischen Nutznießer Nietzsches von Spengler über Klages bis hinaus zu Borchardt allenthalben praktizieren, *hat jedoch mehr an Einsicht gezeitigt*, als dem vielgewandten Lakonismus der Reklame für Ursprungsmächte zuzutrauen wäre. Die Stimme des reinen, quellenden, unverstellten Lebens, in welche sich die Identifikation mit jenen vermummt, die dem Leben stets blutige Gewalt antaten, verwirft mit unbeirrbarer Härte, was nicht ihres eigenen Unwesens ist. Unter dem hasserfüllten Blick erstrecken die Linien von Vernunft, Liberalität, Bürgerlichkeit samt all ihrer Schuld sich unvergleichlich weiter als nicht nur die klassizistische Tradition, sondern auch die historische Vorstellung annimmt, die den Begriff des Bürgers im Großen vom Ende der mittelalterlichen Feudalität her datiert. Indem die neuromantische Reaktion den Bürger dort aufspürt, wo der ältere bürgerliche Humanismus heilige Frühe wähnt, die ihn selber legitimieren soll, *sind Weltgeschichte und Aufklärung in eins gesetzt*. (*GEO* 40; my italics).

This rather striking passage exemplarily shows the peculiar combination of critique and admiration with respect to Borchardt that runs through Adorno's text. The latter stigmatizes Borchardt's Neo-Romantic *Kulturkritik* and restorative archaism through a starkly polemical

vocabulary ("hasserfüllten Blick") not lacking in biting sarcasm ("vielgewandten Lakonismus der Reklame für Ursprungsmächte"). At the same time, however, Adorno indirectly ("die neuromantische Reaktion") yet unmistakeably acknowledges Borchardt's interpretative merits: to 'equate' ('Ineinssetzen') world-history and enlightenment ("Weltgeschichte und Aufklärung in eins gesetzt") is in fact the premise of Adorno's own *Odyssey* interpretation. In the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*, Adorno sees the history of Western civilization as a progress of enlightenment, understood as man's liberation from natural coercion. This reading takes the form of an 'archaeology' of modern subjectivity (see Agard 2005, 158), centred on the figure of Odysseus as the prototypical bourgeois, civilized subject and shrewd hero of instrumental reason. Significantly, Adorno's tracing of the origin of modern bourgeois subjectivity back to Homeric Greece relies on Borchardt's cultural history of Greek poetry. His intentionally 'anachronistic' judgment of the *Odyssey* as an already modern poetic work influences Adorno's depiction of Odysseus as a proto-modern hero, as well as his understanding of the *Odyssey* as a 'novel'. The poet's philological essay on Greek poetry in this sense functions as *both a fundamental source of inspiration and polemical backdrop to* Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation in *DA*.

The tension between thematic inspiration and ideological rejection accounts for the peculiar ambiguity that characterizes Adorno's relation to Borchardt in *GEO*. This becomes particularly evident in the strident mixture of conflicting rhetorical registers in Adorno's text, which constantly shifts from admiration to critique, from recognition to hostility towards the conservative poet. The following passage provides an example of this highly ambivalent relationship: "Unmenschlichkeit hat die *Geschichtsphilosophie der homerischen Menschlichkeit* erraten, das Verhältnis von Mythos und Zivilisation" (*GEO* 41). While Adorno attributes to Borchardt a correct historico-philosophical understanding of Homeric poetry (as premised by the "Geschichtsphilosophischer Exkurs zur *Odyssee*"), the rhetorical affect of the sentence negates this attribution in the process of affirming it. Adorno embeds his open recognition of Borchardt's interpretative merits in a harsh accusation ('inhumanity') and, furthermore, understates that the poet would only have 'guessed' ("erraten"), rather than really understood the relation of myth and civilization that informs the Homeric epics. Such is the peculiar ambivalence informing Adorno's relationship with Borchardt in the first part of the earlier *Odyssey* chapter.

This ambivalent rhetorical strategy has an equivalent at the level of argumentation. As we have seen, Adorno uses Borchardt's theses about Homer for his own progressive evaluation of the *Odyssey*. Adorno takes his cue from Borchardt's afterword to *Pindarische*

Gedichte, yet he does so in order to contradict the latter's arguments and dialectically 'overcome' them. As I have already mentioned, such agonistic confrontation with Borchardt is *both theoretical and ideological*. Adorno avails himself of Borchardt's theory of Greek poetry in order to confute him, i.e., prove him 'wrong', by developing an interpretation of the *Odyssey* that claims to be more theoretically valid than that of Borchardt. At the same time, Adorno's reproof of the poet's Pindaric afterward implies a radical ideology critique of the latter's poetic and cultural theory. The intrinsic connection between the theoretical and ideological levels of Adorno's critique of Borchardt is apparent in the following passage from *GEO*:

> Borchardt hat den antimythologischen, aufgeklärten Charakter Homers im Gegensatz zur chthonischen Mythologie *erkannt*. Im Dienste der repressiven Ideologie jedoch hält seine Analyse zu früh inne. *Er sieht nicht*, daß die von ihm gepriesenen Ursprungsmächte, als deren späten Restaurator und substantiellsten Ausdruck er Pindar begreift, selbst *bereits eine Stufe jenes Prozesses der Aufklärung* darstellen, den er im Bunde mit ihnen rückgängig machen möchte. *Sein Prinzip*, Aufklärung und Ratio geschichtsphilosophisch weit hinter die Grenze von systematischer Spekulation und organisierter Wissenschaft zurückzuverfolgen, kehrt sich gegen den Archaismus, den er vertritt. (*GEO* 43; my italics)

This passage sums up the gist of Adorno's theoretical confutation and ideological inversion of Borchardt's Homeric interpretation. Adorno fundamentally acknowledges the validity of Borchardt's historico-philosophical understanding of the *Odyssey* as an enlightened, i.e., myth-disenchanting narration ("Borchardt hat ... erkannt"). Yet immediately afterwards he exposes Borchardt's negative judgment of the epic as a sign of 'repressive' ideology, which does not allow him to thoroughly pursue his fruitful historical and philological intuitions. The recognition of the link of myth and enlightenment in the *Odyssey* should have lead the poet – based on *his own* premises – to a different conclusion than the one that he eventually came to in his afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte*. For Adorno, "Die Mythen, die der Aufklärung zum Opfer fallen, waren selbst schon deren eigenes Produkt. ... Der Mythos wollte berichten, nennen, den Ursprung sagen: damit aber darstellen, festhalten, *erklären*" (*DA* 24; my italics). Even ancient Greek mythology, which for Borchardt was impiously trivialized by the Homeric epic, represents a first stage of 'enlightenment' with respect to archaic Greek religion: "Als sprachlich entfaltete Totalität, deren Wahrheitsanspruch den älteren mythischen Glauben, die Volksreligion, herabdrückt, ist der solare, patriarchale Mythos selbst

Aufklärung" (*DA* 28)[179]. According to Adorno, myth and enlightenment cannot be absolutely separated. This is why he cannot accept Borchardt's stark juxtaposition of 'mythical' Doric poetry (Pindar) and 'enlightened' Ionian epos (Homer) (see 2.5.).

This criticism underlies Adorno's 'deconstruction' of Borchardt's Pindaric afterword. The mode of reasoning that proves an argument to be dissonant with its own premises – i.e., contradictory, therefore wrong – can be described by the term 'confutation'. Thus, Adorno *confutes* Borchardt's Homeric interpretation in order to discredit his conservative-revolutionary cultural and poetic theory (see 2.4. and 2.5.). Yet at the same time, he avails himself of this theory in order to build up his own Homeric interpretation, which is inextricably tied to his polemical argument against Borchardt. In this sense, Adorno 'ventriloquizes' the poet, since he has him talk *for him* and yet *against himself*[180]. The following passage from *GEO explicitly* accounts for such strategy, which is *implicitly* at work throughout the first section of Adorno's earlier *Odyssey* chapter:

> Die Ideologie, welche Liquidation von Aufklärung zu ihrer eigensten Sache macht, erweist ihr widerwillig die Reverenz. So nahe ist die Erfüllung aufgeklärten Denkens gerückt, dass dessen Todfeinde noch in der entlegensten Ferne es zu verfemen gezwungen sind, weil gerade seine älteste Spur dem schlechten Gewissen der heutigen Archaiker den ganzen Prozeß noch einmal zu entbinden droht, den zu ersticken sie sich vorgenommen haben. Solchem Vernichtungsdrang dankt Borchardt Einsichten in Homer, die, einmal dem Bann des Unheils entrissen, dem gescholtenen Epos zum Guten ausschlagen mögen. (*GEO* 41)

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[179] Adorno-Horkheimer borrow the notions of 'patriarchy' and 'matriarchy' ('*Patriarchat*' and '*Matriarchat*') from Johan Jakob Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* (1861). This work constitutes one of the major anthropological sources for the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. Bachofen postulated the existence of a 'mother-right' ('*Mutterrecht*') and matriarchal religion in archaic (particularly Hellenic) societies. Both according to him have been replaced in the historical development of ancient cultures by a 'Dionysian' (a transition time when patriarchy began to emerge), and then an 'Apollonian' (i.e., patriarchal and solar) phase, which Bachofen saw as the first 'rational' stage of culture. Adorno's quasi-anthropological interspersions in the *Odyssey* chapter heavily rely on Bachofen's work. The latter was also as a major source of inspiration for much irrationalist literature and philosophy in Germany during the first decades of the 20th century (see Dörr 2007).

[180] Adorno polemical dealing with Borchardt's poetic theory in *GEO* is 'rhetorical', as Bachtin understands the terms: "rhetoric relies heavily on the vivid re-accentuating of the words it transmits (often to the point of distorting them completely) that is accomplished by the appropriate framing context" (Bachtin 1981, 354). As we have seen, by aptly contextualizing Borchardt's poetic discourse, Adorno attempts to lay bare the latter's ideological implications, which he submits to harsh criticism, exerted from a (broadly speaking) Marxist or progressive perspective. However, in dealing with Borchardt's "discourse as a topic of speech, one that requires the transmission and re-processing of another's word", he also appropriates it, as "one may speak of another's discourse *only with the help of that alien discourse itself*, although in the process … the speaker introduces into the other's words his own intentions and highlights the context of those words in his own way" (ibid. 355; my italics). This, precisely, is the gist of Adorno's 'ventriloquism' of Borchardt.

This paragraph contains a statement and an implication. First, Adorno affirms that Borchardt's *Odyssey* interpretation unwillingly – that is precisely by means of disparaging criticism – pays Homer his due. Furthermore – this is the underlying implication – if a reactionary author such as Borchardt is so irritated by Homer, then the latter's epic poetry must have a 'political' quality that is in opposition to Borchardt's poetic sensibility and cultural tenets. As we have seen, this quality for Adorno (and Borchardt) pertains to enlightenment as a dominant tendency of ancient Greek civilization. The statement and the implication contained in Adorno's sentence suggest an ideological conclusion that runs counter to Borchardt's Homeric evaluation. The historical process of enlightenment – which the poet sees already at work in Greek antiquity, and of which the Homeric epics would be the paramount poetic expression – for Adorno fundamentally coincides with the social and material progress of mankind. As such, it has to be further pursued, towards the realization of a truly 'civilized' condition of existence, one in which humanity would be liberated from misery and affliction (determined by either natural or social causes such as hunger and violence, illness and coercion). Indeed, civilization implies for Adorno-Horkheimer the realization of the original promise of Enlightenment: to make man the master of his own destiny[181].

The evaluation of the *Odyssey* as an enlightened poetic form thus implies for Adorno a defense of enlightenment tout court from its conservative-revolutionary detractors, "die organologisch-realpolitischen Nutzniesser Nietzsches von Spengler über Klages bis hinauf zu Borchardt" (*GEO* 40)[182]. Moreover, despite the critical assessment of the history of civilization as a process of growing domination and depredation of nature, in the *Odyssey* chapter (more evidently so in the earlier than in the final version) Adorno speaks *for* civilization, and *against* the *Zivilisationskritik* of Rudolf Borchardt and like-minded conservative *Kulturkritiker* of Weimar Germany, who "mit aller ... unmittelbaren Herrschaft sich einig fühlen und alle Vermittlung, den 'Liberalismus' jeglicher Stufe verfemen" (*DA* 62).

Adorno's ideological defense of Western enlightenment and modern civilization against Rudolf Borchardt (and Ludwig Klages, as I will show in the following chapter) takes the form of a philosophical interpretation of the *Odyssey* as an allegorical *narration of civilization* and as an enlightening, i.e., *civilizing narrative* at the same time. In the following

[181] This promise for Adorno is far from being realized in his time, as the first sentence of *DA* famously states: "Seit je hat Aufklärung im umfassendsten Sinn fortschreitenden Denkens das Ziel verfolgt, von den Menschen die Furcht zu nehmen und sie als Herren einzusetzen. Aber die vollends aufgeklärte Erde strahlt im Zeichen triumphalen Unheils" (*DA* 19).

[182] In a later fragment of *Minima Moralia* (1944-1947) Adorno defines this project as follows: "Nicht die letzte der Aufgaben, vor welche Denken sich gestellt sieht, ist es, alle reaktionären Argumente gegen die abendländische Kultur in den Dienst der fortschreitenden Aufklärung zu stellen" (*GS* 4, 218).

section of this chapter, I will demonstrate this through a close reading and interpretation of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* against the background provided by his confrontation with Borchardt in the introductory part of the earlier excursus on the *Odyssey*.

2.7. Language and Instrumentality in the *Odyssey*: a Counterpoint to Borchardt's Neo-Romanticism

Adorno's polemical confrontation with Borchardt occurs in a manifest manner and at an *explicit level* in the first pages of *GEO*, as is evinced by the frequent references and quotes from Borchardt's afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* in the text. However, Adorno's confrontation with Borchardt also takes place at an *implicit level* throughout *GEO*. Although the latter certainly cannot be reduced to Adorno's polemic against Borchardt, the framework provided by the first, later deleted pages of the *Odyssey* chapter justifies a reading of it as a philosophical response to Borchardt's poetic and cultural theory. This response develops subterraneanly throughout the chapter, and is immanent to Adorno's philosophical reading of the *Odyssey*. For this reason, after having considered his explicit polemic against Borchardt, I will now devote my attention to the implicit level.

As I have shown, Adorno considers the *Odyssey* in terms of a dialectic of 'matter' and 'form': "In den *Stoffschichten* Homers haben die Mythen sich niedergeschlagen; der *Bericht* von ihnen aber, die Einheit, die den diffusen Sagen abgezwungen ward, ist zugleich die Beschreibung der Fluchtbahn des Subjekts vor den mythischen Mächten" (*GEO* 45-46). For Adorno, the narrative subject of Odysseus' escape from the mythical figures that he encounters during his wanderings is reflected in the 'prosaic' and 'open' form of the Homeric epic, as opposed to the 'chanted' mythical sagas of archaic folk poetry. The discursive and social quality of the *Odyssey* as a rhapsodic market narration, which Borchardt disparages as a sign of cultural decadence, is for Adorno an indication of the incipient self-empowerment of the Greek subject in the face of mythical belief and primitive *Volksreligion*.

In order to comprehend the reason for Adorno's understanding of the intrinsic relationship between *epic language and enlightened subjectivity* in the *Odyssey*, it is useful to recall the theoretical premises of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter, which are to be found in the first chapter of *DA*, entitled "Begriff der Aufklärung". Here, Adorno-Horkheimer understand enlightenment as a process of emancipation from myth, more precisely from the 'mythical fear' ("mythische Angst", *DA* 32) of nature[183]. The organ of this liberation is instrumental

[183] "Seit je hat Aufklärung im umfassendsten Sinn fortschreitenden Denkens das Ziel verfolgt, von den Menschen *die Furcht zu nehmen* und sie als Herren einzusetzen. ... Das Programm der Aufklärung war die Entzauberung der Welt. Sie wollte die Mythen auflösen und Einbildung durch Wissen stürzen" (*DA* 19; my italics).

reason, i.e., the ability to learn from nature in order to command it[184]. Enlightenment and domination of nature thus go hand in hand in Adorno-Horkheimer's philosophy of history. This theoretical premise is developed figuratively in the excursus on the *Odyssey*. Here the historical process of enlightenment is illustrated by way of allegorical narration, centered on Odysseus as a prototypical *civilized subject and enlightened hero*. A champion of instrumental reason, Odysseus manages to assert himself against the overpowering forces of nature, embodied by the mythical figures (the Sirens, the Lotus-Eaters, the Cyclops, Circe) that he encounters during his ten years of wandering across the Mediterranean:

> Im Gegensatz des einen überlebenden Ich zum vielfältigen Schicksal prägt sich derjenige der Aufklärung zum Mythos aus. Die Irrfahrt von Troja nach Ithaka ist der Weg des leibhaft gegenüber der Naturgewalt unendlich schwachen und im Selbstbewußtsein erst sich bildenden Selbst durch die Mythen. (*DA* 64; see also *GEO* 46)

Odysseus' confrontation with the mythical figures in the *Odyssey* is read by Adorno as an allegory of man's confrontation with nature in the process of human civilization. This interpretative perspective allows him to consider the Homeric epic as an emblematic narrative of the historical dialectic between myth – as a primitive form of knowledge and worldview – and enlightenment, understood as the process of acquisition of power over nature and obliteration of the 'mythical fear' of it[185]. The mythical figures that confront Odysseus try to subject him to their unchanging laws, thus interrupting his course of homecoming to Ithaca. The hero manages to overcome them through cunning ('*List*'), which Adorno defines as the capacity to gain intelligence about a foreign power in order to oppose it. Odysseus' cunning for Adorno takes the form of a shrewd mimesis of nature, aimed at its final disempowerment:

> Nur die bewußt gehandhabte Anpassung an die Natur bringt diese unter die Gewalt des physisch Schwächeren. ... Es ist die Formel für die List des Odysseus, daß der

[184] At the beginning of the chapter "Begriff der Aufklärung", Adorno-Horkheimer refer to (and extensively quote from) one of the fathers of experimental philosophy, Francis Bacon, who exhorted his contemporaries to dismiss traditional prejudices and emulate nature in invention, in order to command her by action (see *DA* 20 ff.).

[185] This obliteration of fear in the process of civilization for Adorno-Horkheimer is only apparent. Their janus-faced dialectic implies a reversal of the chronological process of disenchantment, at the end of which enlightenment appears itself as a radical form of mythical fear: "Die Götter können die Furcht nicht vom Menschen nehmen, deren versteinerte Laute sie als ihre Namen tragen. Der Furcht wähnt er ledig zu sein, wenn es nichts Unbekanntes mehr gibt. Das bestimmt die Bahn der Entmythologisierung, der Aufklärung, die das Lebendige mit dem Unlebendigen ineinssetzt wie der Mythos das Unlebendige mit dem Lebendigen. Aufklärung ist die radikal gewordene, mythische Angst" (*DA* 32).

> abgelöste, instrumentale Geist, indem er der Natur resigniert sich einschmiegt, dieser das Ihre gibt und sie eben dadurch betrügt. (*DA* 75-76; see also *GEO* 59)

Instrumental reason (as 'cunning') and enlightened subjectivity go hand in hand in Adorno's depiction of Odysseus as the prototypical civilized subject and hero of enlightenment. In Adorno's representation of Odysseus, however, instrumental rationality is not only a technical, but also a *linguistic faculty*. Adorno's narration of the hero's successful struggle against myth stages the birth of subjective rationality from the 'spirit' of language. Odysseus saves himself from the threat posed by the myths by becoming conscious of language as an instrument of power and deception, but also of self-preservation and self-formation. In order to demonstrate this, it is necessary to first consider how Adorno characterizes the mythical figures of the *Odyssey*:

> Die mythischen Ungetüme, in deren Machtbereich er gerät, stellen allemal gleichsam versteinerte Verträge, Rechtsansprüche aus der Vorzeit dar. ... Daß es unmöglich wäre, etwa eine andere Route zu wählen als die zwischen Szylla und Charybdis, mag man rationalistisch als die mythische Transformation der Übermacht der Meeresströmung über die kleinen altertümlichen Schiffe auffassen. Aber in der mythisch vergegenständlichenden Übertragung hat das Naturverhältnis von Stärke und Ohnmacht bereits den Charakter eines Rechtsverhältnisses angenommen. Szylla und Charybdis haben einen Anspruch auf das, was ihnen zwischen die Zähne kommt, so wie Kirke einen, den Ungefeiten zu verwandeln, oder Polyphem den auf die Leiber seiner Gäste. Eine jegliche der mythischen Figuren ist gehalten, immer wieder das Gleiche zu tun. Jede besteht in Wiederholung: deren Mißlingen wäre ihr Ende. (*DA* 76-77; cf. *GEO* 59)

For Adorno, the myths of the *Odyssey* are unchangeable figures of coercion ("Figuren des Zwanges", *GEO* 59), emanations of a foreign and inhuman, abstract and meaningless necessity ("Figuren des abstrakten Schicksals, der sinnfernen Notwendigkeit", ibid.). It is against such a seemingly unmovable law of destiny that Odysseus' enlightened subjectivity according to Adorno asserts itself in the epic, driven by self-interest, i.e., the 'egoistic' drive towards self-preservation, spurred by the goal of returning to his homeland and possessions:

> Die einfache Unwahrheit an den Mythen aber, daß nämlich Meer und Erde wahrhaft nicht von Dämonen bewohnt werden, Zaubertrug und Diffusion der überkommenen Volksreligion, wird unterm Blick des Mündigen zur 'Irre' gegenüber der

> Eindeutigkeit des Zwecks seiner Selbsterhaltung, der Rückkehr zu Heimat und festem Besitz. (*GEO* 46)

According to Adorno, the absolute claim of the mythical powers must be perceived as an irrational folly by the rational subject struggling for survival and homecoming. At the same time, however, Odysseus acquires the full measure of his rational faculty only by facing the threat that the myths pose. Odysseus sharpens his wits and becomes 'rational' in the face of death:

> Das Wissen, in dem seine Identität besteht und das ihm zu überleben ermöglicht, hat seine Substanz an der Erfahrung des Vielfältigen, Ablenkenden, Auflösenden, und der wissend Überlebende ist zugleich der, welcher der *Todesdrohung* am verwegensten sich überläßt, an der er zum Leben hart und stark wird. Das ist das Geheimnis im Prozeß zwischen Epos und Mythos: *das Selbst* macht nicht den starren Gegensatz zum Abenteuer aus, sondern *formt in seiner Starrheit sich erst durch diesen Gegensatz*, Einheit bloß in der Mannigfaltigkeit dessen, was jene Einheit verneint. (*GEO* 46-47; my italics)

The self-formation of the hero as a rational subject results from the state of necessity into which the mythical figures repeatedly cast him. The wandering subject must demystify the myths if he wants to survive. He therefore sets out to acquire a rational, topographic and toponymic overview of the 'mythical' space that surrounds him: "Die Vorwelt ist in den Raum säkularisiert, den er durchmißt. … Die Abenteuer … bedenken jeden Ort mit seinem Namen. Aus ihnen gerät die rationale Übersicht über den Raum. Der zitternde Schiffbrüchige nimmt die Arbeit des Kompasses vorweg" (*GEO* 46). According to Adorno's interpretation of Odysseus' character, his state of necessity, determined by his physical inferiority with respect to the mythical powers, is also the precondition for his disenchantment and subsequent overcoming of these powers: "Seine Ohnmacht, der kein Ort des Meeres unbekannt mehr bleibt, zielt zugleich auf die Entmächtigung der Mächte" (ibid.).

As we have seen, in Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* the instrument of Odysseus' self-assertion against the mythical threats is cunning ('*List*'). The relationship between the hero's subjective interest and the mythical law is described by Adorno in terms of an unequal confrontation between rational 'universality' ('*Allgemeinheit*') and irrational 'destiny': "Das Selbst repräsentiert *rationale Allgemeinheit wider die Unausweichlichkeit des Schicksals*. Weil er aber Allgemeines und Unausweichliches ineinander verschränkt vorfindet, nimmt

seine Rationalität notwendig beschränkende Form an, die der *Ausnahme*" (*GEO* 59-60; my italics). Since the power relation between the mythical law of destiny and the subject's subjective interest is fundamentally unequal, Odysseus cannot oppose the mythical forces directly. He rather has to find a subterranean way to contrast them. For Adorno, Odysseus' cunning consists in his ability to find a breach in the mythical law in order to penetrate and disrupt it from within. His physical inferiority thus determines his rational superiority over the overpowering, yet spatially restricted authority of the myths[186]. As Adorno famously exemplifies through his reading of the Sirens episode of the *Odyssey*, the sly hero acknowledges the unquestionable jurisdiction of their mythical chant, yet only in order to overcome it. Odysseus

> muß sich den ihn einschließenden und bedrohenden Rechtsverhältnissen entziehen, die gewissermaßen einer jeglichen mythischen Figur einbeschrieben sind. Er tut der Rechtssatzung Genüge derart, daß sie die Macht über ihn verliert, indem er ihr diese Macht einräumt. Es ist unmöglich, die Sirenen zu hören und ihnen nicht zu verfallen: es läßt sich ihnen nicht trotzen. Trotz und Verblendung sind eines, und wer ihnen trotzt, ist damit eben an den Mythos verloren, dem er sich stellt. List aber ist der rational gewordene Trotz. Odysseus versucht nicht, einen andern Weg zu fahren als den an der Sireneninsel vorbei. Er versucht auch nicht, etwa auf die Überlegenheit seines Wissens zu pochen und frei den Versucherinnen zuzuhören, wähnend, seine Freiheit genüge als Schutz. *Er macht sich ganz klein*, das Schiff nimmt seinen vorbestimmten, fatalen Kurs, und er realisiert, daß er, wie sehr auch bewußt von Natur distanziert, als Hörender ihr verfallen bleibt. Er hält den Vertrag seiner Hörigkeit inne und zappelt noch am Mastbaum, um in die Arme der Verderberinnen zu stürzen. Aber er hat *eine Lücke im Vertrag* aufgespürt, durch die er bei der Erfüllung der Satzung dieser entschlüpft. Im urzeitlichen Vertrag ist nicht vorgesehen, ob der Vorbeifahrende gefesselt oder nicht gefesselt dem Lied lauscht. (*GEO* 60; my italics)

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[186] As I have shown (see 2.6.) 'universality' ('*Allgemeinheit*') for Adorno is the prerogative of enlightenment. In the passage, however, Adorno suggests that the myths also represent universality, since they incarnate an absolutely valid, inescapable law. Yet their universality is restricted by their local jurisdiction, and thus reveals itself in actuality as a form of *particular interest*, as such lacking general validity. The universal claims of the myths must therefore appear 'irrational' to the rational subject, since they are utterly alien to his (literally) wide-ranging horizon as a traveler across the known world, as well as to his ultimate goal, namely the return to his civilized home in Ithaca. Odysseus on the contrary represents for Adorno the claims of 'true' universality, because his interest is not restricted to a single geographic space or legal jurisdiction. The travelling subject finds itself in a process of self-development through space. He is confronted with local laws and restricted jurisdictions, which he needs to overcome in order to carry out his goal of homecoming. In other words, Odysseus is *forced* to be an agent of disruptive universality by his own condition as a traveler and cast away at the same time. He therefore is not merely an impious debunker of old myths, as conservative readers such as Borchardt consider him, but rather an unwilled 'subject' (in Foucault's sense, as 'subjected') of the mythical laws that he is repeatedly submitted to, wherefrom, however, he breaks away always anew, in a process of continuous self-emancipation. For a political reading of the *Odyssey* in terms of the relation between localism and universalism see Deneen 2003.

The 'civilized' intelligence of Odysseus allows him to detect a breach in the Sirens' law, which does not specify how the travelers must listen to their chant while passing through their mythical realm. He consequently has himself tied by his shipmates to the mast of his ship, and is thus able to listen to their chant without perishing (as the myth says, those who listen to the Sirens are doomed):

> Odysseus erkennt die *archaische Übermacht des Liedes* an, indem er, *technisch aufgeklärt*, sich fesseln läßt. Er neigt sich dem *Liede der Lust* und vereitelt sie wie den Tod. Der gefesselt Hörende will zu den Sirenen wie irgendein anderer. Nur eben hat er die Veranstaltung getroffen, daß er als Verfallener ihnen nicht verfällt. (ibid.; my italics)

The Sirens' chant, which invites the traveler to abandon his ship and become one with them, is irresistibly seductive for Odysseus. However, he recognizes in advance his inferiority with respect to them, and saves his life by means of this sly yet humble recognition. For Adorno, Odysseus' cunning consists in his ability to determine the power relations at play in his confrontation with the enemy, and act in accordance. His promethean capacity to foresee and plan guarantees his survival in the face of the Sirens' deadly temptation.

In Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey*, the Sirens' unchanging law manifests itself through *enchantment and incantation*. The mythical jurisdiction of these uncanny figures coincides with the seduction exerted on the hearers by their alluring chant. This gives us a clue as to the reasons for Adorno's opposition to Borchardt's Neo-Romantic notion of poetry as mythical 'chant' in *GEO* (see 2.5.). As I have shown, in his afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte* Borchardt exalts Pindar's poetry as the last document of the aboriginal 'choric' poetry of mainland Greece. Borchardt defines the content of this poetry as 'mythical' ("[die] mutterländische Poesie ist ... überhaupt nichts als Mythos", *PG* 108-109), its form as 'chanted': "dichtenden Musik", whose "musikalische Ordnung" (*PG* 102) reflects the hierarchical order of the 'close' community[187]. The 'chanted' community poetry idealized by

[187] In the speech *Die Pindarische Restauration* Borchardt goes as far as stating: "Es gibt keine Poesie als Schöpfung außerhalb von Mythus und Musik" (Borchardt, "Die Pindarische Restauration", 101-102). Significantly, Borchardt's construct of Greek choric poetry as a musical and ritual form entails a relativization of the 'logical' and 'rational' aspects of its language: "Diese Worte haben mit *Sprache und Rede nichts zu schaffen*; sie sind reiner Ausdruck entrückter Harmonie, werden nicht von Sprache und Sprachgebrauch, kanonisierter Grammatik Syntax oder Flexion aus nach rationalen und logischen Gesetzen betstimmt, sondern bestimmen umgekehrt alle dies vom *Rhythmus* und der *Musik* aus ins Gefüge. Die verschmelzende Fügung ist ihr Charakter und ihr Stil. Die Worte sind in den Satz, der Satz in die Periode nicht gereiht und geordnet sondern durch den Intensitätsgrad der Entrückung in den Ton gegoßen, lückenlos. So fließen sie ihm denn auch aus den Schätzen der Erinnerung zu, die er besitzt und verwaltet. Er besitzt, der hat, er ist die ganze Vorzeit" (Borchardt, "Die

Borchardt was perceived by Adorno retrospectively (during his American exile) as an anticipation of the sham *Gemeinschaft*-cult propagated by the Nazis[188]. In "Die Pindarische Restauration" Borchardt writes:

> Ein griechisches Chorlied ist ... eine in vorgeschriebenen Formen vollzogene heilige Handlung uralt sinnbildlichen Charakter. Die Menschen die den Chor bilden sind *keine Individuen*. Der Meister der den Chor lehrt was er zu singen hat, ist *kein Individuum*; und im Grunde ist ein Individuum auch nicht der Chor: er ist ein *symbolischer Vertreter* des wirklichen Individuums das durch alle diese Mittel hindurch heilig handelt, *des Stammes* ... der aus einem einzigen Munde betend singt, und dessen Gesange ein mehr oder minder festgeknüpftes Wortnetz unterspannt werden muß, um den musikalischen Rhythmus zusammenzuhalten. Mehr als das sind die Texte ihrem Ursprunge nach nicht, der geringste Teil also der ganzen ... Heiligungshandlung. Bestimmt wird sie nicht vom Worte her, sondern von der Musik, und die Musik ist ihrerseits uralt ehrwürdig determiniert. (Borchardt, "Die Pindarische Restauration", 95-96; my italics).

Borchardt's idea of a mythical and musical poetry, understood as the ritual expression of the close cultural community, is diametrically opposed to Adorno's appreciation of the *Odyssey* as a literary document representative of an already secularized, open and democratic society[189]. Against this background, Adorno's interpretation of the Sirens episode of the *Odyssey* can be read in my opinion as a suggestive allusion to Borchardt's Neo-Romantic idealization of the 'natural' community (*Gemeinschaft*), which he contrasts with modern individualism and the free 'chatter' of liberal society (*Gesellschaft*)[190]. Borchardt's fascination with collective ritual appeared to Adorno in the early 40s as a learned version of the fascist

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Pindarische Restauration", 101). Thus, for Borchardt the choric 'music' evokes prehistory, as much as the Sirens' chant does for Adorno (more to this in 2.8.).

[188] As I have shown in the preceding section of this chapter, Adorno considers Borchardt's aristocratic aestheticism and radical anti-modernism in connection with his conservative-revolutionary and proto-fascist ideology. His idealization of Pindar as the last tutor of an archaic socio-cultural order, which he opposes to the cultural developments of the Greek colonial period, reflects in Adorno's eyes Borchardt's 'fundamentalist' opposition against the constitutive plurality of liberal society. Borchardt belongs to those conservative-revolutionary intellectuals of Weimar Germany who, due to their authoritarian sympathies, "[sich] mit aller ... unmittelbaren Herrschaft … einig fühlen und alle Vermittlung, den 'Liberalismus' jeglicher Stufe verfemen" (*DA* 62).

[189] Borchardt characterizes Homer's epics and its world as follows "das Publikum, die Menge, das wachsende buntschichtige Gewimmel der See- und Handelsstädte ... die Vielen, die den neuen Olymp der spaßigen Götter übernahmen, die Erzählung stofflich wie einen Roman, die Charaktere unbekümmert" (Borchardt, "Die Pindarische Restauration", 110). The contrast with his idealization of choric poetry could not be greater.

[190] "Die berühmte Unterscheidung zwischen Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, die wir Ferdinand Tönnies verdanken, wurde in der publizistischen Literaturen der Weimarer Jahre in einer Einseitigkeit aufgegriffen, die den subtilen Analysen ihres Schöpfers ins Gesicht schlug. Gemeinschaft ist gut, Gesellschaft böse; Gemeinschaft ist organisch, Gesellschaft künstlich; Gemeinschaft ist Göttes Schöpfung, Gesellschaft ein Gebilde von Menschenhand" (Sontheimer 1962, 309).

aesthetization of politics theorized by his friend Walter Bejamin some years earlier in his "Kunstwerk" essay (see Benjamin 1991-I). Through his interpretation of the Sirens episode, Adorno therefore attempts to de-romanticize Borchardt's Pindaric ideal by suggesting the dangerous political implications of the latter's poetic and cultural theory.

In the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*, Odysseus is *positively pictured* by Adorno as the enlightened hero who, by holding onto his subjective individuality, manages to overcome the threat posed to him by the mythical powers and the unchangeable jurisdiction that they represent. Adorno's interpretation of the Sirens episode suggests that the mythical figures *aesthetically tempt* Odysseus, by promising him *self-dissolution*, i.e., the relinquishment of individuality through a fusion with unbounded 'nature'. In truth, this promise is deadly, since the ones who listen to the Sirens' chant are doomed, according to the myth. The rational subject Odysseus represents in Adorno's *Odyssey* reading a sort of 'bourgeois hero', who succesfully opposes the musical temptation of the Sirens. This temptation is sugggestive of the 'musical climate' for Fascism that characterized large parts of German late-Romantic art and culture from Wagner on, according to Adorno [191].

Odysseus, the prototypical modern subject, disenchants the power of myth through his rational dispositions, which are a necessity of his struggle for self-preservation. Significantly, such disenchantment of myth is made possible by the hero's acquisition of a new awareness of *language* as an *instrument of designation*:

> Mit der Auflösung des Vertrags durch dessen wörtliche Befolgung ändert sich der geschichtliche Standort der Sprache: sie beginnt in *Bezeichnung* überzugehen. Das mythische Schicksal, Fatum, war eins mit dem gesprochenen Wort. Der Vorstellungskreis, dem die von den mythischen Figuren unabänderlich vollstreckten Schicksalssprüche angehören, kennt noch nicht den Unterschied von Wort und Gegenstand. Das Wort soll unmittelbare Macht haben über die Sache, Ausdruck und

[191] As Adorno wrote in an American essay (unpublished during his life) entitled "The Musical Climate for Fascism in Germany": "Fascism ... absorbs practically all intellectual trends which are not definitely and articulately opposed to it, even the most contradictory ones. The philosophies of Fichte as well as of his modern antipode Klages, the poetry of populists, such as Gerhart Hauptmann and Hamsun, as well as of esoterics, such as George and Rudolf Alexander Schröder, political theories of hierarchical conservatism and of revolutionary activism have been equally swallowed by totalitarian ideology, undergoing on the way changes which often, as for example with the German mystic Meister Eckhardt, amounted to mutilation and complete falsification. It may thus be said that it is no good looking for fascist symptoms in pre-Hitler culture since no element of that culture was safe from being taken over by the usurper. This objection, however, is too sweeping. One can very well differentiate between artistic and philosophical phenomena which tend towards Fascism by themselves, and others which were claimed by the Nazis more or less arbitrarily, mainly on account of their prestige value. Moreover, one can clearly distinguish between names to which the Nazis did only lip service, such as Goethe and Beethoven, and others who represent ideas which are the lifeblood of the fascist movement, mostly comparatively obscure figures, such as Ernst Moritz Arndt and Paul de Lagarde" (*GS* 20.2, 430-431). Although Adorno did not regard Borchardt as a fascist intellectual, he considered him as someone who had strong fascist tendencies.

> Intention fließen ineinander. List jedoch besteht darin, den Unterschied auszunutzen. Man klammert sich ans Wort, um die Sache zu ändern. So entspringt das *Bewußtsein der Intention*: in seiner Not wird Odysseus des Dualismus inne, indem er erfährt, daß das identische Wort Verschiedenes zu bedeuten vermag. ... Odysseus entdeckt an den Worten, was in der entfalteten bürgerlichen Gesellschaft *Formalismus* heißt: ihre perennierende Verbindlichkeit wird damit bezahlt, daß sie sich vom je erfüllenden Inhalt distanzieren, im Abstand auf allen möglichen Inhalt sich beziehen. ... Selbsterhaltende List lebt von jenem zwischen Wort und Sache waltenden Prozeß. (*GEO* 61; my italics)

The state of exception in which Odysseus finds himself forces him to become aware of his intentions. This awareness allows him to resist the mythical threat and survive. For Adorno, Odysseus' conscious resistance against the Sirens' chant – which in *GEO* is allegorical of a politically dangerous aesthetic temptation – is made possible by his realization of the power of linguistic signification, that is to say the faculty of attributing 'arbitrary' names to things[192]. According to Adorno, Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens makes him aware of the 'formalist' aspect of language, which he uses to disempower the 'musical' temptation of the mythical creatures.

The birth of subjective intention from a reflection on language forcefully annihilates the seducing perspective of a 'poetic' union with nature, yet it also guarantees the subject's survival in the sea of myths. In Adorno's version of the Sirens myth, the primeval identity of word and object, language and world promised by their chant is a form of coercive temptation. The symbolic union of signifier and signified must be disrupted by Odysseus, who refuses to be subjected to the mythical law. In the terms of Adorno's subterranean confrontation with Borchardt's poetic theory, this means that the enlightened subject cannot acknowledge the legitimacy of an aesthetic unity of language and world, culture and nature. A tenable theory of language – and consequently of poetic language – in the age of the world's 'disenchantment' (Weber 1921) must go beyond the naïve idea of such primeval unity. This is the reason why Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation undertakes to provide a theory of language *as a function of civilization*. This theory is programmatically antagonistic to Borchardt's Neo-Romantic theory of poetry as communal chant and mythical incantation. In the following

[192] Adorno attributes to Odysseus a linguistic insight that is worth Nietzsche. In "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn" (1873), written only one year after *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche provides his famous definition of concepts as anthropomorphisms that serve human purposes, rather than giving a true image of the world. Nietzsche's critique of linguistic instrumentality anticipates Adorno's argument in the *Odyssey* chapter: "jedes Wort wird sofort dadurch Begriff, dass es eben nicht für das einmalige ganz und gar individualisierte Urerlebnis, dem es sein entstehen verdankt, etwa als Erinnerung dienen soll, sondern zugleich für zahllose, mehr oder weniger ähnliche, d.h. streng genommen niemals gleiche, also auf lauter ungleiche Fälle passen muß. Jeder Begriff entsteht durch Gleichsetzen des Nicht-Gleichen" (Nietzsche 1980, 879-880).

section, I will show how Adorno elaborates on such ‘instrumental’ views of language in order to develop a *narrative theory of civilization*, which he opposes to Borchardt’s *poetic theory of culture*.

2.8. Adorno's Narrative Theory of Civilization: a Confutation of Borchardt's Poetic Theory of Culture

In the preceding section, I have shown that Odysseus' awakening to a sense of his subjectivity is defined by Adorno in linguistic terms, as the result of a reflection on the instrumental character of language. It is not only in his relationship with the external world, however, that Odysseus is presented by Adorno as a civilized hero and champion of enlightenment. He also uses language as an instrument of enlightenment in his *relation to himself*, i.e., *self-enlightenment*. Language is for the hero not only a function of instrumental enlightenment of the external world, but also of *self-consciousness*, functioning as a means of survival in the perilous sea of myths. In order to see how this is the case, I will now turn my attention to the *implicit narrative theory* contained in Adorno's interpretation of the *Odyssey*.

For Adorno, Odysseus' rational subjectivity emerges through his confrontation with mythical figures, which are symbolic projections of natural forces. Odysseus successfully opposes the latter by means of instrumental cunning. He initially acknowledges mythical laws, which he then disempowers by exploiting the 'breach' that is originally inscribed in them. Odysseus thus eventually proves to be superior to the archaic powers that thwart him by virtue of his 'civilized' intelligence. His trajectory across the Mediterranean is for Adorno allegorical of the history of civilization, understood as man's development of the ability to understand and exploit the forces of nature. Adorno's interpretation of the epic in this sense follows the conceptual definition of enlightenment given by him and Horkheimer in the first chapter of *DA* ("Begriff der Aufklärung").

In the *Odyssey* chapter, however, Adorno complements the theoretical tenet expounded in the first chapter of *DA* with a further insight: the process of domination of external nature goes hand in hand with the process of domination of man's *inner nature*. For Adorno, civilization is not only a history of human self-empowerment and emancipation from the 'mythical fear' of nature, but also a history of *instinctual renunciation*: "Die Geschichte der Zivilisation ist die Geschichte ... der Entsagung" (*GEO* 55). Adorno owes this fundamental insight to Sigmund Freud, whose late cultural-theoretical works are a major source of inspiration for Adorno's philosophy of civilization in *DA*. Freud's works also provide Adorno with basic conceptual tools to confront the aesthetic and cultural theories of the revolutionary intellectuals who he argues against in the *Odyssey* chapter, namely Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages (more on this in the following chapter). Freud's *Das*

Unbehagen in der Kultur in particular provides the theoretical background for Adorno's *narrative theory of civilization*, which is antagonistic to Borchardt's *poetic theory of culture*[193]. In the present section of this work, I will therefore consider how Adorno uses Freud's cultural theory for his reading of the *Odyssey* as a *narrative of civilization*. I will then show how, based on this theory, Adorno sketches a progressive narrative theory that stands in opposition to Borchardt's reactionary archaism.

In *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930), Freud claims that civilized life creates an irresolvable tension between the demands of culture ('*Kultur*') – understood as the whole set of arrangements and dispositions that allow human beings to live together – and the individual's search for instinctual freedom[194]. The latter according to Freud is at odds with civilization's need for order, security and conformity, and therefore has to be submitted to restrictive limitations for the sake of public benefit. This is why Freud argues that civilization is based upon *Triebverzicht*, meaning the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction, accompanied by a combined interaction of repression and sublimation[195].

In the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* Adorno basically follows Freud's definition of civilized life as a state of instinctual renunciation when he asserts: "[Die] Verleugnung der Natur im Menschen ... um der Herrschaft über die außermenschliche Natur und über andere Menschen willen ... [ist] der Kern aller zivilisatorischen Rationalität" (*GEO* 55)[196]. Based on this tenet,

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[193] *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* is Freud's main social-theoretical work, and counts as one of the most influential works of philosophical *Kulturkritik* in the 20th century. Adorno refers explicitly only once in a footnote to this work (see *DA* 90), although his whole argument in the *Odyssey* chapter heavily relies on Freud's work.

[194] Freud understands the word *Kultur* in general as "die ganze Summe der Leistungen und Einrichtungen bezeichnet, in denen sich unser Leben von dem unserer tierischen Ahnen entfernt und die zwei Zwecken dienen: dem Schutz des Menschen gegen die Natur und der Regelung der Beziehungen der Menschen untereinander" (Freud 1930, 46-7). As Georg Bollenbeck points out, *Kultur* for Freud is in this sense synonymous with *Zivilisation*: "In der Tradition der Aufklärung und des westeuropäischen Denkens ist hier 'Kultur' mit 'Zivilisation' identisch. Freud verschmäht es, die Begriffe zu trennen" (Bollenbeck 1994, 279).

[195] For Freud it is "unmöglich zu übersehen, in welchem Ausmaß die Kultur auf Triebverzicht aufgebaut ist, wie sehr sie gerade die Nichtbefriedigung (Unterdrückung, Verdrängung oder sonst etwas?) von mächtigen Trieben zur Voraussetzung hat. Diese 'Kulturversagung' beherrscht das große Gebiet der sozialen Beziehungen der Menschen; wir wissen bereits, sie ist die Ursache der Feindseligkeit, gegen die alle Kulturen zu kämpfen haben" (Freud 1930, 59-60). This insight that was later elaborated on by Herbert Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization. A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1995).

[196] This self-denial is for Adorno also "die Zelle der fortwuchernden mythischen Irrationalität" (*GEO* 55). Adorno's *Zivilisationskritik* in *DA* is based on this assumption. The 'dark' side of civilization, as a coercive mechanism of self-repression and alienation from nature, is also the 'dark' side of Odysseus, which is bound to annihilate many of the mythical figures he encounters on his course. Many commentators of the *Odyssey* chapter have underlined this negative aspect of Adorno's characterization of Odysseus, yet they have exaggerated in my opinion its importance in the overall economy of Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation (cf. Geyer-Ryan/Lethen 1987, Buschlinger 2007). In fact, Odysseus is depicted in the *Odyssey* chapter as a highly ambivalent hero, whose negative traits are compensated by his civilizing function and enlightened, 'human' quality. This positive aspect of Odysseus comes particularly to the fore in the earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter, against the background of Adorno's polemical confrontation with Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages (more to this in the next chapter).

Adorno interprets the mythical figures that Odysseus encounters during his Mediterranean wanderings not only as symbolic reflections of the life-threatening forces of nature, but also as figural projections of Odysseus' inner nature, that is to say of his instinctual drives[197]. Particularly such figures as the lotus-eaters, the sorceress Circe and the Sirens are presented by Adorno as figures of 'sensual' seduction. Odysseus' journey across the Mediterranean is thus for Adorno emblematic of the history of civilization as a process of repression and sublimation of instincts – in other words, emblematic of man's 'struggle' with his inner nature, which poses a threat to his civilized existence:

> Furchtbares hat die Menschheit sich antun müssen, bis das Selbst, der identische, zweckgerichtete, männliche Charakter des Menschen geschaffen war, und etwas davon wird noch in jeder Kindheit wiederholt. Die Anstrengung, das Ich zusammenzuhalten, haftet dem Ich auf allen Stufen an, und stets war die *Lockung*, es zu verlieren, mit der blinden Entschlossenheit zu seiner Erhaltung gepaart. ... Die Angst, das Selbst zu verlieren und mit dem Selbst die Grenze zwischen sich und anderem Leben aufzuheben, die Scheu vor Tod und Destruktion, ist einem *Glücksversprechen* verschwistert, von dem in jedem Augenblick *die Zivilisation bedroht* war. Ihr Weg war der von Gehorsam und Arbeit, über dem Erfüllung immerwährend bloß als Schein, als entmachtete Schönheit leuchtet. Der Gedanke des Odysseus, gleich feind dem eigenen Tod und eigenen Glück, weiß darum. (*DA* 50-51; my italics)

Odysseus' adventures are read by Adorno as a continuous trial, as it were, of his civilized, mature character, which he is able to preserve by consciously holding onto his subjective individuality: "Die Abenteuer, die Odysseus besteht, sind allesamt gefahrvolle Lockungen, die das Selbst aus der Bahn seiner Logik herausziehen" (*GEO* 46). As we have seen, Odysseus' subjective 'logic' consists in self-preservation for the purpose of returning to his land and possessions. In other words, the goal of Odysseus' striving is the *return to a state of civilization*. In Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey*, mythical figures repeatedly confront the hero with the perspective of instinctual satisfaction through self-dissolution. They seek to allure him with the chimerical perspective of a return to an original, untainted stage of life – a 'pure' state of nature – which has been long surpassed, both psychologically and historically, by the adult, civilized individual[198]. Their temptation is therefore fundamentally *regressive*, as it runs

[197] The only exception is the Cyclops, who on the contrary represents the 'unsublimated' aggressive drives of a barbaric prehistoric humanity.

[198] Adorno-Horkheimer in *DA* also refer to *Totem und Tabu* (1913), where Freud applies his psychoanalytic theory to the fields of archaeology, anthropology and the study of religion. For Freud, the historical stages of development of human society find a correspondence in the phases of psychological development of the

counter to the psychological development of the mature individual and thus threatens to revoke the psycho-historical achievements of civilized mankind. The mythical figures that Odysseus encounters are in this sense *figures of regression*, psychological (ontogenetic) and historical (philogenetic) alike[199].

In another of his influential works, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920), Freud surmises that "alle organischen Triebe *konservativ*, historisch erworben und auf *Regression*, Wiederherstellung von Früherem gerichtet sind" (Freud 1921, 36; my italics)[200]. Leaning on Freud's speculations on the nature of instinctual drives, in his *Odyssey* interpretation Adorno considers Odysseus' passage through the myths as a continuous overcoming of their *seduction to instinctual regression*[201]. Particularly the Sirens function in Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* – already in the last part of the first chapter of *DA*, "Begriff der Aufklärung"[202] – as an emblematic example of the threat of regression posed to Odysseus by the mythical figures of the epic. In a manner that is strongly reminiscent of Freud's assessment of the conservative

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individual. Freud makes out three ideal-typical worldviews that characterize the development of human culture: 1) animism (analogous to infantile narcissism), according to which the world is populated with spirits; 2) religion (analogous to the phase of the individual's dependence on parents), which explains worldly phenomena by ascribing them to the agency of deities; 3) science (the mature stage of the individual, who conforms to the reality principle), according to which the world is governed by natural laws. Such a developmental scheme – which, by the way, was typical of anthropological studies in Freud's time – also informs Adorno's historico-philosophical interpretation of the *Odyssey* as an allegory of civilization's progress in *DA*.

[199] In Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* (which is supported by a number of philological sources), Odysseus travel through the pre-history of mankind. The mythical figures that he encounters represent either real or imagined primitve stages of culture. So for example the lotus-eaters stand for a blissful Edenic condition, in which man did not have to work for their subsistence and relished the fruits of the earth; Circe, who turns Odysseus' comrades into unconscious swines, incarnates a magical stage of culture, characterized by sexual promiscuity (hetaerism) and sensual confusion; Scylla and Charybdis are depicted by Adorno as frightening animistic demons, inhabiting a remote and inaccessible corner of the Mediterranean; the Sirens are emblematic of the call of nature and the chimera of self-dissolution in its 'womb'; the Cyclops represent a primitive, barbaric humanity, as testified by his archaic habits (cannibalism) and brutal slaughter of Odysseus' comrades. Adorno's description of these figures relies on the one hand on philological and mythological studies – as for instance J. A. K. Thomson's *Studies in the Odyssey* (Oxford 1914) and Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's *Glaube der Hellenen* (Berlin 1931) – on the other hand on an original elaboration of Bachofen's anthropological and of Freud's psycho-historical speculations about prehistory and archaic cultures.

[200] Adorno does not openly refer to this work in *DA*. It is uncertain whether he was acquainted with it at the time of writing the *Odyssey* chapter. However, he refers to it explicitly in his sociological study *The Stars Down to Earth: The Los Angeles Times Astrology Column. A Study in Secondary Superstition*, written in the US in the early 50s (see *GS* 9.2, 7 ff.). Moreover, in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* Freud himself underlines how important it was for him in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* the theorization of the comupsion to repeat and the 'conservative' character of instinctual life ("Wiederholungszwang und ... konservative Charakter des Trieblebens", Freud 1931, 91). In this work Freud provides a new conceptualization of 'drive' ('Trieb'). Whereas previously drives for Freud were aimed at gaining pleasure and avoiding pain, in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* he understands 'drives' as forces aimed at restoring a past organic condition. Freud will hold onto this notion until his death.

[201] "Er überläßt sich ihnen immer wieder aufs neue, probiert es als unbelehrbar Lernender, ja zuweilen als töricht Neugieriger" (*GEO* 46).

[202] Though the Sirens episode of the *Odyssey* is analyzed for the most part in the first chapter of *DA*, written by Adorno and Horkheimer together, the passage in which this analysis takes place exhibits stylistic and thematic characteristics point to Adorno's authorship. In *GEO* Adorno reprises the Sirens episode and compares it to the other mythical encounters of Odysseus.

(or 'restorative') nature of instinctual drives, Adorno describes the Sirens as figures in which past and pleasure overlap:

> Ihre Lockung ist die des *sich Verlierens im Vergangenen*. ... Sie wissen 'alles, was irgend geschah auf der viel ernährenden Erde', zumal woran Odysseus selbst teilhatte, 'wie viel in den Ebenen Trojas Argos' Söhn' und die Troer vom Rat der Götter geduldet'. Indem sie jüngst Vergangenes unmittelbar beschwören, *bedrohen sie mit dem unwiderstehlichen Versprechen von Lust*, als welches ihr Gesang vernommen wird, die patriarchale Ordnung, die das Leben eines jeden nur gegen sein volles Maß an Zeit zurückgibt. Wer ihrem Gaukelspiel folgt, verdirbt, wo einzig immerwährende Geistesgegenwart der Natur die Existenz abtrotzt. Wenn die Sirenen von allem wissen, was geschah, so fordern sie die Zukunft als Preis dafür, und die Verheißung der frohen Rückkehr ist der Trug, mit dem das Vergangene den Sehnsüchtigen einfängt. (*DA* 49-50; my italics)

In Adorno's representation of the Sirens episode, *past*, *pleasure* and *nature* equally represent a dangerous temptation for the returning hero. The creatures seem to offer a regression behind the 'patriarchal' stage of Greek society. They invite the passersby to forget themselves in a pleasure-yielding, natural past. Their chant sounds like a hedonic promise of mindless self-abandonment. This promise however is a swindle ("Trug"), since the creatures lay claim to the future of the hearers. Satisfaction through regression into the past can only be obtained at the price of one's life.

Adorno's interpretation of the Sirens episode follows the letter of the myth, according to which the creatures promise to reveal everything that has happened in the past (from the beginning of mankind to the war of Troy), and invite the hearers to self-abandonment. Adorno's personal contribution to the myth (his genuine '*Arbeit am Mythos*', in Hans Blumenberg's words) is the emphasis on the entanglement of aesthetic temptation and psycho-historical regression in the Sirens' chant. In Adorno's reading, the mythical creatures entice Odysseus with the promise of return to a point of past-in-pleasure: the 'principle' of pleasure (or 'pleasure principle', to speak with Freud), where man's primeval consubstantiality with nature (as mankind's own past) would be restored. Adorno further complements this 'Freudian' intuition with another element, which he in fact already finds in the myth. He suggests that the Sirens' illusory temptation coincides with the promise of giving knowledge of all *things past*[203]. Their seduction thus consists in a cognitive historical

[203] According to the myth in fact they promise to reveal everything that happened on earth from the beginning of mankind up the war of Troy. Through their revelation they seem to offer an *absolute reconciliation with the past* – a pass of suffering and violence, loss and distance from home for the Greek besiegers of Troy. This promise

detour, as it were, on the way to absolute physical pleasure. In this sense, the Sirens promise not only the knowledge of, but also *a return to the past* of mankind, which they represent as part of untamed nature. They entice Odysseus with an aesthetic 'absolute' that precedes the relentless course of civilization and remains outside of society. They represent untainted originality, or the origin of 'civilization' in nature: this is why in Adorno's reading they are a dangerous temptation.

Drawing upon Freud's psycho-historical philosophy of civilization, Adorno gives an interpretation of the Sirens episode of the *Odyssey* that, given his polemic against Rudolf Borchardt in the first part of *GEO*, should be read as a subtle though poignant polemical allusion to the latter's cultural and poetic theory. The cultural critical projection of a fulfilled state of culture onto a *natural-organic past* – from which modern civilization has fatefully drifted away – is in fact the gist of Borchardt's Neo-Romantic project of cultural restoration, as formulated in his essay "Schöpferische Restauration", and assumed in the afterword to his *Pindarische Gedichte*. As we have seen, Borchardt romantically conceives of this original past as the point of connection between culture and nature, which can be *restored* through mythical and national *chant* of the kind that he believed to find exemplarily realized in the work of Pindar. Borchardt defines the latter's poetry as "Gemeinschaftsausdruck ... eine das Ganze einer Stadt, eines Stammes, eines Volkes durchspielende elementare Nationalangelegenheit" (Borchardt 1931, 85). As Kurt Sontheimer notes in his study on anti-democratic thought during the Weimar Republic, "Gemeinschaft war eines der magischen Worte der Weimarer Zeit" (Sontheimer 1962, 309), and, "Der Mythos vom Volk ist aufs innigste Verknüpft mit der Idee der Gemeinschaft" (ibid.). The communitarian ideology of many right-wing political groups of the Weimar period (from the *Jungkonservative* to the *Völkische*) had as its main polemical target 'liberal' and 'Western' individualism, seen as responsible for Germany's moral, cultural and political crisis[204].

Borchardt's poetic idealization of ritual performance and cultural origins was perceived by Adorno against the backdrop of such right-wing discourses. This is why he saw

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thus resembles Adorno's "Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt" (*DA* 58): the 'remembrance' of nature in the subject, which might put an end to the spiral of self-overcoming, repression and violence that marks the history of civilization. However, the Sirens' is a mere *resemblance* of reconciliation: in truth, it is a swindle that leads to self-forgetfulness and loss of subjectivity.

[204] In the words of the *volkskonservative* journalist Hermann Ullmann: "Diese Gemeinschaftsgesinnung hat nur einen Feind: die Überschätzung des einzelnen, jenen Individualismus, wie er in den letzte hundert Jahren von den Westvölkern her sich entwickelt hat ... ich gebe, damit du gebest: dies die höchste Weisheit einer auf Individualismus gegründeten Gesellschaft. Ich gebe mich ganz, um aus der Gemeinschaft mein Ich gesteigert zurückzuempfangen: dies *das eigentlich innerliche Erlebnis der Gemeinschaft*" (Hermann Ullmann, *Das werdende Volk. Gegen Liberalismus und Reaktion* 1929; cited in Sontheimer 1962, 316).

Borchardt's poetic theory – as suggested at different points in *GEO* – as an anticipation of Fascist cultural politics (see 2.6.). The poet's understanding of the national community in 'natural' terms – i.e., as the 'organic' substratum of social life – was for Adorno the product of a nostalgic self-delusion, which lead Borchardt to hope for a national renewal ("nationalen Erneuerung", *GEO* 63) of Germany on authoritarian premises. Adorno was able to see in retrospect the dire effects of such Romantic nostalgia for origins and community, which was appropriated and transformed by the Nazis into a sham mythology of natural-biological origins and *Volksgemeinschaft*, into which the 'egoist' and 'decadent' bourgeois subject of the frowned-upon liberal era must be forcefully reintegrated for the sake of national renovation. In implicit contraposition with Borchardt's theory of poetry as mythical chant, Adorno therefore points out that the Sirens' promise of originality is a swindle, for it can be kept only at the price of self-dissolution, i.e., death.

Through his interpretation of the Sirens episode as a meaningful parable of the encounter between 'civilized' mankind and 'mythical' nature, Adorno suggests that Borchardt's 'restorative' and Neo-Romantic cultural politics represent a *politically dangerous aesthetic temptation*. Borchardt's archaistic nostalgia, though itself 'impotent' ("ohnmächtigsten Ausdruck", *GEO* 39), was from Adorno's perspective an unwilled prefiguration of the *manipulated mass regression* of Nazi propaganda. The poet's ideal image of an original (both past *and* natural) archaic community, held together by performances of ritual *chant*, later became the Nazi *Volks*-horde – not because, but rather in spite of Borchardt's nostalgic Neo-Romantic theory. His aristocratic dream of a close cultural community certainly had little to do with the cheap idiosyncrasy of National Socialist ideology, as Adorno well knew. However, as I have previously argued (see 2.6.), Borchardt functions in *GEO* as a sort of ideological 'character', standing for the cultural-political movement of the *Konservative Revolution*. The latter contributed with its heavy criticism of liberalism and individualism to the erosion of the Weimar democracy, thus preparing the ground for the Nazi seizure of power.

With Adorno's hindsight, Borchardt's organic understanding of poetry had much in common with the pre-fascist glorification of the organic community, as opposed to the individualistic freedoms (or 'egoisms') of liberal society[205]. One of the basic demands of the

[205] "Die Freiheit des Entseelten und Abgestorbenen, eine flüchtige und schweifende Freiheit. Das *Organische* aber ist nicht in diesem Sinne frei. Das Gefühl des Notwendigen besagt, daß das Leben aus einem *organischen Bestand* von unverbrüchlicher Gesetzlichkeit erwächst und daß ihm Freiheit unter keinen Umständen gewährt ist" (Friedrich Georg Jünger, *Der Aufmarsch des Nationalismus*, 1926; cited in Sontheimer 1962, 338. The words used by Jünger were common slogans of right-wing politics in the interwar period. The extolment of the organic community was invariably a common trait of the radical nationalist, *völkische* and conservative-

right-wing ideology of the Weimar period was that one should give up individualism (see Sontheimer 1962, 316 ff.). In his *Odyssey* interpretation, Adorno therefore insists on Odysseus' capacity to hold onto his own subjective individuality by keeping himself awake in the perilous sea of myths, "wo einzig immerwährende Geistesgegenwart der Natur die Existenz abtrotz" (*DA* 50). His wakefulness and presence of mind allow him to not succumb to the mythical "Mächte[...] der Auflösung" (ibid.), which attempt to seduce him with the prospect of abandoning his individualistic struggle for survival. Odysseus' return to civilization in Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* is emblematic of the modern subject's opposition against all temptations of an 'organic' regression to the original community. Such a community no longer exists, and must be therefore considered as a treacherous illusion, which the enlightened individual should resist and overcome.

For Adorno, the battle to preserve individual subjectivity against the regressive temptation of myth is precisely what makes Odysseus a prototypical enlightened and civilized hero[206]. In a sort of discursive counterpoint to the conservative-revolutionary – more generally German nationalist and right-wing – criticism of modern individualism and liberal society, Adorno insists on the 'bourgeois' virtues of Odysseus (he calls the latter a "prototypischer Bürger", *DA* 94)[207]. Odysseus is a truly enlightened hero not only due to his ability to 'dupe' nature through instrumental rationality, but also because he constantly practices renunciation, patience and self-control[208]. Adorno repeatedly underlines these 'proto-bourgeois' (as such 'civilized') qualities of Odysseus, who through a process of harsh self-education has learned how to control his instinctual drives and direct them rationally, i.e., 'sublimate' them ("Odysseus ist eines, das Selbst, das immerzu sich bezwingt", *DA* 73-74). He is a realist, because – in Freudian terms – he is able to adjust to the 'reality principle', even if this means

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revolutionary movements of Weimar Germany. Though Borchardt did not mingle directly with politics, his *cultural* politics share some fundamental presuppositions with the aforementioned political-ideological movements (see 2.4.). This is why Adorno underlines the direful political implications of his poetic theory.

[206] The hero is not a rationally 'mature' subject from the start of his adventures, but rather *becomes* one by overcoming the perils that thwart his course: "Der Held ... ist im Leiden *mündig* geworden. In der Vielfalt der Todesgefahren, in denen er sich durchhalten mußte, hat sich ihm die Einheit des eigenen Lebens, die Identität der Person gehärtet" (*DA* 49).

[207] While committed to a liberal stance in his polemic against the conservative-revolutionary cultural criticism, Adorno certainly does not spare liberal individualism, as the social-ethical correlative of capitalist market society, a critique from a Marxist perspective: "Der listige Einzelgänger ist schon der homo oeconomicus, dem einmal alle Vernünftigen gleichen: daher ist die Odyssee schon eine Robinsonade. Die beiden prototypischen Schiffbrüchigen machen aus ihrer Schwäche – der des Individuums selber, das von der Kollektivität sich scheidet – ihre gesellschaftliche Stärke. Dem Zufall des Wellengangs ausgeliefert, hilflos isoliert, diktiert ihnen ihre Isoliertheit die rücksichtslose Verfolgung des atomistischen Interesses. Sie verkörpern das Prinzip der kapitalistischen Wirtschaft, schon ehe sie sich eines Arbeiters bedienen" (*GEO* 63). However, such Marxist criticism does not change the fact that Adorno's interpretative stylization of Odysseus as a hero of civilization has a fundamentally positive character.

[208] Adorno description of Odysseus as a 'patient' hero relies on Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's *Die Heimkehr des Odysseus* (1927) (cf. *GEO* 47, footnote 22).

renouncing immediate satisfaction[209]. This renunciation makes him a 'bourgeois' enemy of unbounded aesthetic pleasure, yet it also guarantees the achievement of his 'sublimated' goal, which is the return to his civilized home in Ithaca.

Significantly, in Adorno's reading of the Homeric epic, Odysseus can hold onto his subjective individuality and bourgeois-civilized identity against the mythical threats because of his ability to structure his inner time, and construct a subjective space through *narration*. In contrast with the blurring of temporal planes and spatial realms effected by mythical 'chant', narration is presented in the *Odyssey* chapter as a *function of self-consciousness*, enabling *self-enlightenment* in the confusing sea of temptations. By considering Odysseus' survival as the result of self-enlightening narration, Adorno implicitly develops a *narrative theory of civilization*, which is opposed to Borchardt's *poetic theory of culture* (as national-mythical *Kultur*). Adorno's narrative theorization relies on Freud's philosophy of civilization, which he fruitfully exploits for his elaboration of a progressive literary and cultural theory in between the lines of his *Odyssey* chapter.

In Freud's *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* one reads: "Der Urmensch hatte es in der Tat darin besser, da er keine Triebeinschränkungen kannte. Zum Ausgleich war seine Sicherheit, solches Glück *lange* zu genießen, eine sehr geringe. Der Kulturmensch hat für ein Stück Glücksmöglichkeit ein Stück *Sicherheit* eingetauscht" (Freud 1930, 86; my italics). Freud suggests that the process of civilization is aimed at the achievement of security and time, i.e., at *the assurance of one's (life)time*. This is also a major assumption of Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* in *DA*. First of all, while most of the mythical figures[210] that Odysseus encounters on his way to Ithaca try to weaken him by confusing his sense of time through a *temptation of the senses*, Adorno points at how the epic hero confronts them through a strict *ordering of time*:

> Wie Wasser, Erde und Luft scheiden sich ihm die Bereiche der Zeit. Ihm ist die Flut dessen, was war, von Felsen der Gegenwart zurückgetreten, und die Zukunft lagert wolkig am Horizont. Was Odysseus hinter sich ließ, tritt in die Schattenwelt: so nahe

[209] "Das Schema der odysseischen List ist Naturbeherrschung durch ... Angleichung. In der Einschätzung der Kräfteverhältnisse, welche das Überleben vorweg gleichsam vom Zugeständnis der eigenen Niederlage ... abhängig macht, ist in nuce bereits das Prinzip der bürgerlichen *Desillusion* gelegen ... *die Entsagung*. Der Listige überlebt nur um den Preis seines eigenen Traums, den er abdingt, indem *er wie die Gewalten draußen sich selbst entzaubert*" (*GEO* 58; my italics; my italics).

[210] The Sirens, with their promise of natural originality, the lotus-eaters, with their image of paradisiacal vegetative pleasure, the sorceress Circe, who represents the 'matriarchal' (in Bachofen's sense) and 'magic' stadium of culture: "Magie desintegriert das Selbst, das ihr wieder verfällt und damit in eine ältere biologische Gattung zurückgestoßen wird. Die Gewalt seiner Auflösung ist abermals eine des Vergessens. Sie ergreift mit der festen Ordnung der Zeit den festen Willen des Subjekts, der an jener Ordnung sich ausrichtet" (*GEO* 71).

> noch ist das Selbst dem vorzeitlichen Mythos, dessen Schoß es sich entrang, daß ihm die eigene erlebte Vergangenheit zur mythischen Vorzeit wird. Durch feste Ordnung der Zeit sucht es, dem zu begegnen. Das dreigeteilte Schema soll den gegenwärtigen Augenblick von der Macht der Vergangenheit befreien, indem es diese hinter die absolute Grenze des Unwiederbringlichen verweist und als praktikables Wissen dem Jetzt zur Verfügung stellt. (*DA* 49-50)

Adorno suggests that Odysseus not only clearly distinguishes between the different temporal planes of his personal history, but is also able to relate them to his physical position as different stages of his journey to Ithaca. He thus creates a temporal-spatial hierarchy which confers a sense – as in both 'meaning' and 'direction' – to his wanderings, thus enabling him to orient himself and survive in the perilous sea of adventures[211]. The ordering of time in space, that is to say the fixation of a *chronotope*, amounts to the creation of a basic narrative (see Bachtin 1981, 84 ff.). Adorno defines the 'chronotope' of the *Odyssey* as "der Weg des leibhaft gegenüber der Naturgewalt unendlich schwachen und *im Selbstbewußtsein erst sich bildenden Selbst* durch die Mythen" (*DA* 64; my italics). Thus Adorno suggests the narrative ensuing from the chronotope of the subject's journey through the sea of myths, which is that of the *individual's self-formation through trial*, told in the form of a biography in progress. For Adorno, Odysseus' escape from the mythical figures that threaten him with regression and self-dissolution is made possible by self-narration, the most basic version of a 'live' autobiography (or rather oral autobio-telling) that accompanies the subject's travels: "*Rede* selber, die *Sprache* in ihrem Gegensatz zum *mythischen Gesang* … ist das Gesetz des homerischen Entrinnens. Nicht umsonst wird der entrinnende Held als *Erzählender* immer wieder eingeführt" (*DA* 97-98; my italics). As somebody who successfully escapes from life-threatening perils, Odysseus is also constitutively a narrator ("Erzählender") of his escape ("Entrinnen") from the mythical coercion of the Sirens. Narrative speech ("Rede"), as opposed to mythical chant ("Gesang"), literally saves his life and allows for his homecoming. In Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation, narration thus acquires a truly *vital function*.

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[211] Although according to Adorno's allegorical philosophy of history, Odysseus, as a proto-typical modern subject, still has a comparatively weak sense of time: "So sehr ist auf der homerischen Stufe die Identität des Selbst Funktion des Unidentischen, der dissoziierten, unartikulierten Mythen, daß sie diesen sich entlehnen muß. Noch ist die innerliche Organisationsform von Individualität, Zeit, so schwach, daß die Einheit der Abenteuer äußerlich, ihre Folge der räumliche Wechsel von Schauplätzen, den Orten von Lokalgottheiten bleibt, nach welchen der Sturm verschlägt. Wann immer das Selbst geschichtlich solche Schwächung später wiederum erfahren hat, oder die Darstellung solche Schwäche beim Leser voraussetzt, ist die Erzählung des Lebens abermals in die Abfolge von Abenteuern abgeglitten. Mühselig und widerruflich löst sich im Bilde der Reise historische Zeit ab aus dem Raum, dem unwiderruflichen Schema aller mythischen Zeit" (*GEO* 48). Time is considered by Adorno as a function of individual consciousness and a vector of historical emancipation, and is opposed as such to the hostile, coercive and limited 'space' of myth.

Against the polemical backdrop laid out by the first pages of *GEO*, Adorno's emphasis on narration should be seen as a 'defense' of the novel as a prosaic narrative genre, against Borchardt's disparagement. Adorno's definition of the *Odyssey* as a proto-novelistic literary form is based on an understanding of the novel as the literary genre of *self-enlightenment*. Even the first theorizations of the novel in the Age of the Enlightenment saw its distinguishing quality in its concern with the 'inner' history of the individual (see Vietta 2010, 79). As Friedrich von Blanckenburg wrote in his *Versuch über den Roman* (1774): "Wenn der Dichter nicht das Verdienst hat, daß er das Innere des Menschen *aufklärt*, und ihn sich selber kennen lehret: so hat er gerade – gar kein" (cited in Vietta 2010, 79; my italics). Thus already in the late 18th century the novel was perceived as an 'enlightened' genre, concerned with the "Selbstfindung des Ich" (Vietta 2010, 79). As Silvio Vietta remarks, "Die literarische Methode, die sich hier schon abzeichnet, ist ... auf den Menschen selbst fokussiert: Das Programm der Aufklärung und auch des modernen Romans ist über weite Strecken das der Erforschung der Subjektivität, des Menschen selbst" (ibid. 80).

Considering this characterization, Adorno's emphasis on narrative speech (in the form of an oral autobiography in progress) as the tool of Odysseus' survival can be seen as a tacit polemical reference to Borchardt's disparagement of the novelistic, i.e., 'enlightened' and 'speaking' character of the Homeric epics, which he contrasts with the inaccessible hermetism and severe taciturnity of Pindar's poetry. In his Berlin speech "Die Pindarische Restauration", Borchardt constructs his ideal of a 'noble' use of language in Doric times as follows:

> Das Wort liegt in strenger Hut, im ganzen Volke, soweit es edler Art ist [sic]. Der adlige althellenische Mann führt es so wenig unnütz wie der Schweizer, der Römer und der Angelsachse. Die Äußerung ist gemessen um gewichtig sein zu dürfen, die gewichtige auch prägen zu können, do daß ihr Gepräge bleibt, zeichnet den *gewaltigen und fürstlichen Mann* aus und ist ein Attribut der Herrschaft echter Edelheit, Agathie, namhafter Weisheit. *Man hält keine Reden und man erzählt nicht*. Beides gehört dem *Markte*, dem schwatzhaften *Sklaven*, dem halbblütigen *Barbaren*, dem anpreisenden *Händler* und *Schiffer*, dem bezahlten *Spielmann* und *Lustigmacher*, dem *Fahrenden* überhaupt. Die Zunge entbinden der Rausch und der Zorn, entbindet und bindet jedoch wiederum in neuem Maaße *der Gesang*. (Borchardt, "Die Pindarische Restauration", 102; my italics)

Borchardt judges speech and narration in disparaging terms as tokens of civilized decadence, and contrasts them to the lordly linguistic comportment of the Doric people – at least, as long as it remains 'noble' – which reflects in truth the poet's ideal of an atemporal gentry (see

Schmidt 2007-I, 195). In his afterword to *Pindarische Gedichte*, Borchardt consequently opposes Pindar's verbal frugality and stately self-control to the "*redenden* Character" of the Homeric epics, where "alles genießt sein *Sprechen*können ... *Reden*wollen ... Sich-verständlich-zu-machen-wissen" (Borchardt 1931, 108; my italics)[212]. The prosaic language of the Homeric epic is despised by Borchardt on account of its fundamentally 'public' and 'social' dimension, which he associates with the quintessentially modern genre of the novel (see 2.5.). This aesthetic judgment is attuned to the more general deprecation of public discourse and rational communication – in other words, to all forms of 'communicative reason' (see Habermas 1999) – by the intelligentsia of the *Konservative Revolution*, who saw these as signs of 'democratic' degeneration during the Weimar Republic[213]. The 'chatter' of liberal and democratic society was condemned by many national conservatives as an excess of disruptive intellectualism and uncontrollable plurality, which was leading the nation to the verge of political chaos, and which therefore had to be checked by a strong authority (and authoritarian personality) to come (see Sontheimer 1962, 72 ff. and 180 ff.).

While Borchardt judges the chattering and prosaic quality of the Homeric epic as a token of cultural decadence ('*Zivilisation*'), Adorno comes to Homer's defense of indirectly, by demonstrating through the character of Odysseus the structural connection between speech and survival or – the *Odyssey* being for Adorno allegorical of man's civilizing development – between language as narration (or narrative 'communication') and progress. By doing so, Adorno suggests that the assurance of one's lifetime – which Freud saw as one of civilization's main achievements – is not just a matter of external security, but rather primarily of internal security, that is self-consciousness ('*Selbstbewußtsein*'). Odysseus is for him an "im Selbstbewußtsein erst sich bildenden Selbst durch die Mythen" (64), and *only* as such a survivor. In Adorno's *Odyssey* reading, self-consciousness results from the *narrative realization and assurance* of being an independent life-bearer. This realization causes the

[212] While for Borchardt Pindar is "der einzige Dichter stummer Völker" (Borchardt 1931, 151), Homer's poetry is characterized by a constant "Beschwätzen und Belügen, eingeschachtelte umfangreiche Fabeln und Rückerzählungen" (Borchardt 1931, 108). Homer's success, sealing "der Sieg Ioniens über Griechenland" for Borchardt is "ein Sieg des Mundes" (ibid. 102).

[213] This criticism of democracy was a general characteristic of the anti-democratic movements of Weimar Germany, *Deutschnationale*, *Völkische* and *Konservativ-Revolutionäre* alike. The following quote gives a good example of such criticism of the democratic system, and of the way in which pseudo-cultivated arguments and vulgar rhetoric mingled in such discourses: "Nirgendwo ist sinnloser geherrscht worden ... als in demokratische geleiteten Staaten. Durch die Demokratie ward Hellas vollständig zugrunde gerichtet. ... Die parlamentarische Demokratie und ihre Regierung sind in jedweder Hinsicht die allergefährlichsten Feinde eines Staates, durch sie wird einmal der eitlen Selbstgefälligkeit, Selbstgenügsamkeit, der Schwatzhaftigkeit, dem Schmarotzertum ... endlich der blanken Bestechung Tür und Tor sperrangelweit geöffnet. Die Demokratie, wie sie sich vor uns auslebt, ist nichts anderes als ein große Lüge" (Ottokar Stauf von der March, *Demoratie und Republik, Plutokratie und Zusammenbruch. Betrachtung in Deutschlands Marterjahren* (1928), cited in Sonheimer 1962, 222-3).

subject to preserve his own individuality against all forms of aesthetic regression, which Adorno saw in his time in the *völkische*-organicist chimera of a fusion with the 'natural' community[214].

In this way, Adorno praises the 'sober' individualism of bourgeois society against the intellectual attempts at a re-mythization of society through communitarian inebriation of Weimar cultural pessimism. His emphasis on Odysseus' need to narrate his own story in order to overcome mythical temptations amounts to a defense of bourgeois individuality in the face of all conservative-revolutionary and *völkische* critique. In implicit contrast with the Neo-Romantic transfiguration of nature as the holy origin of human life, Adorno's narrative theory in the *Odyssey* chapter shows that life is not an original given, but rather its own conscious creation[215]. Against all self-forgetting incantation, aimed at a revocation of subjective individuation through a fusion with nature – in the forms of *Volksgemeinschaft* and *Heimatkultur* – Adorno moreover suggests that only through an artful and self-conscious narrative work can civilized life (i.e., a truly human life) be preserved.

Adorno's stylization of Odysseus as a self-narrating hero bears wide-ranging social and cultural implications. An autobiography is never self-referential, but always addresses a more or less intended audience. There is no narration without an at least potential or implicit listener or interlocutor: for this reason, narration is always a form of 'communication'. In the Homeric epic, throughout his journey as well as upon arrival in Ithaca Odysseus narrates his life story not only to himself, but also to others – first of all Penelope: after the recognition

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[214] Such chimerical projection is also apparent in Spengler's cultural philosophy, which is not *völkisch*, yet anticipates important aspects of the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. The following passage from Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* gives an idea of the cultural-political implications of Adorno's evaluation of self-consciousness as a 'civilizing' force: "Kulturmenschen leben unbewußt, zivilisierte Menschen leben bewußt. Das im Boden wurzelnde Bauerntum vor den Toren der großen Städte, die jetzt – skeptisch, praktisch, künstlich – *allein* die Zivilisation repräsentieren, zählt nicht mehr mit. 'Volk' – das ist jetzt Stadtvolk, anorganische Masse, etwas Fluktuierendes. Der Bauer ist *nicht* Demokrat – denn auch dieser Begriff gehört zum mechanischen und städtischen Dasein –, folglich übersieht, belächelt, verachtet, haßt man ihn. Er ist nach dem Schwinden der alten Stände, Adel und Priestertum, der einzige *organische* Mensch, ein Überbleibsel der frühen Kultur. Er findet weder im stoischen noch im sozialistischen Denken einen Platz" (*UA* 452).

[215] By defining Odysseus' narrative faculty as his primary tool for survival, Adorno sets up a fundamental narrative-theoretical nexus (life-narration-consciousness). The nexus suggests that life is its own narration, this being, in Odysseus' exemplary case, the structuring principle of self-consciousness, which on its turn upholds life and allows for its continuation (the chronological order however is not decisive: the chain could begin from any of its parts). Such narrative theorization anticipates some developments of contemporary narratology (see for instance Neumann-Nünning-Petterson 2008, 3 ff. and 23 ff.). As Mark Freeman and Jens Brockmeier affirm in their study on 'narrative integrity', dealing with the ethical implications of self-narration, "life is always already enmeshed within the fabric of narrative", since "there is no life apart from the stories told about it and ... there are no stories apart from the ethical realm" (Freeman-Brockmeier 2001, 97). It is precisely such 'narrative integrity', encompassing both life and telling simultaneously, that Odysseus is able to preserve against the repeated attacks posed on it by the mythical figures. The continuation of his life story thus amounts to the preservation of his biological life. Furthermore both depend on Odysseus' conscious holding onto his subjective individuality and mature character ('ethos') on his way to Ithaca: consciousness and conscience, reflection and ethics are the two faces of his survival.

scene, the first thing he does is tell her the story of his ten years away from home. Moreover, most of the adventures of the *Odyssey* are told within the frame of Odysseus' retrospective narration at the court of Alcinous, on the Phaeacians' island, where he is received as a respected guest and helped along his way home, though only after having told his story.

This is probably the reason why Adorno defines 'speech' ('*Rede*') as "das Gesetz des homerischen Entrinnens" (*DA* 97). By 'speech' he means the faculty of narration, which is always embedded in a communicative context that exceedes heroic isolation[216]. Narration principally pertains to a 'civil' dimension, and is as such functional not only to individual, but also to communal life. Adorno's community, however, is one of narrators and listeners, as opposed to the 'natural' cultural community of earth and class bonds that Borchardt romantically idealizes, and that Adorno saw as an elitist anticipation of the Nazi *Blut und Boden* ideology. Thus, a further implication of Adorno's anti-Romantic reading of the *Odyssey* is that the organization of time through narration is always necessarily both individual and collective, an arrangement conducive to the individual's self-formation and the progress of society alike. Adorno owes this insight to Freud, who in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* also talks of an "Analogie zwischen dem Kulturprozeß und dem Entwicklungsweg des Individuums" (Freud 1930, 129). In other words, for Freud progress and self-formation (*Fortschritt* and *Bildung*) are analogous processes, because individual and society are mutually determined. For Adorno the two processes are also similar, since they evolve simultaneously and according to the same 'narrative' rule.

As I have already mentioned, in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* Freud understands the process of civilization as the result of an *exchange* of pleasure for security and a continuation of one's lifetime. This exchange leads to a forced adjustment of the individual libido (the 'pleasure principle') to reality (the 'reality principle'), and thereby to the construction of a society regulated by laws and mores; this cultural 'asset' becomes implicit by use, allowing man to satisfy his needs and desires, yet only in a socially *mediated* way[217]. Adorno elaborates on Freund's insight by suggesting, through the example of Odysseus, that one of the fundamental ways of mediation between the individual and society is narration. If for Freud the development of the individual and the process of civilization are mutually related 'vital' processes (cf. Freud 1930, 129), for Adorno their common characteristic is quintessential

[216] This is why I cannot agree with Helga Geyer-Ryan and Helmut Lethen, who see in Adorno's Odysseus a "Repression seiner kommunikativen Natur" at work (Geyer-Ryan/Lethen 1987, 44). As I have shown, communication according to Adorno is fundamental to Odysseus' survival.

[217] Freud introduced the notions of 'reality principle' and 'pleasure principle' in his *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (1917), which Adorno knew and referred to in his professorial dissertation *Der Begriff des Unbewußten in der transzendentalen Seelenlehre* (1927). See *GS* 1, 230 ff.

narratability. 'Life' needs to be narrated, in order to be continued. Herein resides the progressive gist of Adorno's implicit narrative theory in the *Odyssey* chapter. Odysseus not only needs to cling to his sense of time in order to survive; in order to subsist, civilization itself requires the fictional organization of time through the cultural narrations that inform, legitimize and thus stabilize social life[218].

In spite of appearance, Odysseus does not save himself alone, but is rather saved *in absentia* by his own 'original' society, whose tools, knowledge and skills – the sense of time above all, along with the ability to tell stories – he brings with himself as a life-saving provision. Furthermore, he firmly intends to return to his society, where he will eventually restore a civilized order under his rule (and narrate what he has experienced). Thus, narration functions for Odysseus as both a tool (to tell his story to himself) and motivation (to tell his story to others) to survive. For Adorno, *only as a civilized being* does the hero manage to resist the forces of nature, disguised under the regressive allure of myths, which would certainly overpower an asocial, uncivilized individual.

I argue that within the context provided by the first pages of *GEO*, Adorno's depiction of Odysseus as a narrating and speaking hero functions as a subterranean confutation of the Neo-Romantic poetic theory and archaistic cultural politics of Rudolf Borchardt. For Adorno, whose dialectical philosophy of culture is schooled on Marx, Hegel, Freud and Nietzsche, Borchardt's restorative project, though aesthetically enticing, is theoretically untenable – and politically dangerous. Through the process of civilization, society becomes man's 'natural' abode (as the metaphor of culture as second nature signifies). No absolute escape from society is thinkable, although the individual drive towards instinctual freedom and satisfaction continuously foments the desire to revert to nature.

In Adorno's philosophy of civilization, the escape from society is only admissible as a moment of calculated aesthetic pleasure, which needs to be checked by security arrangements provided by society itself. Adorno's treatment of the Sirens episode in the first chapter of *DA* is emblematic of this. This episode constitutes for Adorno a sort of primal aesthetic scene, which displays the deep entanglement of myth, domination and labor ("Verschlingung von Mythos, Herrschaft und Arbeit", *DA* 49) throughout the history of civilization. Adorno

[218] Such cultural – one could also call them 'ideological' – narrations are in so far vital as they serve to even out and regulate the idiosyncrasies of society's members for the sake of a civilized existence. Communal and individual narration – in other words, 'self' and 'world making' – are in this sense complementary, as Jerome Bruner contends: "autobiography (like the novel) involves not only the construction of self, but also a construction of one's culture" (Bruner 2001, 35). Conversely, cultural constructions and narrations determine for Bruner the way in which autobiographies and personal narratives in general are told.

regards this episode as the *paradigmatic allegory* of the dialectic of myth and enlightenment, grounded in man's attempt to dominate nature via the social division of labor.

As we have seen, the Sirens' temptation consists in promising a return to an absolute past, where man's primeval consubstantiality with nature would be restored. Adorno underlines how this promise is deceptive: the chimera of nostalgic fulfillment is paid for with the impossibility of outliving the encounter, since the Sirens lay claim to the future of their hearers. Past and future are thus mutually exclusive during Odysseus' return to civilization. As Adorno points out, the hero has been warned about the Sirens' deadly threat by the sorceress Circe as a reward for not having immediately yielded to her sexual advances[219]. For this reason he takes the necessary measures to successfully overcome their regressive temptation. Confronted with the Sirens' deadly chant, Odysseus

> kennt nur zwei Möglichkeiten des Entrinnens. Die eine schreibt er den Gefährten vor. Er verstopft ihnen die Ohren mit Wachs, und sie müssen nach Leibeskräften rudern. Wer bestehen will, darf nicht auf die Lockung des Unwiederbringlichen hören, und er vermag es nur, indem er sie nicht zu hören vermag. *Dafür hat die Gesellschaft stets gesorgt*. Frisch und konzentriert müssen die Arbeitenden nach vorwärts blicken und liegenlassen, was zur Seite liegt. Den Trieb, der zur Ablenkung drängt, müssen sie verbissen in zusätzliche Anstrengung sublimieren. So werden sie praktisch. – Die andere Möglichkeit wählt Odysseus selber, der *Grundherr*, der die anderen für sich arbeiten läßt. Er hört, aber ohnmächtig an den Mast gebunden, und je größer die Lockung wird, um so stärker läßt er sich fesseln, so wie nachmals die Bürger auch sich selber das Glück um so hartnäckiger verweigerten, je näher es ihnen mit dem Anwachsen der eigenen Macht rückte. Das Gehörte bleibt für ihn folgenlos, nur mit dem Haupt vermag er zu winken, ihn loszubinden, aber es ist zu spät, die Gefährten, die selbst nicht hören, wissen nur von der Gefahr des Lieds, nicht von seiner Schönheit, und lassen ihn am Mast, um ihn und sich zu retten. *Sie reproduzieren das Leben des Unterdrückers in eins mit dem eigenen, und jener vermag nicht mehr aus seiner gesellschaftlichen Rolle herauszutreten*. Die Bande, mit denen er sich unwiderruflich an die Praxis gefesselt hat, halten zugleich die Sirenen aus der Praxis fern. (*DA* 51; my italics)

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[219] In other words, for having been 'civilized' enough to control his sexual insticts: "Odysseus ist gewarnt von Kirke, der Gottheit der Rückverwandlung ins Tier, der er widerstand, und die ihn dafür stark macht, anderen Mächten der Auflösung zu widerstehen" (*DA* 50). His shipmates on the contrary yield to Circe's sensual temptations, and are therefore transformed into pigs by the sourceress. As such they are not necessarily unhappy: "Die Hetäre gewährt Glück und zerstört die Autonomie des Beglückten. Aber sie vernichtet ihn nicht notwendig: sie hält eine ältere Form von Leben fest", *DA* 89). However, "weil ... sie einmal schon Menschen gewesen sind, weiß die zivilisatorische Epopöe was ihnen widerfuhr nicht anders denn als unheilvollen Sturz darzustellen, und kaum ist an der homerischen Darstellung die Spur der Lust selber noch zu gewahren. Sie wird um so nachdrücklicher getilgt, je zivilisierter die Opfer selber sind. Die Gefährten des Odysseus werden nicht wie frühere Gäste zu heiligen Geschöpfen der Wildnis, sondern zu unreinen Haustieren, zu Schweinen" (89-90). Such passages are evidence of Adorno's emphasis on the 'civilized' quality of Homer throughout the *Odyssey* chapter.

Odysseus, the master of the ship, is not necessitated to perform physical work, and is thus free to defy the aesthetic temptation of the Sirens. Yet as a technically 'enlightened' hero, he does so only after having been bound by his shipmen to the mast of the ship. Furthermore, he has ordered them not to untie him for any reason until the Sirens' chant is over[220]. Finally, he has wisely warned his fellow travellers about the danger posed by the mythical creatures, and convinced them to numb their senses. He plugs their ears with wax and thus makes them insensible towards the regressive aesthetic temptation represented by the Sirens.

In Adorno's Marxist depiction of the episode, Odysseus' reasonable imposition is in truth a subtle form of social domination. He prevents his fellow travelers from abandoning themselves to pleasure by forcing them to work for him, thus enabling *his own experience of aesthetic pleasure*. By following the instructions of the master, the shipmates save Odysseus' life and thus further the social structure in which they are bound as subjected 'workers'. Odysseus can afford to enjoy the Sirens' chant because, as a 'master', he does not have to perform physical work. While the 'society' of the ship 'progresses' by rowing past the Sirens, he 'regresses' in pleasure:

> Wie Vertretbarkeit das Maß von Herrschaft ist und jener der Mächtigste, der sich in den meisten Verrichtungen vertreten lassen kann, so ist Vertretbarkeit das Vehikel des Fortschritts und zugleich der Regression. Unter den gegebenen Verhältnissen bedeutet das Ausgenommensein von Arbeit, nicht bloß bei Arbeitslosen sondern selbst am sozialen Gegenpol, auch Verstümmelung. ... Odysseus wird in der Arbeit vertreten. Wie er der Lockung zur Selbstpreisgabe nicht nachgeben kann, so entbehrt er als Eigentümer zuletzt auch der Teilnahme an der Arbeit, schließlich selbst ihrer Lenkung, während freilich die Gefährten bei aller Nähe zu den Dingen die Arbeit nicht genießen können, weil sie sich unter Zwang, verzweifelt, bei gewaltsam verschlossenen Sinnen vollzieht. Der Knecht bleibt unterjocht an Leib und Seele, der Herr *regrediert.* (*DA* 52; my italics)

The work of the shipmates allows Odysseus to relish the unbounded pleasure yielded by the Sirens, and to aesthetically regress through their chant. This momentary aesthetic enfeeblement ("Schwächung") is for Adorno the 'equivalent' of power ("Äquivalent der Macht", ibid.), which exempts the master from physical work. Adorno reads into the Homeric epic his Marxist understanding of culture as the counterpart of labor exploitation: "Das Epos enthält bereits die richtige Theorie. Das Kulturgut steht zur kommandierten Arbeit in genauer

[220] "Odysseus erkennt die archaische Übermacht des Liedes an, indem er, technisch aufgeklärt, sich fesseln läßt. Er neigt sich dem Liede der Lust und vereitelt sie wie den Tod" (*GEO* 60).

Korrelation, und beide gründen im unentrinnbaren Zwang zur gesellschaftlichen Herrschaft über die Natur" (ibid. 51-52). Such Marxist criticism of society, however, is compensated in Adorno's *Odyssey* reading by the unquestionable necessity of Odysseus' provident dispositions, which allow him and his ship crew to survive. By following the master's instructions, the laboring shipmates not only reinforce their state of bondage, but also perpetuate society and thus save their endangered lives.

Adorno's criticism of labor exploitation in the Sirens episode is not so radical as to prevent the realization on his part of the objective, i.e., *functional necessity* of an unequal distribution of power and division of labor. Odysseus survives thanks to the society of his shipmates, who allow him to abandon himself to aesthetic pleasure and face the threat of self-dissolution without perishing. Adorno remarks how the master momentarily regresses, yet this regression is socially mediated and therefore does not have deadly consequences[221]. From a Marxist perspective, Odysseus' aesthetic 'enfeeblement' might well be the 'equivalent' of power. Yet this momentary enfeeblement is the product of a common social arrangement, and therefore does not lead to a complete turning back from society, i.e., the state of civilization. Such artful preparation of aesthetic experience prevents the latter from transforming into a disastrous *regression of the whole of society* into a mythically disguised natural state. Precisely this for Adorno had been the effect of the right-wing mythical idealization of *Heimat*, *Nation* and *Volksgemeinschaft* in the interwar period.

In the *Odyssey* chapter, Adorno describes Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens as a moment of 'Dionysian' self-abandonment. This reading suggests that the 'nostalgic' person drawn to the past either perishes or contemplates a mere illusion, since complete 'deindividuation' is not possible within the 'iron cage' (Max Weber) of civilization: "die Verheißung der frohen Rückkehr ist der Trug, mit dem das Vergangene den *Sehnsüchtigen* einfängt" (*DA* 33; my italics). Odysseus' conditional abandonment to mythical chant is symbolic of the 'destiny' of aesthetic pleasure in the history of civilization. While before the encounter with Odysseus, the Sirens' chant has a real aesthetic, i.e. sensual power – as it "noch nicht zur Kunst entmächtigt" (ibid.) – afterwards it becomes art, which cannot fully take hold of the senses. Through Odysseus' rational arrangement, the Sirens' "Lockung wird zum bloßen Gegenstand der Kontemplation *neutralisiert, zur Kunst*. Der Gefesselte wohnt einem Konzert bei, reglos lauschend wie später die Konzertbesucher. ... So treten Kunstgenuß

[221] Eve more: the moment of regression can have an *enlightening* function, because it serves to test the limits of subjectivity and the individual's striving for instinctual freedom. The trial of self-dissolution, once overcome, might even strengthen the individual's bonds with society, and thus can serve a progressive function. Adorno will elaborate on this insight in *Ästhetische Theorie*, where he discusse the enlightening force of art.

und Handarbeit im Abschied von der Vorwelt auseinander" (ibid. 51-52; my italics). The bourgeois disempowerment of the threat of pleasure amounts to a death sentence for the mythical temptresses. Since their secret has been unveiled, they no longer have a reason to exist[222]. On the other hand, the rational subject manages to survive and further progress on his civilizing course.

Adorno's description of Odysseus' aesthetic encounter with the Sirens bears traces of a Nietzschean metaphysics of art. At such points of the *Odyssey* chapter, Adorno seems to come close to Borchardt's nostalgic idealization of primordial chant and untainted aesthetic experience. This proximity might be explained in their shared post-Nietzschean aesthetic culture and *bildungsbürgerliche* background. However, Adorno's Marxism prevents him from yielding to an overly nostalgic tone. Contrary to Borchardt's 'naive' idealization of chant, Adorno defines the moment of aesthetic confrontation with the past in terms of a tension between the individual's drive towards instinctual pleasure and his bondage to social reality. Thus, in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* he provides a dialectical aesthetic theory, which anticipates his later work on *Ästhetische Theorie*. Adorno compensates for his Nietzschean metaphysics of art (the 'Dionysian' dissolution of individuality) with a Marxist sociological perspective. Indeed, in the *Odyssey* chapter, which is framed by Adorno's polemical confrontation with Borchardt's Homeric reading, the Dionysian tension towards self-abandonment and dissolution of individuality is overruled by the necessity of physical survival and social security[223]. Such needs are met with by Odysseus through *narrative information and rational communication*, as opposed to the irreducible singularity of aesthetic experience, which is the primary concern of the erudite and elitist poet Rudolf Borchardt.

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[222] "Die Sirenen haben das Ihre, aber es ist in der bürgerlichen Urgeschichte schon neutralisiert zur Sehnsucht dessen, der vorüberfährt. Das Epos schweigt darüber, was den Sängerinnen widerfährt, nachdem das Schiff entschwunden ist. In der Tragödie aber müßte es *ihre letzte Stunde* gewesen sein, wie die der Sphinx es war, als Ödipus das Rätsel löste, ihr Gebot erfüllend und damit sie stürzend. Denn das Recht der mythischen Figuren, als das des Stärkeren, lebt bloß von der Unerfüllbarkeit ihrer Satzung. Geschieht dieser Genüge, so ist es um die Mythen bis zur fernsten Nachfolge geschehen. Seit der glücklich-mißglückten Begegnung des Odysseus mit den Sirenen *sind alle Lieder erkrankt*, und die gesamte abendländische Musik laboriert an dem Widersinn von Gesang in der Zivilisation, der doch zugleich wieder die bewegende Kraft aller Kunstmusik abgibt" (*DA* 78, *GEO* 60 my italics).

[223] Reinhardt Maurer has shown with clarity how Adorno's and Horkheimer's critical theory, particularly in *DA*, "ist ein von Nietzsche-Perspektiven durchkreuzter Neomarxismus. ... Ihr Marxismus ist ein mit Selbstkritik durchsetzter und in Bewegung geratener, darum ja auch dem orthodoxen Marxismus so verdächtig. Man darf dennoch von 'Neomarxismus' sprechen, weil das Bekenntnis zu Marx im Vordergrund steht. Der Einfluß Nietzsches dagegen ist zwar allgegenwärtig – gehört er doch zum geistigen Klima, in dem die erste Generation der FS aufgewachsen ist – , tritt aber nur gelegentlich offen zutage und ist in der Art, wie er in direkter Bezugnahme offenbar wird, oft weniger typisch als in seiner latenten Wirksamkeit" (Maurer 1982, 35-36). This is precisely the case with the Sirens episode, and more in general with Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey*, where the prominent voice is clearly Marxist, whereas Nietzsche's influence is perceivable as a hushed yet penetrating whistle.

Society is for Odysseus and his crew a guarantee of survival against the aesthetic threat of regression posed by the Sirens. Their temptation can only be contrasted through an *enlightened social disposition*, one in which every member of the group fulfills his role and thus contributes to the well being of all. A literally double bind for the sake of mutual benefit takes place before Odysseus and his shipmen encounter the Sirens: the latter have their ears plugged with wax by Odysseus, who in his turn gets tied by them to the mast. The hero willingly subjects himself to the structure of society, and his societal responsibility as a master and landowner ("Grundherr"). His subject-shipmates do the same by submitting themselves to the master's enlightened dispositions. The set up of such a double bind is crucial in Adorno's interpretation of the Sirens episode as the quintessential allegory of the dialectic of enlightenment: "Maßnahmen, wie sie auf dem Schiff des Odysseus im Angesicht der Sirenen durchgeführt werden, sind die ahnungsvolle Allegorie der Dialektik der Aufklärung" (*DA* 52). Adorno reads Odysseus' passage through the Sirens as a crucial moment of negotiation, in which a *social contract* (between 'master' and 'workers') needs to be sealed. This contract symbolically marks the beginning of civilization as a history of social domination of nature.

Significantly, in Adorno's reading of the Sirens episode this contract takes place in a moment of 'aesthetic' threat for the whole of society. On the one hand, the overcoming of the threat of regression posed by the mythical creatures happens through the social division of labor proper to the state of civilization. In socio-theoretical terms: the return to an archaic past is *prevented* through man's socialization, involving a relentless course of material and technological progress (which the reactionary *Kulturkritiker* of Weimar despised as a path of cultural decadence). On the other hand, civilization develops *as the result* of a social and material arrangement that serves the purpose of survival by securing the benefit of society as a whole against the asocial instinctual drives of individuals (see Freud 1931).

From this perspective, Adorno's emphasis on 'speech' ('*Rede*') as a means of survival becomes clearer. Odysseus' facutly of speech is one of *narrative self-enlightenment and rational communication* at the same time: both are necessary to counter the threat of society's regression to an archaic condition. Odysseus' enlightened arrangement on the ship does not result from an act violence – it is not a mere *imposition* – but is rather the result of his communicative *disposition*. Odysseus in fact does not force, but rather *convinces* his shipmates to plug their ears. His act of rhetorical persuasion is rational insofar as it is aimed at the benefit of the whole ship crew, and not himself alone (in this sense it represents 'generality': '*Allgemeinheit*'). In Adorno's interpretation of the epic, Odysseus is not only a

narrating hero, but also a *hero of communicative reason*, a capable speaker and persuader, who only as such can overcome the mythical threats that face him.

Through his figuration of Odysseus as a narrating and speaking hero, Adorno seems to anticipate Habermas' concept of communicative action[224]. As we have seen, the other side of instrumental reason, the 'intelligence' of nature for the sake of rational control, is *narrative reason*, that is to say instrumental reason turned 'reflective'. It is indeed narrative, and not mere instrumental reason, that for Adorno saves Odysseus and makes him a truly progressive, i.e., civilizing hero[225]. However, narrative reason immediately translates into *communicative reason*, as soon as the subject realizes his unavoidable dependence on his social environment. Thus, narrative and communicative reason are two interdependent aspects of Odysseus' survival in the mythical sea, which for Adorno is allegorical of the progressive course of civilization.

Adorno's interpretation of the Sirens episode of the *Odyssey* clarifies why, in his opinion, Borchardt's summary opposition of mythical 'chant' and rational 'speech' is basically flawed:

> *Die bündige Unterscheidung von Lied und Rede* reicht an den Sachverhalt nicht heran und das Verdikt, demzufolge die Mythen bloß noch die Stoffe des Epos abgeben, erreicht erst dessen Schwelle. Bei Homer treten Epos und Mythos, Form und Stoff nicht sowohl einfach auseinander, *als daß sie sich auseinandersetzen*. (*GEO* 45; my italics)

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[224] As a matter of fact, Habermas' demand for a change of paradigm of Critical Theory towards a theory of communication, able to overcome the aporias that *DA* in his opinion has got stuck itself into, due to its dependence on the subjectivist paradigma of *Bewusstseinsphilosophie*, is already anticipated in my opinion in Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* in *DA* (see Habermas 1991, 518 ff.). Habermas' project of complemening Adorno-Horkheimer's criticism of instrumental reason, as well as their 'subjectivist' notion of a mimetic 'remembrance' of nature in the subject (see *DA* 58) through a theory of communicative reason seems to describe what Adorno in fact already does, though in a rather veiled manner, in the *Odyssey* chapter: "den mimetischen Leistungen läßt sich der vernünftige Kern erst freilegen, wenn man das Paradigma der Bewußtseinsphilosophie, nämlich ein die Objekte *vorstellendes* und an ihnen sich *abarbeitendes* Subjekt, zugunsten des Paradigmas der Sprachphilosophie, der intersubjektiven Verständigung oder Kommunikation aufgibt und den kognitiv-instrumentellen Teilaspekt einer umfassendere *kommunikativen Rationalität* einordnet" (Habermas 1991, 523; italics in original).

[225] This is what most critics, lacking the contextual reference of Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation, have been unable to see, considering Adorno's Odysseus an egoist, opportunistic swindler ("Adornos Listiger ist ... ein Anpasser im übelsten Sinn", "Adorno ... macht in Odysseus' Listen einen abgelösten, rein instrumentellen Geist aus, der sich der Natur resignierend einschmiegt", see Buschlinger 2007, 19) or an anti-social colonizer who in his travel across the Mediterranean Sea only leaves "Schädelstätte der Sozietät" behind himself (Geyer-Ryan/Lethen, 1987, 46). Sure in Adorno's reading of the epics Odysseus leaves behind himself, as a civilized man fighting for his life and heading back to his 'civilized' home, the primitive societies that he encounters on his way. Yet he does not do any harm to them, unless he is under life threat, as in the Cyclops-episode. Moreover, Odysseus' heroic egoism, as portrayed by Adorno, is functional to his final reintegration in his original society, therefore by no means sterilely self-referential.

For Adorno, Borchardt's clear-cut distinction between 'chant' and 'discourse' ("Dunkler Gesang und rationale Rede", *GEO* 37) separates aesthetic categories ('Dionysian' and 'Apollonian') that in Nietzsche's work were still – and indeed still ought to be – thought together. The two principles are not opposed, but rather mutually determined. The *Odyssey*, which Adorno reads as a narrative of subjective formation and rational emancipation from myth, emblematically testifies to this mutual determination. What is more, the rational principle of language ('*Rede*') gets the upper hand over the musical aspect of language ('*Gesang*'), and this happens by rational necessity. Odysseus is forced by the mythical threat of self-dissolution to become aware of the instrumental character of language. Disenchantment for him is not an impious choice, by rather a necessity of survival, which can only be guaranteed by an enlightened use of language, i.e., by self-narration and social communication.

Adorno indirectly counters Borchardt's derogatory interpretation of the *Odyssey* as a 'chatting' narration, which betrays the poet's proto-fascist bias. In the section of this study dedicated to Borchardt's *Pindarische Gedichte*, I have shown how the latter contrasts Homer as a rhapsodic market narrator and impious debunker of the Olympian religion to Pindar as the last heroic representative and restorer of Doric "altfestländische Lyrik" (*PG* 108). Borchardt's depiction of Pindar as an aristocratic and conservative poet clearly expresses his own poetic sensibility and political orientation (see 2.5.). Adorno responds to Borchardt's idealization of Pindar and disparagement of Homer by underlining the enlightened quality of the epic poet, which is manifest both in the content and the form of the *Odyssey*:

> Von der Antike bis zum Faschismus hat man Homer das *Geschwätz* vorgeworfen, *das* der *Helden* sowohl wie des *Erzählers*. Alten und neuen Spartanern jedoch hat der Ionier prophetisch darin überlegen sich gezeigt, daß er das Verhängnis darstellte, welches die Rede des Listigen, des Mittelsmanns über diesen bringt. (*GEO* 70; my italics)

Adorno's *Odyssey* reading shows how the cunning Odysseus gets the better of the mythical figures that try to subject him to their unchangeable laws. His 'discursive' rationality proves to be objectively superior to the stolid rigidity of myth – which Adorno considers as the reflection of an archaic social structure – and also superior to Borchardt's 'restorative', indeed regressive recuperation of myth as a binding social order and system of beliefs. By injecting

his theory of civilization into his Homeric reading, Adorno establishes a fundamental connection between narration and progress, in opposition to Borchardt's archaistic poetic theory and anti-modernist cultural criticism. Such connection is at the core of Adorno's *narrative theory of civilization* in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. In light of this theory, the progressive aspect of Adorno's philosophy comes to the fore, in spite of all of the criticism of enlightenment that one finds in *DA*.

CHAPTER III.
The Hidden Confrontation:
Ludwig Klages in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*

3.1. Ludwig Klages' *lebensphilosophische Zivilisationskritik*: *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*

In the preceding chapter I have shown how Borchardt figures in "Geschichtsphilosophischer Exkurs zur *Odyssee*" as an archaistic poet and Neo-Romantic, reactionary 'mythologue', whose elitist project of '*schöpferische Restauration*' is criticized by Adorno for being dangerously regressive. At the same time, however, Adorno appropriates different points of Borchardt's cultural theory of Greek poetry, and weaves them in a more or less explicit manner into his *Odyssey* interpretation. By doing so he manages to confute Borchardt's Romantic poetic theory and aristocratic cultural politics, while 'saving' the theses and insights of the poet that come in handy for his own Homeric reading.

My aim in the present chapter is to show how a similar strategy of dialectical appropriation and immanent confutation marks Adorno's relationship with the philosopher Ludwig Klages in the *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. The latter's presence in Adorno's work is less apparent than that of Borchardt, who as we have seen is the unquestioned polemical antagonist of the first, later deleted pages of the text. Nonetheless, Klages' influence on the *Odyssey* chapter is equally strong, indeed even more pervasive than that of Borchardt. The philosopher's presence in Adorno's text is mostly latent, though a number of explicit as well as implicit references to his work can be found at different points of Adorno's chapter (direct quotations, allusions, tacit paraphrasing). Although his and Horkheimer's editorial revision of the *Odyssey* excursus of *DA* has not determined as many erasures of Klages as of Borchardt, the earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter also in this case proves to be better evidence for Adorno's productive confrontation with the philosopher than the later one. For this reason, in the present chapter I will devote my attention and pursue my

textual analysis basing on *GEO*, while pointing to the abridgements and changes that occurred in the process of chapter editing.

Before setting about dealing with this task, however, it will be necessary to give a presentation of both the historico-intellectual context and philosophical content of Klages' work, dwelling on the points that are of immediate relevance for Adorno. Ludwig Klages (1872–1956) is a rather peculiar figure in the German philosophical landscape of the first half of the 20th century. A cult philosopher of the Weimar era, he counts as the foremost representative of *lebensphilosophische* irrationalism in the wake of Nietzsche (see Bollenbeck 2007, 238 ff.). Klages was a prolific publicist and infatigable writer (see Aschheim 1992, 79 and Breuer 1995, 100), and did important studies in the field of 'characterology' ('*Charakterkunde*'). Besides this, he founded the discipline of graphology, the psychological analysis of handwriting, which he sought to develop into a comprehensive 'science of expression' ('*Ausdruckswissenschaft*'). More important for the present discussion, however, is his intellectual role as a cultural critic of modernity in Weimar Germany. Klages' philosophical work can be regarded as both the symptom and product of the major anti-modernist cultural movements of his time, which he combines in a comprehensive and radical *Zivilisationskritik*. As Georg Bollenbeck notes:

> Wie bei keinem anderen ist bei ihm das kulturkritische Denken in die intellektuelle Biographie eingeschrieben. Ungleich prägender als das Studium der Chemie mit abgeschlossener Promotion sind für ihn die engen Kontakte zum Georgekreis, der Einfluß der kosmischen Runde um den esoterischen Altertumsforscher Alfrede Schuler, die Heimatschutz-, Naturschutz- und Lebensreformbewegung, die Lebensphilosophie, die Neuromantik und vor allem Nietzsche mit seiner Vorstellung vom rauschhaften dionysischen Leben. (Bollenbeck 2007, 238)

As is the case with most of his predecessors and contemporaries in matters cultural criticism (Langbehn, de Lagarde, Nietzsche, Spengler), a key word for the understanding of Klages' philosophical work is 'life' (*Leben*). His can be defined as a *Lebensphilosophie*, a philosophy primarily concerned with life and its immediate experience (*Erlebnis*). For Klages, both were threatened by forces extraneous or downright hostile to them, such as capitalist economy, city life, industrialization and the urban masses. Klages shares this opinion with a number of other German intellectuals of his time. In the wake of Nietzsche a *lebensphilosophische*

Zivilisationskritik[226] emerged in Germany, directed against everything that was perceived to impair life and the vital urges of individuals in the state of civilization (see Bollenbeck 2007, 155 and 163, Honneth 1984, 98-99). An excerpt from Walter Benjamin – himself a long-time reader and admirer of Klages – may help to convey the gist of this philosophical tendency of turn-of-the-century and Weimar Germany:

> Seit dem Ende des vorigen Jahrhunderts stellte sie [die Philosophie, A/N] eine Reihe von Versuchen an, der wahren Erfahrung im Gegensatze zu einer Erfahrung sich zu bemächtigen, welche sich im genormten, denaturierten Dasein der zivilisierten Massen niederschlägt. Man pflegt diese Vorstöße unter dem Begriff der Lebensphilosophie zu rubrizieren. Sie gingen begreiflicherweise nicht vom Dasein des Menschen in der Gesellschaft aus. Sie beriefen sich auf die *Dichtung*, lieber auf die *Natur* und zuletzt vorzugsweise auf das *mythische Zeitalter*. Diltheys Werk 'Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung' ist eines der frühesten in der Reihe: sie endet mit Klages und mit Jung, der sich dem Faschismus verschrieben hat. (cited in Großheim 1996 109-110; my italics)

Benjamin touches upon two main elements of *Lebensphilosophie*, namely: 1) the search for a personal experience untainted by 'civilized' life, i.e., a modern, urban form of socialization; 2) the quintessentially Romantic orientation towards uncontaminated nature, original poetry and primeval myth[227]. Following Benjamin's concise description of this philosophical tendency, Ludwig Klages can rightly be considered as its most radical representative in Germany in the interwar years. His work as a whole is marked by a Neo-Romantic criticism of modern civilization, exerted in the name of nature and motivated by a basic epistemic orientation towards life processes and 'living' origins. The result of this is Klages' reevaluation of myth, or rather of a *mythological way of thinking*, able to restore man's original bond with the natural world.

It is telling in this respect that Klages became renowned in his time through his opening speech at the first general gathering of the *Jugendbewegung* ('Erster Freideutscher

[226] I use the expression in German, not only given the difficulty to translate it appropriately into English, but also due to its specific meaning and conceptual content in the German language. Both *Lebensphilosophie* and *Zivilisationskritik* are notions describing intellectual phenomena and cultural tendencies that developed in a specifically German context. This specificity legitimizes in my opinion the use of these and related terms in their language of origin.

[227] Benjamin furthermore points to the ideological parable of the *lebensphilosophische* criticism of modern civilization in Germany, which ended up being appropriated by Fascist culture. Interestingly, Klages is not explicitly considered by Benjamin as a fascist intellectual – for good reasons, as I hope I will be able to show in the present study – as the prominent psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung is.

Jugendtag'), which took place in the vicinity of Kassel in 1913[228]. His speech was immediately published under the title *Mensch und Erde* (1913), which can be seen as one of the first ecological manifestos, indeed as a forerunner of the ecological movements of the 20th century[229]. In his text, Klages exposes what will also be the main concern of his philosophical magnum opus, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (*The Spirit as the Opponent of the Soul*, 1929-1932), namely the destruction of life by the rational 'spirit'. According to Klages, in the history of civilization the latter would have increasingly suppressed the 'soul', understood as the sensing and nature-related part of man. Departing from this assumption, Klages develops a radical criticism of modern civilization – for him a complex of cultural decadence, greedy capitalism, mechanization of life and eradication of nature – both in its ideological premises (the belief in progress) and practical consequences (the scientific explanation and technological exploitation of nature). Let us consider a representative excerpt from Klages' *Mensch und Erde* of 1913:

> Wir täuschten uns nicht, als wir den 'Fortschritt' leerer Machtgelüste verdächtig fanden, und wir sehen, daß Methode im Wahnwitz der Zerstörung steckt. Unter den Vorwänden von 'Nutzen', 'wirtschaftlicher Entwicklung', 'Kultur' geht er in Wahrheit auf *Vernichtung des Lebens* aus. Er trifft es in allen seinen Erscheinungsformen, rodet Wälder, streicht die Tiergeschlechter, löscht die ursprünglichen Völker aus, überklebt und verunstaltet mit dem Firnis der Gewerblichkeit die Landschaft und entwürdigt, was er von *Lebewesen* noch übrigläßt gleich dem Schlachtvieh zur bloßen Ware, zum vogelfreien Gegenstande eines schrankenlosen *Beutehungers*. In seinem Dienst aber steht die gesamte *Technik* und in deren Dienst wieder die weitaus größte Domäne der *Wissenschaft*. ... So hätten wir denn beisammen die Früchte des 'Fortschritts'! Wie ein fressendes Feuer fegte er über die Erde hin, und wo er die Stätte einmal gründlich kahl gebrannt, da gedeiht nichts mehr, solange es noch Menschen gibt. Vertilgte Tier- und Pflanzenarten erneuern sich nicht, die heimliche Herzenswärme der Menschheit ist aufgetrunken, ... und es blieb ein mürrischkalter Arbeitstag mit dem falschen Flitter lärmender 'Vergnügungen' angetan. Kein Zweifel, wir stehen im Zeitalter des Untergangs der Seele. (*MUE* 12-13; my italics)

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[228] Walter Benjamin was present at this gathering and wrote an article on it (see Großheim 1996, 97)

[229] Michael Großheim defines it "eine fundamentalökologische Kritik der Moderne" (Großheim 1996, 97). Reinhard Falter says in his sympathetic study on Klages, "'Mensch und Erde' ist bis heute Klages' meistgelesene und wirksamste Schrift. Der Essay ist ein Beitrag zu einem Band, der anläßlich eines Treffens der Freideutschen Jugend auf dem Hohen Meißner 1913 veröffentlicht wurde – einer Jugend, die aufzubrechen hoffte im Zeichen der Natur. Das Verdienst der Schrift ist, den philosophischen Gehalt des verharmlosend 'Umweltproblem' Genannten freizulegen. Ungewohnt waren die Deutlichkeit der Worte sowie der Anspruch, die historischen Ursachen und die einheitlichen Tendenzen der Naturzerstörung deutlich zu machen. Klages' Beitrag war die schonungslose Aufdeckung des Komplexes von Kapitalismus, Mechanisierung, Christentum und Kulturverfall" (Falter 2003, 63).

The passage presents a compendium of Klages' *lebensphilosophische Zivilisationskritik*, and reads at the same time as a summa of the radical cultural criticism of modernity that started spreading in Germany around the turn of the 20th century. *Mensch und Erde* indeed appropriates common arguments of the *Heimat-*, *Naturschutz- and Jugendbewegung* (see Bollenbeck 2007, 239-240), and merges them into a strongly Neo-Romantic philosophy of nature. This combination results in a criticism of civilization that can be rightly called *radical*, in so far as it goes – or at least portends to go – to the 'roots' of the problem, namely the subjugation of both nature and life in modern civilization. Thus, more than a *Kulturkritik* in the strict sense of the term, Klages' is a fundamentalist *Zivilisationskritik*, calling into question the material attainments and technological advancements of the modern era on account of their deteriorating effects on the natural environment and the quality of both human and non-human life[230].

The radicalism of Klages' criticism of civilization explains his notoriousness in intellectual circles during the Weimar Republic, when he also reached his peak of popularity. Contrary to Spengler, the other prominent cultural critic of the time, who had been able to combine his conservative cultural criticism of modernity with a *realpolitische* orientation and shrewdly constructed public image (Merlio 2000, 35), Klages always remained faithful to his radical anti-modernist stance (see Falter 2005). While on the one hand this attitude gained him the reputation of an 'esoteric' thinker and Romantic visionary out of touch with reality, it also served to make him a sort of philosophical icon, catering to the spiritual needs of a time of crisis, representative of the post-Nietzschean search for alternative ways to approach modernity (see Aschheim 1992, Bollenbeck 2007, 201 ff.).

It is probably the radical consequentiality of Klages' criticism that captivated many of his contemporaries in the general climate of weariness with rationality (see Frank 1982, 26 ff.) and 'discontent' with civilization (Freud 1930, Plessner 2001, 42 ff.) that characterized the

[230] It goes without saying that, like most conservative minded cultural critics of his time (like Oswald Spengler and Rudolf Borchardt for instance) Klages is also hostile to the specifically *cultural* aspects of modernity: the daily hustle and bustle of urban life, money fetishism and consumerism, the cultural industry and avant-garde art: "Die meisten leben nicht, sondern existieren nur mehr, sei es als Sklaven des 'Berufs', die sich maschinenhaft im Dienst großer Betriebe verbrauchen, sei es als Sklaven des Geldes, besinnungslos anheimgegeben dem Zahlendelirium der Aktien und Gründungen, sei es endlich als Sklaven des großstädtischen Zerstreuungstaumels, ebenso viele aber fühlen dumpf den Zusammenbruch und die wachsende Freudlosigkeit. In keiner Zeit war noch die Unzufriedenheit größer und vergiftender" (*MUE* 12). However, the object of Klages' critical discourse is not 'Kultur' in the strict sense of the term – namely as life-style, mentality, taste and artistic production – but rather in the broader meaning that the term has in the German language, namely as 'Zivilisation'. The latter word indicates the whole of the technical-material arrangements and socio-political dispositions that differentiate human from natural (or primitive) life. For this reason Klages' work ought to be defined *zivilisationskritisch*, rather than simply *kulturkritisch* (as it is the case for instance of Rudolf Borchardt).

interwar period[231]. Klages' influence in fact was not restricted to such small literary circles as the George-*Kreis* and the one he founded with Alfred Schuler in Munich's Schwabing (known as the *Kosmiker* circle; see Breuer 1995, 95 ff.). His notoriety in the 20s and 30s was so great that although not an academic, he provoked academic criticism and aroused the interest of many prominent contemporaries, from Max Scheler and Walter Benjamin to Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács (see Bollenbeck 2007, 239, Großheim 1996). His radical criticism of modern civilization – precisely on account of its radical and uncompromising character – in a way reflected the philosophical *Zeitgeist*, marked by a spreading sense of crisis and the troubled search for ways out of the predicament of modern civilization[232].

Klages' two major philosophical works, *Vom kosmogonischen Eros* (1922) and *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (1929-1932), were also received with interest by the members of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (see Großheim 1996, 113). In his detailed study on the relationship between Klages' philosophy and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Michael Großheim has shown how not only the eclectic Walter Benjamin – who played a pioneer role in introducing Klages to other members of the institute (see Großheim 1996, 100) – but also Adorno, Horkheimer and even Habermas have been interested in Klages' philosophy to different extents[233]. While on the one hand the official line of the *IfS* held Klages as the foremost representative of the metaphysical and anti-historical reaction that pervaded German philosophy in the 20s and 30s, personal opinions about him differed greatly amongst the members of the institute. As a matter of fact, Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer privately showed a genuine interest in the philosopher, as testified by their epistolary exchanges (ibid. 101 ff.).

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[231] Freud's *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930) is only the most renown of a number of works of the time that questioned the state of culture and inquired into the problems of human life in modern society.

[232] In his recent study on the philosopher, Reinhard Faser points out how "Klages' Publizität war so groß, dass er, obwohl nicht Lehrstuhlinhaber, auch akademische Kritik herausforderte" (Faser 2003, 67). Also Kurt Sontheimer notes in his study on anti-democratic thought in Weimar Germany: "Ludwig Klages hat mit seiner berühmten Lehre vom 'Geist' auf seine Zeitgenossen den nachhaltigsten Eindruck gemacht" (Sontheimer 1962, 43). A prominent contemporary philosopher, Max Scheler, for example described in a lecture held in 1929 Klages' philosophy as the expression of the "Triebrevolte im Menschen des neuen Weltalters gegen die einstige Sublimierung, gegen die übersteigerte Intellektualität unserer Väter" (Max Scheler, "Der Mensch im Weltalter des Augleichs", cited in Sontheimer 1962, 43). At the other side of the political spectrum, the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch dedicated to Klages different subchapters of his work *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1935), taking the irrationalist philosopher as the main example of the surging anti-modernist Neo-Romanticism and reactionary ideology of Weimar Germany.

[233] So for example Benjamin worte to his friend Scholem in 1926: "Die Auseinandersetzung mit Bachofen und Klages ist unumgänglich" (cited in Großheim 1996, 103). In a lecture held the same year Horkheimer mentioned the "außerordentlich bedeutenden Ludwig Klages" (ibid.). On the other hand other members of the institute like Herbert Marcuse and Leo Löwenthal showed no interest in Klages (see Großheim 1996, 102), while thinkers that were ideologically close to the *IfS* like Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch could only find negative aspects in his philosophy.

This interest resulted in the project of a philosophical confrontation with Klages, which was to be carried out jointly in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Although Adorno, Benjamin and Horkheimer held onto this project for about a decade (approximately from the mid-20s to the mid-30s), it was not realized in the end, both due to other emerging priorities and the indecision as to who was to take up the task (ibid. 103). However, the project of a confrontation with Klages was never entirely abandoned, and indeed followed Adorno and Horkheimer in their American exile, becoming part of their broader intellectual coming to terms with the German reactionary and pre-fascist ideology in the late 30s and early 40s[234].

As far as Adorno is concerned, his interest in Klages within the *IfS* is second only to that of Benjamin. Particularly in his case, however, a peculiar discrepancy can be noticed between his private and public positions towards the philosopher (see Großheim 1996, 100). Klages' work seems to have aroused contradictory feelings in Adorno, who was both fascinated and repulsed by the former. In spite of this, Adorno regarded a confrontation with Klages to be of great importance for the theoretical concerns and ideological purposes of the *IfS* (see Großheim 1996, 104). Some documents of the time testify to Adorno's ambivalence towards Klages. In the minutes of a meeting of the members of the *IfS* dated November 3, 1931, one reads Adorno's following remark: "In der Nachkriegsmetaphysik hat, freilich in verwirrter Weise, an einem Punkte das Bürgertum seine Ideologie eingesehen und zu revidieren versucht. Wichtiger als die Größen Scheler und Hartmann [sind] dabei Radikalere wie Klages" (cited in Großheim 1996, 103). Some years later, in December 1936, Adorno manifests in a letter to Horkheimer his intention

> Klages so zu dialektisieren, daß er nicht bloß, was auf der Hand liegt, als der *romantische Reaktionär* erscheint, sondern auch als ein *radikaler Kritiker der bürgerlichen Arbeitsideologie* und schließlich wenn man will des Begriffs der Arbeit selber. Sein Geist ist ja nichts als der mythologisierte Arbeitsbegriff. (cited in Großheim 1996, 120; my italics)

[234] As Großheim notes: "Cum grano salis könnte man sagen, daß der Ruf nach einer Klages-Kritik in den dreißiger Jahren für das *IfS* eine wichtige Konstante darstellt, die den Bruch durch die Emigration unbeschadet übersteht. ... Die geplante Auseinandersetzung wird schließlich zu einem geringen Teil von Horkheimer und Adorno in verschiedenen kleineren Arbeiten selbst vorgenommenem, zum größten Teil aber dann in die gemeinsam verfaßte *Dialektik der Aufklärung* verlegt" (Großheim 1996, 104). Amongst these works of 'smaller' entity, the American essay on Spengler should be mentioned (see 1.3.), in which Adorno provides a criticism of the philosopher of 'decline' that also to a certain extent applies to Klages (who was indeed the radical Romantic and esoteric counterpart of Spengler in Weimar Germany).

Such statements unmistakably prove the appeal that Klages exerted on Adorno, not only on an intellectual, but also on a personal level. This might be the reason why Adorno initially proposed to take up the burden of a critical confrontation with Klages, save that he later gave up this proposition, explaining this shift in a letter to Horkheimer with reasons of 'psychological' nature ("aus Gründen rein psychologischer Art", cited in Großheim 1996, 103). Unfortunately we do not have further clues as to these reasons in Adorno's epistolary exchanges; however, this private statement to Horkheimer allows the speculation that Adorno might have been impaired in his initial intention by a perceived closeness to some fundamental positions of Klages' philosophy.

Beyond the level of speculation, there is also textual evidence for Adorno's interest in Klages. As far as the latter's presence in Adorno's work, the texts in which the philosopher appears most frequently are the essay on the epistolary exchange between George and Hofmannsthal (see *GS* 10.1, 195 ff.), in which Klages is considered in relation to Stefan George, and the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. This is the work in which Adorno's long-time interest in Klages' philosophy appears finally concretized. Still more clearly than it is the case with Borchardt, Adorno's confrontation with Klages in *DA* is part of his broader coming to terms with German post-Nietzscheanism, particularly with the Neo-Romantic and reactionary appropriation of Nietzsche that had occurred in Germany in the first three decades of the 20th century. As Aschheim notes, "Klages was a post-Nietzschean in every sense of the term," and, "the most radical German exponent of irrationalist Lebensphilosophie, taking its Nietzschean premises to their most extreme conclusions" (Aschheim 1992, 80). Klages' appropriation of Nietzsche, however, was rather selective. His philosophy can be seen as the product of a consequent radicalization of the 'Dionysian' impulse of Nietzsche's thought, which Klages expunges of the 'Will to Power' component and transforms into a neo-pagan philosophy of life and 'cosmic' Eros[235].

Klages' magnum opus *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (*GW*) can be rightly regarded as one of the most prominent examples of post-Nietzschean philosophy in Weimar Germany. In this voluminous work, published in three volumes between 1929 and 1932, the

[235] Klages wrote a treatise on the *Pychologische Errungenschaften Nietzsches* (1926), where he underlined the 'psychological' merits of his model philosopher (see Ellermann 1933, 24 ff.), at same time however pointing out to the latter's shortcomings. In fact for Klages "Nietzsche's tragedy was that he was torn apart by the incompatible Dionysian longing for self-abandon and the constant Übermenschlich striving to self-overcome. Attracted to rationalist Socratism as much as he was repelled by it, Nietzsche never transcended the inner tension between the orgiastic pagan and Christian self-overcoming elements of his character" (Aschheim 1992, 82). In this sense Klages' critique of Nietzsche follows the official line of the George-*Kreis*: "this was a Nietzsche who could intuit, but never himself enter, the new world towards which he had pointed" (ibid.). Klages consequently saw his own philosophy as the coherent and radical continuation of the path fist shown by Nietzsche.

philosopher gives a comprehensive exposition of his cultural critical *Lebensphilosophie* and 'cosmic' *Weltanschauung*. Since this is also the work that Adorno refers to in his *Odyssey* chapter, I will give a summary presentation of it, concentrating on those aspects that are directly related to *DA*. In this brief presentation I will focus in particular on four major points of Klages' philosophy: 1) his metaphysical doctrine; 2) his philosophy of history; 3) his *lebensphilosophische* cultural criticism; and 4) his archaistic anthropology. These four related aspects of Klages' philosophy play an equally important role in Adorno's confrontation with the former in *DA*.

As the title of his work suggests, Klages' metaphysical doctrine is based on a strong binary opposition between two polar principles, namely the 'spirit' and the 'soul' ('*Geist*' and '*Seele*'), along with their respective 'capacities' ('*Vermögen*'), namely 'understanding' ('*Erfassen*', '*Begreifen*') and 'experience' ('*Erleben*'). For Klages, the interaction between these two principles determines the inner constitution of man and his relation to the surrounding world. Within this dual metaphysical scheme, however, the ontological priority according to Klages pertains to the soul, which he considers as the basic, defining attribute of all living beings ('*Lebensträger*'), and the prerequisite for their capacity to 'experience' reality. The spirit on the contrary – generally understood by Klages as the faculty of rational understanding – is for the cosmic philosopher something secondary with respect to the faculty of the soul, as he explains in the 9th chapter of *GW*, entitled "Die Gegensätzlichkeit von Seele und Geist": "Ist nämlich die Fähigkeit zum Erleben eine Seite der Wirklichkeit selbst, so können wir zwar *erleben, ohne das mindeste zu erfassen*, keineswegs aber etwas erfassen ohne Beihilfe des Erlebens" (*GW* 72; my italics).

Thus the opposition between spirit and soul for Klages is not merely asymmetrical, but also hierarchical. What comes first at the level of Being – namely nature as that which is in itself, independently from human intervention – is for Klages both of a different quality and a higher value than the products of man's rational agency and conscious intentionality. Klages subsumes the latter under the term 'spirit', by which he understands roughly all forms of intellectual as well as practical appropriation of the world[236]. Drawing upon Nietzsche's

[236] Michael Großheim notes how Klages operates with a "historisch ungewöhnlich akzentuierten Geistbegriff" (Großheim 1996, 117) – that is, unusual even for the German tradition of metaphysical philosophy: "Klages hat eine Fülle unterschiedlichster Phänomene auf die eine Instanz 'Geist' zurückgeführt ...: Selbstbehauptung des Subjekts; Grenzziehung, Vereinzelung, Herauslösung, Entzeitlichung, Identifizierung, Fixierung des Gegenstands; Bewußtheit des Erlebens, Besinnung auf das Erleben, Nicht-mehr-Aufgehen im Erleben, Verlust der Naivität, der Unbefangenheit; Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung, Distanzierung, Entfremdung vom Gegenstand; Reduktion des Gegenstands, Unterwerfung des Gegenstands, Entzauberung; Souveränität gegenüber den Gefühlen/ergreifenden Mächten; Herrschaft des Willens, Dominanz des Planens, Zukunftsglaube; Verlust an Geborgenheit und Sicherheit innerhalb der Welt, Verlust der Aufgehobenheit im Kosmos" (ibid.).

criticism of intellectual anthropocentrism – as formulated for instance in "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinn" (1873) – Klages considers man's rational activity as the expression of a subjective Will to Power (see Ellermann 1933, 9 ff.), and of the human drive for self-assertion at the expense of nature and therefore of truth, which Klages romantically conceives as an original 'given' or state of Being[237]. The following passage from *GW* helps clarify this position:

> Besteht nun die Anlage zum Erleben, die wir in Rücksicht auf bedeutungstiefe Erlebniswellen die Seele nannten, unweigerlich darin, daß ihr, der Seele, etwas *geschehen, widerfahren, begegnen* könne, so trägt im Verhältnis zum seelischen Widerfahrnis der Akt des Erfassens den Charakter einer *Behauptung*, und die Seinsmacht, die das erfassen ermöglichet, den eines Zwanges zur *Selbstbehauptung*. Als seelisches Wesen ist die Person ein getriebenes oder hingerissenes oder sich hingebendes Wesen, als geistiges Wesen ist sie ein wollendes und dergestalt allemal ein an irgendetwas festhalten *wollendes Wesen*, das der seelischen Wallung unbedingt widerstrebt und jeden Anheimfall an sie bald als Schwäche und Mangel an Widerstandskraft, bald als Ablenkbarkeit, Haltlosigkeit, Verführbarkeit zu bewerten gezwungen ist. (*GW* 72; my italics)

According to Klages, the spirit, as the rational and willing part of man (see *GW* 73), by nature works against the passive and receptive faculty of the soul[238]. Klages' metaphysical ontology thus inscribes a split into the core of human nature, resulting in a fundamental existential imbalance. In one of the few works (published in French) dedicated to the relationship between Klages and *DA*, Axel Honneth has brought to a point the mutual determination of ontological and anthropological premises in Klages' philosophy:

> Cette approche phénoménologique a pour origine une *affirmation d'ordre ontologique* selon laquelle la réalité en tant que telle est un flux spatial et temporel ininterrompu qui ne connait que des ressemblances qualitatives et une rythmique du

[237] The origins of the Nietzschean concept '*Wille zur Macht*' – first introduced in *Zarathustra* – lie in the psychological analysis of the human strategies of power acquisition and self-assertion in the aphorisms collection *Morgenröte*. Klages' fundamentally appropriates Nietzsche's paradigm of 'suspicion' (Ricoeur), which relates intellectual and moral attitudes to deep-rooting psychological motives and instinctual urges. Such a Nietzschean gesture of unmasking grounds Klages' encompassing criticism of modern rationalism – particularly in the form of scientific practice and technological progress – as the manifestation of man's Will to Power, and contributes to his praise of the 'irrational' faculties of perception, intuition and contemplation ('*Schau*') as ways to access a deeper layer of reality.

[238] "Ist mithin der Charakter der Seele bald triebmäßige, bald enthusiastische Preisgegebenheit, so erscheint ihr gegenüber der Charakter des Geistes im Lichte einer Widersetzlichkeit, die sich an jeder seelischen Regung als intentionale Hemmung verwirklicht! Demgemäß ist zwischen Geist und Seele ein Ausgleich unmöglich" (*GW* 74).

> changement. Klages élabore le fondement ontologique de sa théorie en critiquant le concept d'Etre qui prévaut depuis la philosophie grecque et qui considère la réalité comme un système de relations entre des éléments fixes, alors même que ces éléments sont selon Klages animés d'un mouvement perpétuel et continu. ... Klages construit sa thèse *anthropologique* fondamentale en associant tout d'abord à des *réalités* distinctes – les notions de devenir et d'être – des *capacités* humaines. L'homme ne fait l'expérience de la réalité première que grâce à cette faculté de vivre une expérience dont l'âme est l'organe psychique. La réalité s'offre à elle sous forme d'images qui s'impose à la sensibilité. D'un autre coté, l'homme élabore une notion ontologique de la réalité au moyen de cette autre faculté qui lui est propre: la faculté d'appréhender conceptuellement. L'appréhension conceptuelle, le raisonnement et la déduction sont des activités de l'organe psychique que Klages nomme esprit; la réalité lui apparait sous forme des 'choses' et de 'qualités', dans un monde de choses reliées mécaniquement. (Honneth 1984, 100-101; my italics)

Based on the premises summarily exposed by Honneth, Klages pits the true (or 'cosmic') reality of life, which according to him can only be experienced by the soul, against the artificial (or 'a-cosmic') reality *constructions* (or intellectual fictions) of the spirit[239]. Man is permanently 'disturbed' by the ongoing struggle between the two forces: "Der geschichtliche Mensch [ist der] Schauplatz des Kampfes zweier Gewalten … der Wirklichkeit, die wir das *Leben* nennen, und der akosmischen Macht mit Namen *Geist*" (*GW* 912). As Honneth further notes, this irreconcilable tension logically results from the onto-anthropological premises of Klages' metaphysics:

> Il lui faut dès lors concevoir l'activité de l'esprit et les actes de conscience comme *des troubles de la sensibilité* liée au corps et de la faculté que possède l'âme d'avoir l'expérience d'une réalité originaire elle-même douée d'âme, puisque-aussi bien il a auparavant décrit en termes d'ontologie la *construction cognitive* d'un monde d'objet figé comme la *falsification de la réalité originaire*. (Honneth 1984, my italics)

The artificial constructions of the spirit for Klages are not merely extraneous to the life of the soul, but downright hostile to it. This assumption also determines Klages' markedly pessimistic philosophy of history. As for Hegel, so also for Klages human history is a triumphal procession of the human spirit, yet this triumph is baleful and destructive: "Der

[239] According to Klages, life is a 'cosmic' reality binding everything existent, and can be perceived as such only be the empathically receptive faculty of the soul; on the contrary the 'spirit', cannot perceive the reality of life, but only impose on it its own 'a-cosmic', intellectualist constructions. 'Life' is transfigured by Klages into the holy essence of all perceivable reality; he therefore considers its violation and destruction by the rational agency of the spirit as a form of impiousness, worth submitting to a fundamental(ist) criticism. As declared by Klages himself, his lifelong philosophical task was that of erecting a monument to 'life' in the age of its relentless destruction (see Großheim 1996, 115).

Weg der Weltgeschichte ist in der Tat, was Hegel wollte, die Selbstentwicklung des absoluten Geistes, aber in zerstörerischer Gegenstellung zum Leben und mit dem absehbaren Ende von dessen Vernichtung" (*GW* 815). Klages' understanding of the spirit as the metaphysical and historical antagonist ('*Widersacher*') of the soul results in a decidedly negative *metaphysics of history*. The latter prefigures in its turn a radical criticism of modern civilization, based on uncompromising *lebensphilosophische* premises. According to Klages, the deadening agency ("lebentötende Wirksamkeit") of the spirit in its historical development rips and deforms the two poles of life (*Lebenspole*, *GW* 1238), namely body and soul:

> Indem der Geist die Lebenszelle tiefer und tiefer spaltet, verändert sich beides: der Leib und die Seele. Jenes tritt unmittelbar in der Physiognomie der Körper selber hervor und findet einen Ausdruck in der Steigerung der *Technik*, dieses führt unmittelbar zur Veränderung der Gefühle und findet einen Ausdruck im *Hinschwinden von Dichtung und Kunst*. Der Geist selbst endlich, für den es einen Ausdruck nicht gibt, bekundet sich mittelbar in den '*Ideen*'. (*GW* 913; my italics)

Klages depicts the spirit-driven history of civilization as a process of natural decay and destruction of life. Unwillingly revealing the *bildungsbürgerliche* presuppositions of his cultural criticism, he describes technology as a deformation of the body, and considers modern – i.e., urban, industrial – civilization as a state in which art and poetry are destined to disappear[240]. As suggested by the above passage, the damaging effects of the spirit are for Klages both technical-material as well as spiritual ("technische und ... gedankliche", *GW* 914). Spirit's aggression on life in his view manifests itself not only in forms of instrumental rationality (above all technology, but also money and market exchange), but also indirectly ('mittelbar') in modern 'ideas'. Consequently, Klages' criticism of civilization (*Zivilisationskritik*) is a criticism of both technological and intellectual progress, *Technik*- and *Fortschrittskritik* at the same time[241].

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[240] It is therefore only consequent for Klages, as for many other cultural critics of his age (from Georg Simmel to Oswald Spengler), to identify the modern city ("moderne Großstadt", *GW* 913; "Chicagos", ibid. 1224) as the center of life degeneration and most extreme explication of the 'spirit', and to contrast urban modernity to the revered age of Goethe, which he mourns as a cultural time that is forever lost (ibid. 913-4). Differently from other conservative critics of modern culture however – think of Spengler – Klages' Romantic radicalism issues in a *total* refusal of modern civilization basing on uncompromising metaphysical premises. However much radical and seemingly out of touch with reality, Klages' metaphysics also possesses a critical virtue; as Michael Großheim notes, "die Unterscheidung von Seele und Geist im Menschen [ist] insofern wichtig ... als sie eine Kritik des modernen menschenlichen Selbstverständnisses erlaubt" (Großheim 1996, 117). Even Walter Benjamin was surprised at how such a strongly binary metaphysics as that of Klages could disclose new and comprehensive insights (cited in Großheim 1996, 103).

[241] For the post-Romantic tradition of critical discourses on technology and progress in Germany see Sieferle

Klages' "Fundamentalkritik der Moderne" (Großheim 1996, 113) results in a cultural critical construction of daunting proportions, in which not only science and technology, capitalism and materialism, but also Christianity and progressivism are regarded as different facets of the same drive for self-assertion characterizing modern man's attitude towards reality. Spirit, for Klages, cuts through and tears apart the texture of 'cosmic' life, disrupting man's original unity with mother earth (thus the title of his ecological manifesto *Mensch und Erde*). Klages in a way 'hospitalizes' civilization *tout court* (see Bollenbeck 2007, 242), which in his world picture features as a parasite of life, unsettling the original balance between man and the natural environment[242]. Klages' philosophical ideal is clearly one of Romantic contemplation of an in fact highly 'spiritualized' nature[243]. From this evaluative standpoint, all cultural formations of modernity can actually be seen as anthropomorphizing superimpositions on the natural world. This explains Klages' encompassing criticism of the technical-material and cultural-ideological developments that characterize modern civilization, which in his opinion spread its ever-growing, poisonous net over the last remaining uncontaminated forms of life on earth.

The subjugation of the soul by the spirit is not a historical necessity for Klages – as *Zivilisation* is for Spengler, for instance – but rather an unfortunate contingency in the history of human civilization: "Der Geist findet sich nicht … im 'Menschen überhaupt' und seit je, sondern ... in denjenigen Menschengruppen, deren Lebensform früher oder später in den sogenannten Geschichtlichen Prozeß eintrat" (*GW* 1239). According to Klages' historico-philosophical speculations, the development towards an overgrowth of the spirit at the expense of the soul is a quintessentially Western phenomenon. In a manner reminiscent of Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*[244], Klages singles out three ideal stages of cultural development in the history of human civilization: a primitive and pre-historical stage, characterized by man's primordial union with – and 'willing' subjection to – nature; a cultural-historical stage, marked by a prevalence of the soul over the spirit; and a civilized and

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1986.

[242] Just to give an example of Klages' aggressive vocabulary: "Eine Verwüstungsorgie ohnegleichen hat die Menschheit ergriffen, die 'Zivilisation' trägt die Züge entfesselter Mordsucht, und die Fülle der Erde verdorrt vor ihrem giftigen Anhauch" (*MUE* 8).

[243] As Bollenbeck remarks, "Die Wertungsschemata für die Fundamentalablehnung der Moderne bezieht Klages aus der Vorstellung einer ursprünglichen harmonischen Einheit zwischen 'Menschenschöpfung und Erde'" (Bollenbeck 2007, 240). Klages' harmonic ideal therefore made him see the main task of his "Lebensforschung" in the "Rückgewinnung erlebter Zusammenhänge aus dem Maschennetz tausendfältig sie durchquerender Trennungslinien, die das beziehende Urteilsvermögen gezogen [hat]" (cited in Großheim 1996, 114).

[244] As regards the commonalities between Spengler and Klages see Merlio 2000. Implicitly referring to his more renowned contemporary Spengler, Klages once claimed to be the most 'plundered' philosopher of his time.

modern stage, fundamentally compromised by the preeminence of the spirit over the soul. This is the stage of Western civilization since its (documented) historical beginnings:

> Der kulturelle Abschnitt der geschichtlichen Völker ist, seelenkundlich und metaphysisch betrachtet, der Abschnitt der *Lebensabhängigkeit des Geistes*, von dem wir mit Sicherheit nicht angeben können, ob er jemals dem neuerlichen Polwechsel von freilich ganz andrer Art und damit der *Geistesabhängigkeit des Lebens* gewichen wäre ohne das Dasein der *europäischen Menschheit*. Denn, was immer sich außerhalb Europas unter Kulturvölkern der übrigen Erde zugetragen habe … es läßt vor der Berührung mit den Hellenen und Römern nichts erkennen, das auf ein Fortschreiten der Macht des Geistes … zu schließen erlauben würde. 'Der Orient', sagt Bachofen, 'huldigt dem Naturzustand, der Okzident ersetzt ihn durch den geschichtlichen'. Zuerst Südeuropa, später Europa überhaupt ist der Herde jenes Herakleismus, der schließlich in der Gestalt des Judaismus (wofür manche noch sagen: des Christentums) sämtliche Völker der Erde teils ausgetilgt, teils versklavt hat. (*GW* 1240; my italics)

The above passage exemplarily shows the extent of Klages' philosophical construction, by today's standards quite overambitious, in which a pessimistic metaphysics of history and an organicist and *lebensphilosophische* philosophy of culture merge together into an uncompromising criticism of modern Western civilization. The backwash of such harsh criticism of modernity is a cultural critical retrojection of present concerns onto classical antiquity. Klages traces the origin of cultural decay ("Untergang" and "Zerfall", ibid. 1241 and 1244), as far back as Greco-Roman civilization. As a quintessentially Western phenomenon, the destructive development of the spirit begins in particular with the ancient Greeks, as Klages explains in a subchapter of *GW* titled "Rolle der Griechen":

> Indem sie auf der ganzen Erde die ersten sind, die den *Urwald des Mythos* mit den Beilhieben des Geistes rodeten und die Lichtungen schufen, auf denen alle Geisteskämpfe des Abendlandes sich abspielen sollten, sind sie zugleich die ersten, die den *Weg des Unheils* betreten haben, der mit der Ausrottung von Urwäldern überhaupt – im eigentlichen und übertragenen Sinne – seinem Ende naht. (*GW* 850; my italics)

The ancient Greeks are responsible for having begun to clear the 'virgin forest' of myth, which Klages deems to be almost completely eradicated at his time (both in a literal and metaphorical sense, as he remarks in all seriousness). Historico-philosophical reconstruction of antiquity and cultural criticism of the present mingle in this passage in a way that is

somewhat typical of cultural critical discourses in Klages' time (see Bollenbeck 2007 155 ff. and 238 ff.). As is the case with Borchardt, Klages projects modern problems and categories of thought onto Greek antiquity, yet unlike Borchardt, Klages is not able to find a stage or tendency of ancient Greek culture that would serve as a counter-image to present day modernity. As we have seen, the Greeks according to him are rather the origin of the baleful trajectory of Western civilization. He therefore has to dig deeper, in search of a time and culture immemorial, indeed out of reach for present historical knowledge.

For this reason, in the last chapter of *GW* he develops the pseudo-anthropological thought fiction of Pelasgian culture. The indigenous non-Greek population of the Pelasgians – of which little is known up to this day, except that they inhabited Greece before the migration of the Hellenic peoples – serves Klages as an image of a primitive state of culture preceding Western civilization. Through the construct of the Pelasgian people, Klages conjures up a spurious image of archaic Greece that is akin to that of Borchardt in spirit (that is, as far as their common archaistic intention), yet very different from it in its specific figuration. While Borchardt, who was a refined philologist and poet, idealizes archaic Doric culture based on literary documents and philological scholarship, Klages does not bother to bolster his archaistic construction with historical evidence. The Pelasgians are rather an ahistorical figuration, serving as a counter-image to the much-loathed image of modern civilization.

In this sense, Klages' Pelasgians are both an ideal and *archetypal* primitive people, one of the many archaistic and 'Dionysian' figurations of German philosophy from Bachofen and Nietzsche onwards (see Frank 1982). The construct of the Pelasgians in Klages' intention gives graphic evidence to the possibility of a state of consciousness ("Bewußtseinszustand", *GW* 1405) other than the one that has become characteristic of modern man. Klages describes it as a state of empathic feeling with the natural environment ("patisches Bewußtsein", ibid. 1258), able to disclose a reality not of objects and things, but rather of living 'images' ("Wirklichkeit der Bilder", ibid. 1252). Image (*Bild*) is indeed the central notion of Klages' 'aesthetic ontology'[245] (see Moretti 2001, 8). In Klages' philosophy, the term indicates the immaterial point of connection between two 'souls' or, to put it plainly and simply, between a perceiving subject and a living (or 'animated') object.

The fictional thought construct of the Pelasgians serve Klages to illustrate his genuinely animistic theory of images. For Klages, the Pelasgian – i.e., the prototypical primitive man – is caught up in images (he is a "bildgefesselter Mensch"), and thus interiorly

[245] This is to say an ontology that is no longer grounded in a metaphysical system, but rather in aesthetic perception. Aesthetics thus becomes independent in Klages, that is to say no longer anchored – as in the tradition of Baumgarten and Kant – to categories external to sense perception and the faculty of imagination.

connected with the surrounding world, contrary to civilized man ("Kulturmensch"), who is entirely taken up by rational thinking ("begriffgefesslt"), and therefore impaired in his capacity to 'receive' soul images. Modern man is only able to see a 'world of things' ("Welt der Dinge"), populated by abstract functions and relationships, and is therefore bound to overlook the essence of reality, which for Klages literally is of the 'imaginary' kind (*GW* 1257). Pelasgian culture, on the contrary, "beruht auf der Herrschaft des Bilderglaubens über den Glauben an die Wirklichkeit der Dinge" (ibid.); the life-bond spirit ("der lebengefesselte Geist") of the Pelasgians is thus diametrically opposed to the dead, heart- and bloodless ("herzblutarmer", ibid. 1253) spirit of modern civilization.

Klages' Pelasgians are a conscious fiction, a poetic invention serving a theoretical purpose, namely the graphic illustration of his Neo-Romantic philosophy of nature and cultural origins. This primitivist cultural projection avails him to visualize an original state of culture in which the human spirit lived in a sympathetic unity with the natural environment, and was still embedded in an overarching cosmic harmony. Beyond this archaistic projection, however, the Pelasgians also represent an ideal of organic communitarism and cosmic naturalism, which Klages programmatically sets against the cold individualism and intellectualism of modern civilization[246]. Klages provides a metaphysical, indeed religious explanation for his cultural critical comparison. Pelasgian religiosity in Klages' fantasy is diametrically opposed to Judeo-Christian monotheism and its 'rationalist' reduction of the living world to the anthropocentric principle of the one and only God:

> Nicht hervorgegangen ist der *Gott des Ichs* aus der Welt des Lebens, und schon erst recht nicht hat er sie seinerseits hervorgebracht, wie es der jüdische

[246] In his essay on "Weltanschauungsessayistk und Zeitdiagnostik" during the Weimar Republic (in a subchapter significantly entitled "Die Montage des Organischen"), Sloterdijk underlines the 'fictional' character of the archaistic revivals that were common in the *Weltanschauungsliteratur* of Weimar Germany, all of which more or less explicitly grounded on the meta-political ideal of the *organic community*: "Für die meisten Sucher nach neuen 'Ganzheiten', die sich vom 'Atomismus', Individualismus und Pluralismus der liberal-kritizistischen Aufklärungstradition abwandten, gewann der Begriff Organismus eine geradezu magische Attraktivität; wie kein andrer schien er der symptomatischen Sehnsucht nach 'lebendigem Gesamtzusammenhang' entgegenzukommen. Daß sein Gegenbegriff Mechanismus heißt, verrät seine vitalistische und zugleich zivilisations- und maschinenkritische Funktion. Organismus wie Mechanismus sind Ganzheitsbegriffe mit äußerst gegensätzlichen Konnotationen. Dieser impliziert die kalte Totalität eines 'toten' Maschinensystems, in welchem der Teil des Ganzen in purer Funktionalität und Subalternität eingegliedert ist; jener hingegen meint eine warme Ganzheit, die sich 'organisch' durch die innige Teilhabe und Mitlebendigkeit des Einzelnen mit seinem Zusammenhang aus-zeichnet. Soziologisch lebt dieser Gegensatz in dem Begriffspaar 'Gemeinschaft' und 'Gesellschaft', das durch Ferdinand Tönnies zu größter Popularität und durch die gemeinschaftsideologische Komponente der völkischen Bewegung zu politischer Bedeutung geführt wurde" (Sloterdijk1985, 327). From this perspective Klages' cosmic naturalism has to be seen as a form of communitarian philosophy. It is above all the political entailments of Klages' archaistic philosophy that Adorno addresses in his *Odyssey* chapter, as I will show in the following sections of the present chapter.

> Schöpfungsmythos zu behaupten wagt; sondern er ist in sie eingebrochen, hat sich parasitisch niedergelassen, soviel wir sehen ausschließlich im Menschen und beginnt seinen Feldzug gegen die lebendige Wirklichkeit allemal in dem Augenblick, wann ein Volk *sein* natürliches *Schicksal kreislaufartiger Erneuerung* im Strom des Vergehens einzutauschen getrieben ist gegen den linienhaften 'Fortschritt' einer 'Geschichte'. (*GW* 815; my italics)

This passage precisely demonstrates the peculiar mixture of philosophy of history, cultural criticism of modernity and archaistic projections that characterizes Klages' main philosophical work. Following Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity, Klages makes the 'rationalist' principle of Judeo-Christian monotheism responsible for the alleged alienation from nature of European modernity[247]. The above passage also brings to light the political-ideological implications of Klages' philosophy. The assumption of a natural time marked by cyclical repetition, as opposed to the optimistic 19th-century bourgeois belief in linear progress, is in fact a basic ideological tenet of the *Konservative Revolution* of Weimar, where the Nietzschean idea of the 'eternal return' was declined by a number of conservative and right-wing intellectuals in nationalist and *völkische* terms (see Mohler 2005, 48 ff.). Klages' philosophical magnum opus also participates (though only secondarily), in these meta-political and ideological constructions, which more often than not had openly anti-Christian connotations.

From today's perspective, it does not appear as a mere chance that Klages' philosophy reached its peak of popularity in the time around the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 (the final volume of *GW* was published in 1932). Although Klages had no direct connection with the Nazi party, his radical *lebensphilosophische* anti-modernism can be regarded as both an intellectual symptom and a promoter of the spiritual climate in which National Socialism could put down roots and hold sway, given its vague promises of cultural redemption and regeneration[248]. This is how a prominent observer of his time such as Thomas Mann describes

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[247] Klages sets up an anachronistic connection between Christian monotheism and the modern scientific worldview, together with the technical exploitation of natural resources that it produces: "Und da der Mensch sich die Welt stets nach dem Bilde des eigenen Zustands deutet, so glaubt er auch in der Natur ein wüstes *Ringen um Macht* zu sehen, wähnt sich im Recht, wenn er allein im 'Kampf ums Dasein' übrigblieb, malt sich die Welt nach dem Gleichnis einer *großen Maschine*, wo immer die Kolben nur stampfen, die Räder nur schnurren müssen, damit 'Energie' – man sieht nicht zu welchem Ende – umgesetzt werde, und bringt es mit einem geschwätzigen sogenannten *Monismus* fertig, das billionenfältige Leben aller Gestirne umzufälschen und herabzuwerten zum bloßen *Sockel menschlichen Ichs*" (*MUE* 12; my italics).

[248] "Auch wenn seine Ablehnung von Krieg und Technik nicht zum Nationalsozialismus passt, so gibt es doch auch Gemeinsamkeiten, die erklären, warum Klages sich dem NS-Regime andient und warum er von Fraktionen des Regimes durchaus akzeptiert wird: Es sind der Antisemitismus und die Vorliebe für vormoderne Vergemeinschaftungsformen, für Sippe, Stamm, Volkstum und die 'Gemeinschaft des Blutes'" (Bollenbeck 2007, 238-239). For a different opinion on the subject see Falter 2005, 111-112.

the connection between irrationalist philosophy of culture and Nazi ideology in his Berlin speech *Deutsche Ansprache. Ein Appell an die Vernunft* of 1930:

> Der Nationalsozialismus hätte als Massen-Gefühls-Überzeugung nicht die Macht und den Umfang gewinnen können, die er jetzt erwiesen, wenn ihm nicht, der großen Mehrzahl seiner Träger unbewußt *aus geistigen Quellen* ein Sukkurs käme, der, wie alles zeitgeboren Geistige, eine relative Wahrheit, Gesetzlichkeit und logische Notwendigkeit besitzt und davon an die populäre Wirklichkeit der Bewegung abgibt. ... Eine neue Seelenlage der Menschheit, die mit der bürgerlichen und ihren Prinzipien: Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit, Bildung, Optimismus, Fortschrittsglaube, nichts mehr zu schaffen haben sollte, wurde proklamiert und drückte sich künstlerisch im expressionistischen Seelenschrei, philosophisch als Abkehr vom Vernunftglauben, von der zugleich mechanistischen und ideologischen Weltanschauung abgelaufener Jahrzehnte aus, als ein irrationalistischer, dem *Lebensbegriff* in den Mittelpunkt des Denkens stellender Rückschlag, der die allein lebensspendenden Kräfte des Unbewußten, Dynamischen, Dunkelschöpferischen auf den Schild hob, *den Geist* unter dem man schlechthin das Intellektuelle verstand, *als lebensmörderisch* verpönte und gegen ihn das Seelendunkel, das Mütterlich-Chthonische, die heilig gebärerische Unterwelt als *Lebenswahrheit* feierte. (Mann 1990, 876; my italics)

Although Mann does not mention Klages in his speech, the reference to the latter must have been rather clear to the predominantly republican and social-democratic public gathered in the *Berliner Beethovensaal*. The vocabulary that Mann uses – "Lebensbegriff", "Geist", "lebensmörderisch", "Lebenswahrheit" etc. – is quite unambiguous in this sense. As a matter of fact, Klages' irrationalism, his appraisal of archaic origins and creeping anti-Semitism initially found some positive resonance amongst Nazi-minded thinkers. Pretty soon, however, Klages' philosophy was rejected by official Nazi ideologues such as Bäumler and Rosenberg for being "unpolitisch und antitechnisch, passiv und willenlos ... sie gehöre zu jener 'falschen und süßlichen Romantik', der Goebbels eine 'stählerne Romantik' entgegenstellt" (Faser 2003, 111). Klages' radical criticism of rationalism and technical civilization was in truth completely at odds with the needs of a modern state and the imperial aims of Nazi politics. This argument should be enough to prevent hasty associations between his philosophy and Nazi ideology[249].

This said, Klages unquestionably counts as one of the most representative anti-modernist thinkers of his time, who in his quantitatively and qualitatively remarkable philosophical works produced a radical criticism of Western modernity that indirectly served

[249] Georg Lukács made this association in his post-war work *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (1954), where the traced the 'teleological' development of irrationalist thought in Germany from 19th century philosophy to Nazi ideology.

to erode the democratic culture of Weimar Germany, and to intellectually legitimize the anti-liberal habitus that was to undermine the Republic from within. In this regard, Mann's opinion about Klages would not have differed much from that of the members of the Frankfurt *Institut Für Sozialforschung*.

Notwithstanding this judgment, Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin were able to find in Klages' writing strong resonances with their own work. Klages' *GW* gave voice with expressive force and radical coherency to the widespread concern with the downsides of modernization shared by many intellectuals of the time. From a contemporary perspective, it is above all Klages' acute ecological sensibility, his concern with the anthropological and environmental mutations brought about by the process of modernization, that deserves the most attention. Klages' philosophy can be defined as a *fundamental ecological ontology* (much in the sense of Heidegger's fundamental ontology), for its primary concern is man's basic behavioral disposition and mode of interaction with the natural environment. Klages' cultural criticism thus is not merely a programmatic anti-modernism, but also a fundamental(ist) ecological criticism (or ecocriticism) of modern civilization. This perspective makes Klages' philosophical work still relevant today, despite its (at times unbearable) primitivist and archaistic extravaganzas. This is also probably the reason why, immediately after his death in 1956, Habermas characterized Klages' philosophy not as outdated, but rather as ahead of its time[250]. Above all, Klages' eco-critical perspective explains why so many of his contemporaries felt urged to confront themselves with his philosophy. As we have seen, Adorno was no exception in this respect. On the contrary, he devoted greater attention to Klages than one might think at first by searching for the latter's *manifest* presence in Adorno's works. In fact, the criticism of civilization expressed in *DA* has implicit assumptions in common with Klages' *GW*, as I will attempt to demonstrate in the following section of the present chapter.

[250] "Klages entfaltet … eine Fülle von Wahrnehmungen, die nicht für immer hinter dem Schleier einer geistfeindlichen Metaphysik und einer apokalyptischen Geschichtsphilosophie verborgen bleiben sollten; Wahrnehmungen, vor allem anthropologische und sprachphilosophische, die vielleicht unzeitgemäß sind, dann jedoch in Nietzsches Sinn: nicht überholt, sondern allererst einzuholen" (Habermas 1956).

3.2. Unexpected Parallels between *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* and *Dialektik der Aufklärung*: the Criticism of Instrumental Rationality and Modern Civilization

While on the one hand Adorno considers Klages – together with and indeed even more so than Borchardt – to be a foremost representative of the Neo-Romantic and archaistic post-Nietzscheanism of Weimar Germany, which Adorno makes the target of his criticism right at the outset of *GEO* (see *GEO* 38), the conceptual, argumentative and topical similarities between the cultural critical positions exposed in *DA* and *GW* are quite astounding. A few scholars – namely Michael Großheim, Albrecht Wellmer, Axel Honneth and Rolf Wiggershaus – have already pointed to this remarkable intersection. Michal Großheim in particular has convincingly shown the reasons for the intensified reception of Klages by the authors of *DA* in the 30s, motivated by the need to find philosophical alternatives to Marxist materialism for a feasible criticism of civilization at the time of writing their joint work in exile[251]. Surprisingly, the political and ideological differences between Adorno-Horkheimer and Klages do not seem to have impaired such reception:

> Man könnte ... meinen, daß die offensichtliche politische Differenz zu Klages gerade vor dem Hintergrund der Zeiterfahrung ein Hindernis für eine fruchtbare Annäherung sein müßte. Das ist interessanterweise nicht der Fall. Der Grund dafür liegt im Programm einer 'Selbstkritik der Vernunft', das sich in den dreißiger Jahren durchzusetzen beginnt und in dessen Mittelpunkt Horkheimers Problematisierung der instrumentellen Vernunft steht. ... Die durch die historische Entwicklung motivierte Distanzierung vom bisherigen Fixpunkt Rationalität und einem relative unkritischen Vertrauen auf Technik macht also empfänglich für bereits vorliegende Angebote von Vernunft- und Technikkritik. (Großheim 1996, 110)

The reasons for this growing affinity with Klages are easily explained. Both authors of *DA* share with the cosmic philosopher a basic concern with the deformation of life and destruction of nature in technological modernity. Adorno-Horkheimer and Klages therefore similarly produce in their main works a radical criticism of instrumental reason, broadly understood as the principle of technical rationality that characterizes the development of Western

[251] "Der Abschied vom Primat der Ökonomie ... mußte ... für eine Annährung an nicht-materialistisch orientierte Formen der Moderne-Kritik sorgen" (Großheim 1996, 107). See also Jay 1973, 253 ff., Wiggershaus 1986, 366 ff., Dubiel 1978, 87 ff.

civilization in the modern age (roughly from the Age of Enlightenment onwards)[252]. In particular, Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter in *DA* develops a criticism of enlightenment (as instrumental reason) that shows an astonishing degree of similarity with Klages' anti-intellectualist criticism of the rational spirit. Klages' notion of 'spirit' in fact basically corresponds to Adorno-Horkheimer's umbrella term 'enlightenment': both refer to the same conceptual as well as developmental nexus of instrumental rationality and domination of nature. Adorno himself in his *Odyssey* chapter at times uses the term 'Geist' in the same way that Klages does, namely as a synonym for instrumental reason (Adorno's Odysseus is "der Träger des Geistes, der Befehlende", his "List ... der abgelöste, instrumentale Geist", *GEO* 57 and 59, *DA* 74 and 76).

As I have already shown, Klages' anti-modernist philosophy of civilization is based on the assumption that the development of the rational faculty (or 'spirit') in history runs counter to the receptive faculty of man (or 'soul'). According to his metaphysical philosophy of history, in the process of civilization the agency of reason has distanced modern man from his original state of sympathy with the 'cosmic' forces of life. The spirit, once an appendix and subordinate function of the soul, has thereby assumed increasingly artificial (i.e., decadent) forms and become antagonistic to its organic base (life). According to Klages, the result of this process is literally destructive. The spirit cannot truly perceive dynamic reality, but can only impose its abstract constructions, thereby violating life. This incapacity to perceive and respect life determines modern man's unbounded exploitation of nature, the effects of which are the more destructive the more thoroughly modern civilization stretches its net over the globe.

As in Klages' conception, so too in Adorno's allegorical parable of Western civilization are the sympathetic faculty of the soul and the 'animistic' attitude towards the world increasingly repressed in the history of civilization. The latter is described by Adorno in a manner similar to Klages, as a process of disenchantment and consequent *de-animation* of the world. Enlightenment, the principle of modern civilization, basically consists for Adorno

[252] Michael Großheim goes as far as stating: "Die Problematisierung der menschlichen Naturbeherrschung ist einer der Aspekte, die in der *DA* stets als neu empfunden worden sind und der zu einem guten Teil auf Klages' Einfluß zurückgehen dürfte" (Großheim 1996, 122). Also with respect to this point Benjamin functions as a connecting link between Klages and Adorno. In his *Thesen über den Begriff der Geschichte* Benjamin calls into question the 'vulgar' materialism of the German Social Democratic Party. Its exponents would understand progress exclusively in social and material terms, and consider 'work' merely as a process of exploitation of natural resources. They would therefore not be able to see the potential of social regression contained in man's growing univocal domination of nature. Basing on this criticism, Benjamin proposes in his theses on the concept of history a new understanding of the relationship between human progress and technological advancement, no longer based on the claim to nature domination, but rather on the ideal of man's self-control in his relation to nature (see Großheim 1996, 123).

in the eradication of animism: "Das Programm der Aufklärung war die Entzauberung der Welt" (*DA* 19); "Die Entzauberung der Welt ist die Ausrottung des Animismus" (*DA* 21). The extirpation of animism for Adorno-Horkheimer does not simply signify an enlargement of man's cognitive horizon, as implied by the common notion of enlightenment as objective progress. It also marks the beginning of a fateful split between man and nature, 'the spirit and its object' (see Honneth 1984). From this moment on, a gap opens between the two, which will no longer be possible to bridge in the history of civilization ("Die Menschen bezahlen die Vermehrung ihrer Macht mit der Entfremdung von dem, worüber sie die Macht ausüben", *DA* 25). While enlightenment takes away fear from man by disenchanting the world and making it transparent to human understanding, it also prepares the way for its total reification. In other words, by breaking the 'mythical' spell of nature, reason also steals its soul (lat. 'anima', wherefrom 'animism'). From this moment on, all living and non-living entities can be made into disposable objects of manipulation and control, fit to serve human purposes without limits or restraints[253].

The basic arguments of Adorno's criticism of enlightened reason are quite close to those informing Klages' criticism of modern intellectualism. As I have shown, the spirit for him merely serves the purpose of man's self-affirmation at the expenses of natural life. Even Klages' specific terminology and conceptual categories in *GW* are analogous to those used by Adorno in *DA*:

> Was leistet der Verstand an allem, das er sich wirklich zu eigen macht? Man hat es ja oft gesagt: er zähle, wäge, und messe. Was aber geschieht dadurch dem Leben? Eben die – *Entzauberung*! Statt entzaubern können wir auch positivsagen *verdinglichen*. Was aber verdinglicht ist, das läßt sich in die Nähe deutlichster Sichtweise bringen, das kann betastet, umfaßt, *begriffen* werden. (cited in Großheim 1996, 113; my italics)

Klages sees a direct relation – indeed a reciprocal causality – between conceptual and material 'grasp' (*Be-griff* and *Zu-griff*). Abstraction and reification (*Verdinglichung*), de-animation and disenchantment (*Entzauberung*), are for Klages two aspects or moments of the same process

[253] Wolfgang Buschlinger paraphrases the gist of Adorno-Horkheimer's criticism of Enlightenment as follows: "Diese so verstandene Aufklärung wird ... inhaltlich bestimmt als das abendländische Großprojekt der Ent-Seelung der Natur, der Ent-Zweiung von der Natur. Motor dieses Projekts ist die immer stärker werdende Ratio, die Macht über die Natur anstrebt und verleiht, beides aber zum Preise einer tiefreichenden Entmenschlichung. Die Entmenschlichung liegt in der zunehmenden Versachlichung der menschlichen Natur begründet, die ihrerseits in der Versachlichung der Seele gipfelt. Die Seele zur Sache zu machen – genau das ist der 'Geist' der Aufklärung, den Adorno sucht und findet" (Buschlinger 2007, 14).

of intellectualist reduction of the world to human purposes (see Großheim 1996, 113). The intellect abstracts the worldly entities from the natural flow of life, thus isolating and alienating them from their original 'living' context. Instrumental reason superimposes rational fictions on the living reality of things, which is made in its turn into something that can be disposed of and manipulated at will.

Klages opposes to the encroaching disposition of the rational spirit the quintessentially Romantic ideal of a contemplative attitude towards the world. As we have seen, the essence of reality is for Klages one of impressed 'soul' images. His notion of image (*Bild*) does not have an exclusively visual connotation, but rather stands for the irreducible unity of original experience or *Erlebnis* (see Großheim 1996, 114 and Moretti 2001, 30). An image for Klages in fact involves different senses (visual, tactile, auditory etc.), and therefore has to be regarded as a comprehensive soul experience. Ideally, in order to see images and thus experience reality, the subject has to abandon himself to them from the distance, forsaking self-assertion. Reality can only reveal itself to the subject as the 'epiphany of a distance' ("Erscheinung der Ferne", cited in Großheim 1996, 115), which is to say as the atmospheric aura that hangs around the perceived object in the initial moments of perception[254].

In contrast to image perception thus conceived by Klages, the intellectual grasp (*Begreifen*) of the world implies the progressive reduction and eventual elimination of the subject's original distance from the object. The rational spirit disenchants the world (of images) by liquidating its 'distance content': "Die Entzauberung der Welt bestehe[t] in der Tilgung ihres Gehalts an Ferne" (cited in Großheim 1996, 114). The intellectual penetration and enlightenment of aura removes the soul from the perceived entity and transforms it into a mere object of instrumental use. From now on, this object will no longer be able to impress imagination: once disenchanted, it is bound to appear void, face- and meaningless[255].

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[254] As Großheim has shown, Benjamin probably borrowed his term 'aura' in his *Kunstwerk* essay from Klages. According to the latter "die Entzauberung der Welt besteh[t] in der Tilgung ihres Gehalts an Ferne"; similarly, Benjamin defines the aura as "einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne" (cited in Großheim, 1997, 503-4).

[255] A chapter of *Minima Moralia* bearing the title "Kaufmannsladen" echoes Klages' criticism of modern intellectualism. In it Adorno underlines how abstraction deprives the objects of their specific qualities through a process of formalistic equalization: "Die 'Äquivalentform' verunstaltet alle Wahrnehmungen: das, worin nicht mehr das Licht der eigenen Bestimmung als 'Lust an der Sache' leuchtet, verblaßt dem Auge. Die Organe fassen kein Sinnliches isoliert auf, sondern merken der Farbe, dem Ton, der Bewegung an, ob sie für sich da ist oder für ein anderes; sie ermüden an der falschen Vielfalt und tauchen alles in Grau, enttäuscht durch den trugvollen Anspruch der Qualitäten, überhaupt noch da zu sein, während sie nach den *Zwecken der Aneignung* sich richten, ja ihnen weithin ihre Existenz einzig verdanken" (*GS* 4, 259-260; my italics). This is what Adorno calls "Die Entzauberung der Anschauungswelt" (ibid.). As for Klages, so too for Adorno intellectual grasp conflicts with sensual perception, since it tends to obliterate the aura of the perceived object. Both Adorno's and Klages' aestheticist criticism of modern rationalism opposes to this flattening homogenization of the perceivable world the idea of a contemplative intuition ('*Anschauung*'), taking place from a 'security' distance from the object. Here Adorno's (and Benjamin's) *Kulturkritik* is akin to that of Klages (and the George-*Kreis*).

Given these theoretical premises, Klages' archaistic theory of images – illustrated through the pseudo-anthropological fiction of the Pelasgians – can be regarded as a last anachronistic attempt at reanimation of the de-animated, or re-enchantment of the disenchanted world. Klages' work presents itself as a modern animistic philosophy, and as such can be considered the most consequential development of early German Romanticism[256] (one needs only think of Novalis' philosophy of nature). Although he does not formulate it this way, the essential question posed by Klages' philosophy is that of the relationship between intellect and imagination in the historical development of human consciousness, both at the individual and collective level; hence the strict, metaphysically grounded connection between philosophy of consciousness and philosophy of history in his work. The problem – as it has also been recognized by the authors of *DA* – is that of the *de-imagination* of the world (through de-animation and disenchantment), in the process of rational knowledge acquisition and expansion of man's productive capacity[257].

The consequence of this process is for Klages the loss of the subject's capacity for experience, in the failure to be impressed by images of reality. Beyond that, the result of this operational attitude towards the object-world is its leveling and reduction to a singular, anthropocentric and universalizing perspective. The task of reason is thereby restricted to a blind intellectual procedure (Kant's intellect without imagination), which incorporates everything that it sees without truly comprehending it. The enlargement of man's cognitive horizon through instrumental rationality thus not only entails a de-animation and de-mytholigization of the world, but also results in a dangerous intellectual blindness, which merely replaces old myths with new, more powerful and encompassing ones. Such are for Klages the blind trust in technical progress, the exclusive concern with economic growth and material welfare, and the optimistic belief in social-political change. In truth, they all conceal a reality of exploitation of the natural environment as well as the growing desolation of man's own soul.

After this brief summary of Klages' cultural critical philosophy, it should be easy to see the remarkable similarities between *GW* and *DA*. Based on a criticism of instrumental

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[256] In *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* Ernst Bloch defines Klages' work as "die ausgeführteste, die konsequenteste Romantik" (*EDZ* 342).

[257] For Klages an exclusively rational disposition towards the world necessarily ends up *defacing* whatever falls under its horizon. The abstracting and reifying, subsuming and generalizing faculty of the intellect is not able (nor interested) per se to recognize specific differences and individual qualities. This would entail letting the perceived entities speak to and impress the perceiving subject, thus taking away his power of imposition on reality. Due to its exclusively practical preoccupation, instrumental reason on the contrary tends to abolish the singular qualifying 'image' and unique 'aura' (Klages also calls it 'Nimbus') of the entities that it seeks to grasp and intellectually master.

reason as both the principle and motor of Western civilization, Adorno-Horkheimer's work develops a 'monolithic' philosophy of history that resembles Klages' in its seemingly radical negativity[258]. According to Adorno-Horkheimer, human reason progressively 'enlightens' the natural world through history, and so makes it into an object of human intervention and exploitation. The major tendencies of Western philosophy and thought, from ancient myth to modern positivism, are traced back by the two authors to man's will to reduce the world to operational schemes and dispositional formulas for the purposes of its appropriation, use and control (see *DA* 20 ff.). Adorno-Horkheimer's criticism of science as the most developed, indeed epitomic form of instrumental reason in the first chapter of *DA* avails itself of arguments that could come from Klages himself. The former expose the 'spirit' as an instrument of domination of nature, which is degraded by reason to mere matter:

> Der Mann der Wissenschaft kennt die Dinge, insofern er sie machen kann. Dadurch wird ihr An sich Für ihn. In der Verwandlung enthüllt sich das Wesen der Dinge immer als je dasselbe, als Substrat von Herrschaft. ... Es ist die *Identität des Geistes* und ihr Korrelat, die Einheit der Natur, der die Fülle der Qualitäten erliegt. Die disqualifizierte Natur wird zum chaotischen Stoff bloßer Einteilung und das allgewaltige Selbst zum bloßen Haben, zur abstrakten Identität. (*DA* 25-26; my italics)

Though Adorno-Horkheimer's philosophical vocabulary and dialectical argumentation differ (at times substantially) from those of Klages, this passage shows remarkable argumentative similarities with *GW*. The very use of the term spirit (*Geist*) is equivalent to that of Klages. Just like Klages does in *GW*, in *DA* Adorno-Horkheimer expose the rational spirit as an instrument of power over nature: "Der Verstand, der den Aberglauben besiegt, soll über die entzauberte Natur gebieten" (*DA* 20); "Was die Menschen von der Natur lernen wollen, ist, sie anzuwenden, um sie und die Menschen vollends zu beherrschen. Nichts anderes gilt" (ibid.). For Adorno-Horkheimer, this manipulative form of knowledge reduces the living forms of the world to categorial logistics, blunt factualism and brute materialism: "Die Vielheit der Gestalten wird auf Lage und Anordnung, die Geschichte aufs Faktum, die Dinge auf Materie abgezogen" (ibid. 23). As a blind instrument, the intellect knows no boundaries in

[258] In his study on '*Weltanschauungsessayistik*' and '*Zeitdiagnostik*' in Weimar Germany Peter Sloterdijk has shown how the "Haupttendenz der Weimarer Versuche, die 'eigene' Zeit physiognomisch-geschichtsphilosophisch zu deuten" produced a "Neigung, Gegenwart im Sinne eines totalen Historismus als phänomenologische einheitlichen Blockaufzufassen" (Sloterdijk 1985, 318). *DA* participates to this tendency: "Durch sie ['*Dialektik der Aufklärung*' A/N] wirkt, im Guten wie im Schlimmen, das Erbe der Weimarer Krisenreflexion hindurch" (ibid. 339).

its exploitation of life: “Das Wissen, das Macht ist, kennt keine Schranken, weder in der Versklavung der Kreatur noch in der Willfährigkeit gegen die Herren der Welt” (ibid.). Finally, for Adorno-Horkheimer as for Klages, the essence of this power-knowledge – namely a power that grounds itself on knowledge, and a knowledge that is itself a form of power – is technology: “Technik ist das Wesen dieses Wissens” (ibid. 20).

It seems that not only in *GW*, but also in *DA*, instrumental reason is presented as the true historical ‘antagonist’ (*Widersacher*) of the soul, or of man’s sympathetic capacity to get in touch with the natural world. Klages’ cry about modern man’s incapacity to see ‘images’ in *GW* echoes in Adorno-Horkheimer’s lament about the disappearance in enlightened modernity of the primeval mimetic attitude towards reality. Enlightened reason is, for Adorno-Horkheimer and Klages alike, essentially iconoclastic, which also means *hostile to life*, specifically the life that for Klages only pulses and reveals itself in soul images. There are a number of passages, particularly in the first chapter of *DA*, in which its authors seem to look back nostalgically to a magical-animistic stage of culture, when mimetic forms of relation to the world supposedly still prevailed[259]. In such passages, Adorno-Horkheimer avail themselves of motifs and arguments that come close to those of Klages, particularly the latter’s idealization of the Pelasgians’ mimetic-symbolic relation to nature and passive contemplation (*Schau*) of the cosmic forces.

The list of conceptual and argumentative similarities between *DA* and *GW* might easily be continued. These at times astonishing similarities can be explained by the authors’ common concern with ‘life’ and its deformation and destruction by a univocally instrumental attitude towards the world. “Die Spaltung des Lebens in den Geist und seinen Gegenstand” (*DA* 268), which Adorno-Horkheimer identify in *DA* as the primal cause of the destructiveness of modern civilization, finds an echo in Klages’ historico-philosophical narrative about the development of the rational spirit as the antagonist of the soul:

[259] “Die Riten des Schamanen wandten sich an den Wind, den Regen, die Schlange draußen oder den Dämon im Kranken, nicht an Stoffe oder Exemplare. *Es war nicht der eine und identische Geist*, der Magie betrieb; er wechselte gleich den Kultmasken, die den vielen Geistern ähnlich sein sollten. Magie ist blutige Unwahrheit, *aber* in ihr wird Herrschaft noch nicht dadurch verleugnet, daß sie sich, in die reine Wahrheit transformiert, der ihr verfallenen Welt zugrundelegt. Der Zauberer macht sich Dämonen ähnlich; um sie zu erschrecken oder zu besänftigen, gebärdet er sich schreckhaft oder sanft. Wenngleich sein Amt die Wiederholung ist, hat er sich noch nicht wie der Zivilisierte, dem dann die bescheidenen Jagdgründe zum einheitlichen Kosmos, zum Inbegriff aller Beutemöglichkeit zusammenschrumpfen, fürs Ebenbild der unsichtbaren Macht erklärt. Als solches Ebenbild erst erlangt der Mensch die Identität des Selbst, das sich in der Identifizierung mit anderem nicht verlieren kann, sondern sich als undurchdringliche Maske ein für allemal in Besitz nimmt” (*DA* 25-26; my italics).

> Blicken wir auf das, was wir ... den 'Weg des Unheils' genannt, so ist es genauer der Weg vom mythischen Schauen über die *Verpersönlichung* der wirkenden Mächte bis zum nackten Verstandskult (Rationalismus). Am Anfang steht das Symbol und für das davon geleitete Denken der symbolische Name; ihm folgt die Person und für den schon *menschengläubigen Denker* das, was ihm Personheit zunächst vom Nichtpersönlichen scheidet: das Urteilsvermögen oder für ihn der Geist; am Ende stehen ein in sich verfeindetes Doppelgebilde: der zur Selbstherrlichkeit der sogennanten Idee emporgeschraubte Begriff und der nicht minder selbstherrlich sich gebärdende Gegenstand; inmitten aber – den Denkern unbewußt ... der zu wirklicher Selbstherrlichkeit sich vorbereitende *Wille*. (*GW* 851; my italics)

With a cultural critical gesture that is still more radical than that of Adorno-Horkheimer, in his historico-philosophical picture – which is at the same time a miniature story of consciousness – Klages represents the history of civilization as an inexorable development from a state of harmonic cohabitation and sympathetic relation with the natural forces to modern rationalism, which he sees as the ultimate manifestation of man's will of self-assertion at the expense of nature[260]. As I have already mentioned, Klages' *lebensphilosophische Zivilisationskritik* fundamentally relies on Nietzsche's criticism of intellectual anthropocentrism. This explains his idea of the subjectivist 'personalization' of the powers of life ("Verpersönlichung der wirkenden Mächte"), which he sees as a first step towards the total rationalization and creeping destruction of life in modernity[261]. At the last stage of this process, we find in *GW* the same split of life in spirit (or 'ideas') and reified nature (or 'objects') diagnosed by Adorno-Horkheimer in *DA*. Considering these unmistakable similarities, one cannot but agree with Honneth when he affirms:

> La Dialectique de la Raison est ancrée, plus profondément qu'on ne l'eut pensé, dans la tradition d'une critique de la civilisation inspirée par la philosophie de la Vie; comme cette dernière en effet, elle appuie sa reconstruction philosophie de l'histoire sur la conviction que les symptômes de décadence de la civilisation moderne procèdent de la dynamique irrésistible de l'objectivation de la nature par l'homme à des fins utilitaires, c'est-à-dire selon Adorno et Horkheimer d'une 'dissociation de la Vie opposant l'esprit et son objet'. (Honneth 1984, 97)

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[260] In Klages' pseudo-historical and cognitive-theoretical speculations resound a number of common topics of the *Kulturkritik* of Weimar Germany, such as the criticism of intellectualism ("Idee"), materialism ("Gegendstand") individualism and egoism ("Wille"). Such critical topoi are also present in Adorno-Horkheimer's discourse on enlightenment, though in a different modulation and with a different discursive function.

[261] Klages' cultural critical philosophy not only reminds of Nietzsche's criticism of anthropocentrism, but also to a certain extent anticipates Heidegger's criticism of humanism ("menschengläubigen Denker") and the post-modern criticism of logocentrism (see Preußer 1999).

The 'scission' of life into the spirit and its object is indeed the clinical picture furnished by both Adorno-Horkheimer and Klages as cultural critical diagnosis of the diseases of modern civilization. From this perspective, the *Zivilisationskritik* of *DA* appears to be as radical as that expressed in *GW*. As a matter of fact, Adorno-Horkheimer might even have been inspired by Klages at the time of writing *DA* in the early 40s. Under the impression of disastrous global events and destruction of catastrophic dimensions, by this time they had distanced themselves from the Marxist foundations of their critical theory, and relinquished a univocally progressive perspective on history as a course of universal emancipation[262]. These historical developments explain not only the pessimistic tone of Adorno-Horkheimer's masterwork – namely its closeness to a post-Nietzschean, indeed Spenglerian philosophy of history – but also the proximity to Klages' *lebensphilosophische* criticism of modern civilization[263]. Different passages of *DA* unambiguously testify to this increasing approximation of *GW* under the sign of a totalizing *lebensphilosophische Zivilisationskritik*:

> Mit der Verleugnung der Natur im Menschen wird nicht bloß das Telos der auswendigen Naturbeherrschung sondern das Telos des eigenen *Lebens* verwirrt und undurchsichtig. In dem Augenblick, in dem der Mensch das *Bewußtsein seiner selbst als Natur* sich abschneidet, werden alle die Zwecke, für die er sich am Leben erhält, der gesellschaftliche Fortschritt, die Steigerung der materiellen und geistigen Produktivkräfte, ja Bewußtsein selber, nichtig. (*GEO* 55, *DA* 72-3; my italics)

The social, material and cultural attainments of modern civilization become questionable for Adorno when they are no longer supported by an awareness of man's intrinsic bond with and dependence upon nature. As it appears in the above passage, the common premise of both Adorno's and Klages' criticism of civilization is the concern with life in the age of 'total enlightenment' ("Aufklärung ist totalitär", *DA* 22)[264]. The possibility of a direct influence of

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[262] Martin Jay notes how "[p]aradoxically, as the theory became more radical, the Institut found itself decreasingly capable of finding a connection to radical praxis. ... Disillusioned with the Soviet Union, no longer even marginally sanguine about the working classes of the West, appalled by the integrative power of mass culture, the Frankfurt School traveled the last leg of its long march away from orthodox Marxism.

The clearest expression of this change was the Institut's replacement of class conflict, that foundation stone of any truly Marxist theory, with a new motor of history. The focus was now on the larger conflict between man and nature both without and within, a conflict whose origins went back to before capitalism and whose continuation, indeed intensification, appeared likely after capitalism would end" (Jay 1973, 256).

[263] As Großheim notes: "In dieser Perspektive erweist sich die lebensphilosophische Kulturkritik dann ... als ein geistiges Waffenlager, aus dem man sich bedienen kann" (Großheim 1996, 111-112); "Trotz aller soziologisch-materialistischen Kritik ... verdankt die Kritische Theorie (und die *Dialektik der Aufklärung* im besonderen) den Schriften von Klages Wesentliches. Dazu gehört vor allem eine erhebliche Erweiterung des Themenbereichs Herrschaft" (ibid. 126).

[264] Adorno will elaborate on this concern in his *Minima Moralia*, which significantly bears the subtitle

Klages' philosophy on *DA* alone does not explain the basic commonalities of their critical discourse on modern civilization. Both works independently give voice to a common epistemological interest, namely the historical development of human consciousness in relation to nature, and question the change of status of (both human and non-human) life in the process of civilization.

Furthermore, if every cultural critical discourse is more or less explicitly grounded in a philosophy – or at least a philosophical vision – of history, which in turns presupposes a normative anthropology – that is to say an evaluative idea of man as a historical being (see Merlio 2005, 85) – Adorno's philosophy of history and basic anthropology apparently do not differ much from those of Klages[265]. Both Adorno and Klages in fact share an essentially Romantic anthropology, in the broadest sense of the term. Life and nature, mimetic sympathy and contemplation of nature, feeling, soul and sensibility are normative ideals and value presuppositions of both of their philosophical discourses. *GW* and *DA* manifest an equally radical 'aesthetic opposition' (Mattenklott 1970) against the deadening and homogenizing, life-impairing and life-erasing tendencies of instrumental rationality (call it 'enlightenment' or 'spirit') from a *lebensphilosophische* perspective (regardless of whether the latter is declined in dialectical or metaphysical terms). This affinity may be explained through the common philosophical influences of Adorno's and Klages' works, both of which feed on the German tradition of post-Romantic irrationalism from Schopenhauer onwards. From this perspective, Klages' work ought to be considered not so much a unique source of inspiration for *DA*, but rather as a parallel development to the project independently pursued by Adorno and Horkheimer in the latter work[266].

'*Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*'.

[265] Axel Honneth remarks this in his essay on the relationship between *DA* and *GW*: "ces deux théories convergent dans une seule et meme anthropologie" (Honneth 1984, 98). This convergence however is based on a common interest in the status of 'life' in modernity, and not on a subjectivist philosophy of consciousness (*Bewußtseinsphilosophie*) conceiving "la genèse de la personalité – la formation du moi – et l'aliénation psychique intérieure comme un processus dans lequel l'individu est par principe seul avec lui-meme" (ibid. 110). Honneth's opinion follows Habermas' criticism of the philosophy of *DA* for basing on overly subjectivist premises. In truth, as I would like to argue in the present chapter, the difference between *DA* and *GW* is not only ideological, but also theoretical. Odysseus' subjective formation for Adorno is not merely individual – as assumed by Habermas' criticism of *DA* – but also socially predetermined.

[266] Albrecht Wellmer aptly explains this common context of influence: "Nicht nur auf Klages, sondern schon auf Nietzsche, ja auf Schopenhauer zurück geht der Gedanke, daß Begriffe 'ideelle Werkzeuge' sind, zum Zwecke der Zurechtmachung und Beherrschung der Wirklichkeit durch ein Subjekt, das wesentlich als Wille zur Selbsterhaltung gedacht ist. ... Der begrifflich objektivierende, nach dem Gesetz des Nicht-Widerspruchs operierende und systembildende Geist wird schon in seinen Ursprüngen ... zur instrumentellen Vernunft. Dieser instrumentelle Geist, Teil der lebendigen Natur, kann am Ende sogar sich selbst nur noch in Begriffen einer *toten* Natur ausbuchstabieren; als objektivierender ist er von seinen Ursprüngen her selbst*vergessen*, als selbstvergessener verselbständigt er sich zum universellen Verblendungszusammenhang der instrumentellen Vernunft" (Wellmer 1985, 10-11; italics in original). Wellmer has the merit of showing Adorno's and Horkheimer's debt towards Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's aesthetic metaphysics. This influence explains why

The relation between *DA* and *GW*, however, is not limited to the common philosophical tenets, argumentative resonances and conceptual analogies between them. My contention is that their correspondences and convergences can also be explained with a direct *textual influence* of Klages' magnum opus on Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. A comparison between *DA* and *GW* reveals a number of *intertextual connections* between the two works. The reason for this has to be found in Adorno's strategy of tacit confrontation and hidden dialectical appropriation of some important aspects of Klages' work in the *Odyssey* excursus of *DA*. My aim in the present chapter is to show how, as is the case with Borchardt, yet in a still less manifest way, Adorno substantially relies on Klages' *GW* in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*, repeatedly making reference to it in a more or less polemical manner in order to support his own argumentation. From this perspective, Klages' *GW* not only presents noticeable similarities with *DA*, but also literally inhabits the body of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter. Here the references to Klages' work are mostly kept implicit, though they at times emerge on the surface of the text (especially, though not exclusively, in its earlier version).

Adorno's *hidden confrontation* with Klages revolves around the *notion of sacrifice* (*Opfer*). Here, Adorno's and Klages' critical discourses on civilization meet, in order to then separate again (and for good). In the following section, I will thus begin by presenting Klages' ideas about sacrifice, and later show how they are dialectically appropriated by Adorno through a close textual analysis of the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*.

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the authors of *DA* view the rational spirit as quintessentially instrumental. However, the other philosophical sources of Adorno's and Horkheimer's philosophy (think of Hegel and Marx) provide for a decisive correction of this one-sided view of intellectual reason.

3.3. Adorno's Subterranean Confrontation with Ludwig Klages' Theory of Sacrifice in the *Odyssey* chapter of *Dialektik der Aufklärung*

As I argued in the previous chapter, Adorno's work on the *Odyssey* is not just a philosophical dissertation on the concept of enlightenment, but also a polemical text, located within the historico-intellectual context of German anti-modernist cultural criticism during the Weimar Republic. The *Odyssey* serves Adorno not only as an object of allegorical interpretation, apt to illustrate his dialectical philosophy of civilization, but also as a platform of critical confrontation with the conservative-revolutionary and right-wing intelligentsia of Weimar Germany, represented in Adorno's work by the restorative poet Rudolf Borchardt and the archaistic philosopher Ludwig Klages. The confrontation with these two figures plays a fundamental role in Adorno's argumentation in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*.

Adorno does not explicitly manifest his critical intentions towards the two authors in his text. After all, the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* is enveloped in such an array of intellectual discourses and is inhabited by so many contextual references that it would not be right to reduce its significance to a polemical confrontation with the above-mentioned conservative intellectuals. However, Adorno-Horkheimer themselves indirectly hint at the influence of Borchardt and Klages on the argumentation of the *Odyssey* chapter in their 1944 preface to *DA*. In it they explain how their joint work is structured:

> Grob ließe die erste Abhandlung in ihrem kritischen Teil auf zwei Thesen sich bringen: schon der Mythos ist Aufklärung, und: Aufklärung schlägt in Mythologie zurück. Diese Thesen werden in den beiden Exkursen an spezifischen Gegenständen durchgeführt. Der erste verfolgt die Dialektik von Mythos und Aufklärung an der Odyssee, als einem der frühsten repräsentativen Zeugnisse bürgerlich-abendländischer Zivilisation. Im Mittelpunkt stehen die *Begriffe Opfer und Entsagung*, an denen Differenz so gut wie Einheit von mythischer Natur und aufgeklärter Naturbeherrschung sich erweisen. (*DA* 16; my italics)

In this passage, Adorno-Horkheimer anticipate not only the core thesis of their work, but also the way in which this thesis gets expounded in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. As we have seen, the Homeric epic is read by Adorno as an allegory of the dialectic between myth and enlightenment in the historical process of civilization. Significantly, in the preface the authors point to the central concepts that Adorno operates with in the *Odyssey* chapter, namely

'sacrifice' ('*Opfer*') and 'renunciation' ('*Entsagung*'). Both play a fundamental role in Adorno's description of Odysseus as a prototypical civilized bourgeois hero of instrumental rationality. Adorno, who is the author of the *Odyssey* excursus, follows through with the anticipation set up in the foreword. He does so in successive order, first expounding his theory on the dialectic of myth and enlightenment through an allegorical reading of the *Odyssey*, and then proceeding to an interpretation of the figure of Odysseus as a rational and pragmatic self-denier (*Entsagender*), who only as such manages to escape the forces of myth and reach back to his motherland Ithaca[267].

As I have shown in the previous chapter, Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* as an allegory of the dialectic of myth and enlightenment heavily relies on Borchardt's cultural history of Greek poetry. Adorno uses the latter as an opposing foil that allows him to develop his own progressive reading of the *Odyssey* and expose his narrative theory of civilization. In the present chapter, I will attempt to show how Adorno's treatment of the notions of sacrifice and renunciation in relation to Odysseus takes the form of a (mostly) subterranean confrontation with Klages' philosophy, in particular the latter's theory of sacrifice. As is the case with Borchardt, Adorno's confrontation with Klages in the earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter is more revealing than the later one. For this reason, I will concentrate my textual analysis mainly on this text, pointing out differences with the final version whenever relevant. Before going into the details of this confrontation, however, it will be necessary to take into consideration Klages' thesis about sacrifice, in order to understand how Adorno relates to it in the *Odyssey* chapter.

The last chapter of *GW* – the one Adorno mostly refers to and quotes from in his *Odyssey* chapter – is titled "Nachtrag über den Ursinn des Opfers" ('Appendix on the original meaning of sacrifice'). Though presented as an appendix, this chapter is of fundamental importance for understanding Klages' archaistic philosophy. In it he presents his theory of sacrifice, which plays a central role in his pseudo-anthropological fiction of Pelasgian culture. Sacrifice is a pivotal institution of the Pelasgians, as of all primitive cultures: "Es gibt nun eine Tat, die von den Kulten auch des Pelasgertums so wenig zu trennen ist, daß sie vielmehr deren wahrscheinlich *wichtigste Handlung* bildet: die Tat des *Opferns*" (*GW* 1401; my italics). According to Klages, the latter does not primarily have to do with killing and

[267] Adorno concretizes his theory of the historical dialectics of myth and enlightenment through the exposition of the nexus of sacrifice and renunciation that marks the history of civilization. This nexus according to Adorno is already at work in the formation of Odysseus' proto-modern subjectivity. The interplay between theoretical exposition (dialectics of myth and enlightenment) and allegorical interpretation (Odysseus' homecoming as a civilizing enterprise) allows Adorno to (re)narrate the *Odyssey* as a story of man's emancipation from myth through self-sacrifice, renunciation and sublimation.

immolation of living beings (although it certainly involves the latter), but rather brings into focus the spiritual economy of exchange that that every human community necessarily establishes with the surrounding environment. He accordingly defines sacrifice in metaphysical terms as the "Äußerung der Rückgabenpflicht aus dem Gefühl, *Schuldner* des Lebens zu sein" (ibid. 1401). He thus understands sacrificial ritual as a sort of thanksgiving ("Dankeszoll", ibid.) through which men try to repay their (literally) innate debt towards the forces of life ("wirkenden Mächte", ibid. 1404).

This act of thanksgiving constitutes for Klages the ultimate meaning of sacrifice ("Ursinn des Opfergedankens", ibid.), which he duly explores in the last chapter of his work[268]. However, as is typical of his metaphysical philosophizing, rather than providing anthropological or ethnological evidence for his theory of sacrifice, he instead offers idealized speculations. In what follows, I will introduce and break these down to three main theses[269]. First of all, the sacrificial ritual according to Klages involves a fusion of the members of the community with the sacrificial victim through ecstatic participation:

> An erster Stelle setzen wir voraus, daß, wo immer dem Menschopfer noch Urgehalt innewohnt, der Bewußtseinszustand so des Täters als des Erleiders von demjenigen gänzlich abweicht, in welchem wir uns befinden, (so oft wir in den einen oder den anderen uns gedanklich hineinversetzen). Je mehr die Opferhandlung inbezug auf das Opferwesen und zumal auf den Opfermenschen das uns natürliche Mitgefühl garnicht zu kennen scheint, mit umso größerer Bestimmtheit haben wir anzunehmen, daß in irgendeiner Form sich ereigne, was in den Musterfällen seines Sichäußerns auch für uns unverkennbar wird: der Zustand jenes um sich greifenden *Rausches*, der die Schranken des Personseins vorübergehend zerreißt oder auflöst ... [so] verstehen wir oder ahnen wir wenigstens, wie die Tat des Opferns *aufhören könne, Tat zu sein*, indem im Augenblick der Erfüllung der Opfernde mit dem Opfer geheimnisvoll zu *verschmelzen* begnadet wird. (ibid. 1405; my italics)

During the sacrificial performance, Klages assumes an alteration of the state of consciousness of the members of the community, who would fuse together with each other *as well as* with

[268] Klages' idea of sacrifice as a thanksgiving in his view does not only apply to pagan (either primitive or exotic) religions, but also to Christianity: "'Der Gott, den man ißt', dem Christen ebenso vertraut wie dem Heiden, war irgendwann vielleicht überall ein 'Mensch, den man aß'" (*GW* 1402). As a matter of fact for Klages not just any sacrifice, but also human sacrifice is a common element of all primitive cultures: "Menschenopfer war über alle Völker verbreitet"; "Menschenopferbräuche ... fände [man] überall ... gleichgültig, welches Volk, welche Zeit und welche Kulturstufe man herausgreift" (ibid.).

[269] Klages' theses are not particularly original. They were in fact common currency in anthropology and myth studies at his time. Two important sources of Klages' philosophy are the works of James George Frazer (1854-1941) and Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887).

the sacrificial offering in a moment of communal intoxication ('Rausch'). Klages' language betrays the utterly mystical character of his understanding of sacrifice, which he sees as an ecstatic (from '*exstare*': 'being outside of oneself') moment of unconscious self-abandonment to the sacrificial community. The loss of individual consciousness in sacrificial ritual explains Klages' idea of the sacrificial union, in which the sacrificing community and the sacrificed victim become one in the god or demon for which the ritual is performed (see *GW* 1407-8).

This brings us to Klages' second thesis, according to which the thing that is immolated – be it a person, animal or thing – is not significant in itself, but rather stands for the living essence, namely the god or demon to which one sacrifices: "An zweiter Stelle setzen wir voraus: das Darzubringende, wie immer es sachlich benannt werden müsste, sind wesenhaft *Bilder* oder, um mit dem Worte gleich den Kern seines Sinnes zu bieten, *Urbilder*" (*GW* 1405; my italics). The sacrificial victim for Klages is merely an image of that for which it falls. Regardless of the specific immolated object or body in which they take concrete shape, images are what truly counts in sacrificial ritual. As I have shown, according to Klages' aesthetic ontology it is images, rather than things, that constitute reality. For this reason, Klages argues that sacrificial images are not mere representations of an 'essence', but rather correspond to, indeed *are* the demonic essence that they are meant to re-*present*. Klages defines the basic symbolic tenet of sacrifice as follows: "Ein Symbol des zu opfernden Gegenstandes [ist] diesem ohne Einschränkung gleichwertig" (ibid.). The immolated image in Klages' understanding is a true *symbolic presence*, not an arbitrary fetish or sign.

Notwithstanding this tenet, the symbolic choice of the sacrificial image is indeed arbitrary for Klages. Paradoxically (and mystically) enough, though the object-symbol is supposed to be a true presence, according to Klages it makes no difference whether a human being, an animal or a thing is immolated, for the sacrificial 'image' is fundamentally transferable:

> Ist demgegenüber nichts gewisser als dies, daß Symbol und Symbolisiertes zwei Erscheinungsformen des einen und selben Wesens sind, so macht es grundsätzlich keinen Unterschied, ob im Kultbrauch ein Mensch verbrannt wird oder ein menschengestaltiges Bildwerk oder endlich ein echt symbolische 'Zeichen', ob ferne die Köpfung oder Ertränkung oder Zerstückung am Opfernden tatsächlich oder echtsymbolich vollzogen würde (ibid.)

According to this premise, the use of substitutive objects for living creatures in primitive sacrificial rituals is not the token of an incipient humanization of sacrificial practice in

primitive times ("'Milderung der Sitten'", as he polemically remarks), but rather results from the fundamental exchangeability of sacrificial objects:

> Weil die Erscheinung an ihrem dinglichen Träger ebenso wenig haftet wie etwa das Kleid, so erheischt auf der einen Seite die Opferhandlung nicht notwendig tatsächliche Tötung, und so kann auf der andern Seite auch die tatsächliche Tötung von einer Person auf die andre Person, von der Person auf eine Haarlocke ihrer, vom Menschen auf ein Tier und so fort übertragen werden. (ibid. 1407)

In the end, the sacrificial cult seems to be only one instance (however important) of the general 'service to images' that he attributes to primitive cultures ("Opferkult [ist] nur eine Seite des Bilderdienstes", ibid. 1406). This is to say that Klages' theory of sacrifice functions as a kind of corollary to his animistic theory of images and philosophy of the soul. It is through sacrifice that primitive man was able to maintain a balanced economy of spiritual exchange with the surrounding environment. To put it short, sacrifice is for Klages the foremost cultural institution regulating man's harmonic relation with nature.

From these premises follows the third and probably most important of Klages' theses on sacrifice, saying that the immolated being was always already the demonic essence to which one sacrificed, that is to say the beneficiary of the sacrificial ritual: "An dritter Stelle setzen wir voraus ... daß anfänglich immer das Opfer zugleich der Dämon war, dem es geopfert wurde. Opferte man nämlich Urbilder, so opferte man Götter, und opferte man Götter, so brachte man jedesmal *einen Gott sich selber zum Opfer* dar" (ibid. ; my italics). Based on this assumption, Klages defines sacrificial ritual as "einen Vorgang der *Vergottung des Menschen* durch Teilnahme seiner am – Untergange des Gottes" (ibid. 1408). This 'going under' ('*Untergehen*') of the god is for Klages the true meaning ('*Ursinn*') of sacrifice[270].

Klages' theory is not entirely new, but rather relies on contemporary studies in the fields of anthropology and mythology, such as Frazer's famous work *The Golden Bow* (first published 1890; see *GW* 1402). Klages basically appropriates Frazer's understanding of sacrifice as a ritual performance aimed at fostering the seasonal cycles of life and death through the revitalization of the natural divinities. Such revitalization happens through killing: men make sacrifices in order to promote the decay of the revered demon, which 'goes under', i.e., founders in the ritual, only in order to be born again immediately afterwards. The

[270] Klages found this process at work also in Christian religion, "in deren Mittelpunkt ja doch der Opfertod eines Gottes steht" (*GW* 1406). Accordingly Klages compares Christ's crucifixion with the legend of Odin hanging himself on the tree (see *GW* 1414).

sacrificial performance thus aims at the rebirth and rejuvenation of the demon-victim: “Jede Opferung [läuft] zuletzt auf Widergeburt des Opfers und, weil ja das Opfer der Dämon selber ist, auf die Verjüngung des Lebens in ihm hinaus, das sonst dem Altern und Welken und Unmächtigwerden ausgesetzt wäre” (*GW* 1410). This killing of the god happens at the hands of man, though following the seasonal rhythms and laws of nature. Klages for this reason sees sacrifice as a performance of ‘divinization of man’ (“Vergottung des Menschen”): the *symbolic* killing of the god – through the *actual* killing of the victim – represents an act of human self-empowerment through participation in the cosmic forces of life (and death). Man‘s sacrificial action would help life to overcome decay and death, and thus to bloom again: “Man tötete und opferte also, aber man tötete den Tod; man gewann das Leben, aber man gewann es aus der Hand des Todes und um den Preis der Tötung” (ibid. 1411).

The kind of human self-empowerment provided by sacrifice is according to Klages life-enhancing when it follows the ‘natural’ rhythm of life, seconding the cosmic forces of nature. A controlled, visible and concrete sacrifice is essential to the well-being of a healthy culture. Sacrifice on the contrary turns bad as soon as it forgets about this original sense, namely the rejuvenation of natural life, becoming an anthropocentric performance putting man at center stage. The divinization of man that it is always entailed to a certain extent in the sacrificial institution thus becomes a form of anthropocentric hubris, as such fundamentally hostile to life. Unsurprisingly, for this degeneration of sacrifice Klages blames the encroachment of a rational (i.e, pragmatic and utilitarian) attitude upon the sacrificial practice:

> Legen wir den Ton auf die Vergottung, die für den Pelasger freilich besser ‘Dämonisierung’ hieße, so werden wir früher oder später hingelenkt auf eine mit dem Leben schließlich verfeindende Anlage im Vergottungsstreben, die in eben dem Masse zur Entfaltung kommt, als *den Ort der Seele der Geist* einnimmt. *Dämonisierung*, auf die Seele bezogen, bedeutet äußerste Entfesselung des Lebens der Seele und somit des Lebens selbst; Vergottung, auf den Geist bezogen, bedeutet Vergottung der Person; das aber wäre äußerste *Ächtung des Lebens*. (*GW* 1408; my italics)

Klages blames the corrosive agency of the spirit for the perversion of sacrifice. The spirit rips apart man’s original connection with the natural forces and interrupts the rhythm of life, thus initiating a process of cultural corruption. The harmonic unity that for Klages is always strengthened anew through sacrifice is not only natural or ‘cosmic', but also communitarian. Klages understands original sacrifice as a ritual rooted in the close community. The sacrificial

performance is supposed to reinforce both the bond of the community members with each other *and* with cosmic life. Cosmos and community thus have to be regarded as two sides of the same coin in Klages' archaistic philosophy. The cosmic and communitarian aspects of his metaphysics are held together by an understanding of sacrifice as the supreme guarantor and enhancer of the cosmic embedment of the cultural community. The intervention of the spirit into this original nexus of nature and community acts as a separation and isolation of the members of the community from each other, as well as of the community on the whole from its cosmic embedment. This separation causes fear, which men attempt to exorcize through *bloody* sacrificial rituals. According to Klages, the modern understanding of sacrifice as an abomination is only justifiable if applied to late, derivative forms of sacrifice, which in actuality represent a perversion of 'healthy' primitive sacrifice:

> Der Abweg, den das Übermaß blutiger Opfer im Heidentum überhaupt und zumal unter Primitiven zweifelsohne bezeichnet, hätte der Mensch nicht einschlagen können ohne den Geist. Indem dieser die noch völlig in das Leben der Gemeinschaft eingewobenen Seelen zu *isolieren* wenigstens anstrebte, erzeugte er in ihnen zunächst die (wesenhaft unbestimmte) *Angst*, infolge ihrer alsbald die Furcht vor den mystischen Ursachen der Angst, endlich *den Willen*, sich deren zu erwehren durch magische Maßnahmen gegen die – verängstigte Seele selbst! Was irgend am Magismus der Vorzeit als Übermaß sich uns darstellt, ist dem Sinn und der Herkunft nach Abwehrmagie aus beginnender *Lockerung der Zusammenhänge* des Eigenwesens mit dem Kosmos und der davon unabtrennlichen Verfinsterung der wirkenden Mächte. (*GW* 1403-4; my italics)

Klages attributes a double disaggregating agency to the spirit. On the one hand, it alienates the individuals from the sacrificial community; on the other hand, it impels the community to relinquish its felt harmonic unity with the cosmos. The consequence of the isolating force of the spirit is thus the alienation from the cosmic forces of life, which in its turn causes the destruction of community life. This alienation is furthermore responsible for man's fear of nature, which he consequently tries to subject to his will through rationally controlled, truly sanguinary sacrificial practices. The break of the cosmic-communal bond initiates a history of anthropocentric fear and relentless aggression against nature, culminating in the total subjugation of life in the modern era of Western civilization.

As already anticipated, the pivotal point of Adorno's confrontation with Klages in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* is around the concept of sacrifice. In his work, Adorno concretizes his theory on the dialectic of myth and enlightenment through the exposition of the nexus of

renunciation and sacrifice that he sees marking the history of Western civilization. For Adorno, this nexus is already at work in the formation of Odysseus' proto-modern subjectivity. The concept of sacrifice thus holds a central position in Adorno's *Odyssey* reading, and consequently in his philosophy of civilization.

The fact that Adorno's discourse on sacrifice relies on Klages' *GW* has not been paid much attention in the literature on *DA* so far. Michael Großheim is one of the few scholars to have pointed out this connection: "Daß auch der Mythos bereits Aufklärung ist, gehört zu den überraschenden Thesen der 'Dialektik der Aufklärung', die von den Autoren ausgerechnet durch eine subtile Analyse der Opfer-Auffassung von Klages illustriert wird" (Großheim 1996, 121). In what follows, I would like to elaborate on – and indeed further extend – Großheim's thesis, by showing how Klages' understanding of sacrifice not only serves Adorno to 'illustrate' his theory of the entanglement of myth and enlightenment, but rather provides him with crucial conceptual tools for his allegorical interpretation of the *Odyssey* and consideration of Odysseus as a hero of self-sacrifice and renunciation. My contention is that Adorno's criticism of subjective reason and instrumental rationality develops out of a productive *subterranean confrontation* with Klages' theory of sacrifice. In the present section, I will show the terms of this confrontation through a close reading of Adorno's text. This, I hope, will allow me to demonstrate the presence of Klages' theory of sacrifice in Adorno's discourse, and at the same time to underline the fundamental differences in their respective understandings of sacrifice. At the end of this reading, it will be apparent how Klages' notion of sacrifice is incorporated into Adorno's discourse on instrumental rationality, where it is transformed into a criticism of *subjective sacrifice* as the informing moral principle of modern civilization.

As I have shown elsewhere, Adorno (re)narrates the *Odyssey* as a story of man's emancipation from myth through self-repression, self-sacrifice and sublimation (Odysseus for Adorno strives towards a 'sublimated' homeland). This story allows Adorno to expose indirectly, namely by means of allegory, his philosophy of civilization. Klages' notion of sacrifice – along with Freud's notion of renunciation (*Entsagung*) – in a way provides a link between the theoretical and allegorical levels of Adorno's discourse on civilization, as it enables him to concretely illustrate the nexus of sacrifice and instrumental reason in the history of civilization through the figure of Odysseus.

In the previous chapter, I have shown how in *DA*, Odysseus is depicted by Adorno as the prototypical civilized hero and master of instrumental reason, or as an 'enlightened' dominator of nature both within and without himself. Adorno repeatedly underlines the price

that Odysseus pays for this domination: "Odysseus ist eines, das Selbst, das immerzu sich bezwingt und darüber das *Leben versäumt*, das es rettet und bloß noch als Irrfahrt erinnert" (*GEO* 56, *DA* 73; my italics). According to Adorno, the price for self-control and self-domination is the renunciation of life, which is to say of individual satisfaction and personal realization[271]. In other words, Odysseus is depicted by Adorno as a hero of *self-sacrifice*, who as such betrays the life that he saves. Odysseus is in this sense an anti-hero of the 'spirit' (the way Klages understands the word), and as such a *negative hero* of civilization. This negative side of Odysseus has been noticed by many critics, becoming indeed a commonplace in the critical literature on *DA* (see for instance Geyer-Ryan/Lethen 1987). What has gone mostly unheeded so far, however, is that Adorno's negative depiction of Odysseus as a self-sacrificing and life-wasting figure relies on Klages' *lebensphilosophische* criticism of the rationalist individualization and anthropocentrization of sacrifice. Odysseus is for Adorno a foremost example of the 'divinization of the person' ("Vergottung der Person") that Klages sees as the main cause for the perversion of sacrifice, resulting in a contemptuous 'damnation' of life ("äußerste Ächtung des Lebens", *GW* 1408).

Adorno regards Odysseus as a hero of *subjective sacrifice*, which is to say of self-sacrifice for the sake of self-affirmation. Odysseus' preservation of his own subjectivity against the mythical threats of self-dissolution (either through sensual pleasure or physical destruction), is interpreted by Adorno as a *sacrificial ritual* that the hero performs for himself, yet against nature: "Das identisch beharrende *Selbst*, das in der Überwindung des Opfers entspringt, ist unmittelbar doch wieder ein hartes, steinern festgehaltenes *Opferritual*, das der Mensch, indem er dem Naturzusammenhang sein Bewußtsein entgegensetzt, sich selber zelebriert" (*GEO* 54, *DA* 71-72; my italics). The sacrificial self-celebration that Adorno sees at work in Odysseus' struggle for survival corresponds to Klages' idea of the abominable self-divinization of man in 'modern' sacrifice ("Vergottung der Person") by means of subjective reason. The perversion of sacrifice according to Klages takes place as soon as man puts himself at center stage and manipulates the ritual to his own advantage, rather than seconding the sacrificial 'logic' of nature. This is precisely what Odysseus does, according to Adorno. Odysseus disempowers mythical nature by becoming his own sacrificial master, namely priest and victim at the same time: "Odysseus selber fungiert als Opfer und Priester zugleich" (*DA* 68). He thus turns into the absolute protagonist – victim, priest and *god* at the same time – of

[271] Adorno graphically illustrates this on the example of Odysseus' famous encounter with the Cyclops, in which the hero, when asked by the giant for his name, answers 'Nobody': "Die beiden widersprechenden Akte des Odysseus in der Begegnung mit Polyphem, sein Gehorsam gegen den Namen und seine Lossage von ihm, sind doch wiederum das Gleiche. Er bekennt sich zu sich selbst, indem er sich als Niemand verleugnet, er rettet sein Leben, indem er sich verschwinden macht" (*DA* 79).

his own self-sacrificial ritual: “Das Selbst trägt die Züge des vergötzten Opfers: nicht umsonst hat man Odysseus stets wieder, bis zu Thomsons *Studies*, als säkularisierte Gottheit angeschaut” (*GEO* 51). Odysseus disrupts the ‘mythical’ jurisdiction of nature and thus frees himself from the role of victim that the myths impose on him. External sacrifice is thus neutralized by Odysseus, the proto-modern and enlightened subject, yet the same time transformed into *rational subjectivity*. Adorno calls this process “Transformation des Opfers in Subjektivität” (*DA* 74), which is for him the principle, indeed the practical presupposition of all enlightened rationality.

From this *lebensphilosophische* perspective, Odysseus figures in *DA* not only as a positive hero of enlightenment, but also as a *negative hero*, representative of the course of self-sacrifice, self-repression and renunciation that according to Adorno marks the history of civilization from time immemorial. The most radical cultural critical positions of *DA* seem to develop out of a critical appropriation of Klages’ theory of sacrifice:

> Die Herrschaft des Menschen über sich selbst, die sein Selbst begründet, ist virtuell allemal die *Vernichtung des Subjekts*, in dessen Dienst sie geschieht, denn die beherrschte, unterdrückte und durch Selbsterhaltung aufgelöste Substanz ist gar nichts anderes als das *Lebendige*, als dessen Funktion die Leistungen der Selbsterhaltung einzig sich bestimmen, eigentlich gerade das, was erhalten werden soll. Die Widervernunft des Kapitalismus am Ende, dessen Technik, Bedürfnisse zu befriedigen, in ihrer vergegenständlichten, vom Profit determinierten Gestalt die Befriedigung der Bedürfnisse unmöglich macht und zur Ausrottung der Massen treibt, die der kapitalistische Prozeß erst ins Leben gerufen hat – diese Widervernunft ist *prototypisch im Heros ausgebildet*, der dem Opfer sich entzieht, indem er sich opfert. Die Geschichte der Zivilisation ist die *Geschichte solcher Einwanderung des Opfers in den Menschen*. Mit anderen Worten: die Geschichte der Entsagung. (*GEO* 55-56, *DA* 72-3; my italics)

This passage reads like a piece of *lebensphilosophische Zivilisationskritik* that could come from Klages himself[272]. In his attempt to subtract himself from external sacrifice, Odysseus perpetrates self-sacrifice and thus ‘betrays’ his own life. By practicing self-sacrifice, however, the latter also saves and thus confirms himself as a civilized hero. Civilization itself results for Adorno from a ’migration’ of sacrifice into subjectivity (“Einwanderung des Opfers in den Menschen”). Sacrifice thereby becomes ‘abstract’ – i.e., not immediately related to the outer

[272] “Selbstzucht und Willensenergie sind die obersten Werte! Sie können es sein, lautet die Antwort, wenigstens für uns; aber sie werden niemals ohne Einbuße erkauft und bergen nicht geringere Gefahren als ihr Gegenteil. Nur wer sie besitzt und frei über sich verfügen kann, kommt zu großen Taten und mittels ihrer zur Verwirklichung hoher Ziele; aber er prüfe, wieviel Glücksfähigkeiten seinem Können zu Opfer fallen” (cited in Großheim 1996, 118).

world – and therefore more rational and effective, pervasive and totalizing. This process is for Adorno as potentially destructive as it is for Klages, since it is directed against the 'living substance' of man. Adorno's implicit argument in the passage is thus highly ambivalent. The self-sacrifice required of men by the state of civilization is stronger than any sacrificial imposition coming from outside. In this respect, subjective sacrifice is good, for it represents a way – indeed the *only* possible way – to overcome myth in all its forms. However, self-sacrifice is also extremely dangerous, for it contains a life-destructive principle.

Considering the specific points of Adorno's cultural critical arguments in *DA*, Klages' contribution to Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter cannot be overestimated. Adorno's *Zivilisationskritik* revolves around the nexus between sacrifice and civilization, which he exposes with the help of Klages' theory of sacrifice. Certainly there are other prominent sources of Adorno's cultural critical discourse in *DA*, such as the works of Sigmund Freud, Max Weber and Georg Lukács, just to name a few. Their ideas on modern civilization as a state of permanent discontent due to instinctual renunciation (Freud), as an 'iron cage' of rationality determined by self- and world-disenchantment (Weber), and further as a process of relentless reification and self-alienation (Lukács) all flow to varying degrees into the cultural critical philosophy of *DA*. In this work, these diverse intellectual contributions are structured according to a master Marxist-Hegelian scheme of historical development, yet an inverted one, in which the optimistic premises of Hegel's and Marx's philosophies are reversed, thus producing a seemingly pessimistic philosophy of history, which culminates in a radical criticism of civilization as a process of life-destruction.

Particularly with regard to this point, the proximity of *DA* to Klages' *GW* stands out not only in terms of a common symptomatology of the diseases of modern civilization, but also at a deeper philosophical level. Klages' influence on *DA* is considerable even if compared to that of Freud, Weber or Lukács. Albrecht Wellmer has accounted for this striking connection in the following way:

> Was die *Dialektik der Aufklärung* betrifft, so rührt der außerordentliche Charakter dieses Buches nicht nur von seiner literarische verdichteten, gleichsam von Blitzen durchzuckten Prosa her, sondern mehr noch von dem außerordentlich Gewagten des Versuchs, zwei disparate philosophische Traditionslinien miteinander zu verschmelzen: eine, die von Schopenhauer über Nietzsche zu Klages führt, und eine andere di von Hegel über Marx und Max Weber zum frühen Lukács führt. Schon Lukács hatte die Rationalisierungstheorie Webers in die Kritik der politischen Ökonomie integriert; die *DA* ließe sich als Versuch verstehen, auch noch die radikale Zivilisations- und Vernunftkritik L. Klages' marxistisch anzueignen. So werden

> Stufen der Emanzipation vom Naturbann und korrespondierende Stufen der Klassenherrschaft (Marx) zugleich als Stufen der Dialektik von Subjektivierung und Verdinglichung (Klages) aufgefaßt. Hierzu muß die erkenntnistheoretische Trias von Subjekt, Objekt und Begriff in ein Unterdrückungs- und Überwältigungsverhältnis umgedeutet werden, wobei die unterdrückende Instanz – das Subjekt – zugleich zum überwältigten Opfer wird. Die Unterdrückung der inneren Natur mit ihren anarchischen Glücksimpulsen ist der Preis für die Ausbildung eines einheitlichen Selbst, welche um der Selbst-Erhaltung und um der Beherrschung der äußeren Natur willen notwendig war. (Wellmer 1985, 10-11)

Wellmer's remarks aptly bring to the point the role played by different philosophical traditions in the argumentative construction of *DA*, and rightly underline the considerable role that Klages plays within this general economy of influence. The fact that this role has been paid relatively little attention so far is in my opinion the result of a one-sided history of reception, and testifies to the biased approach to *DA* (and the Frankfurt School in general, given the central importance of *DA*) that has been predominant up to the present.

My contention in the current chapter is that Klages' theory of sacrifice enables Adorno to elucidate the fundamental nexus between sacrifice and civilization or, in other words, the significance of self-sacrifice for the formation of modern subjectivity. In his characterization of Odysseus, Adorno basically accepts Klages' criticism of the individualization and anthropocentrization of sacrifice in modernity. Both concepts of Klages' argument are pivotal for Adorno's criticism of instrumental reason. However, this is also the closest point of contact between Adorno's *DA* and Klages' *GW*. Adorno not only appropriates important elements of Klages' philosophy, he also embeds them into *his own* philosophical discourse, where they play an entirely different function than in Klages' *GW*. Adorno's criticism of sacrifice is in fact grounded on theoretical premises and ideological presuppositions that are fundamentally at odds with those of Klages. Whereas the latter generically ascribes the perversion of sacrifice to the intervention of the rational spirit in the sacrificial institution, Adorno's criticism of sacrifice is based on the critical assessment of the *survival* of the sacrificial attitude in the process of civilization, which is to say in present-day modernity.

Upon close look at Adorno's text, it appears that his discourse of civilization develops along a *double register*, combining Klages' *lebensphilosophische* and a Neo-Marxist historical-dialectical perspective. The discursive entwinement of two such disparate philosophical traditions provides for the unorthodox character of Adorno's *Zivilisationskritik* in *DA*. This peculiar combination also explains the fundamental difference in Adorno's treatment of sacrifice with respect to Klages. First of all, Adorno's notion of rational

subjectivity substantially differs from that of Klages. Adorno actually operates with a double notion of 'subject' as well as 'subjectivity': both *lebensphilosophische* and dialectical-materialistic. As is the case with other central notions of *DA* (such as 'myth', 'enlightenment', 'progress' etc.), Adorno uses the term 'subject' essentially as a dialectical concept[273]. On the one hand, the 'subject' is the *living* subject, carrier of the life that for Klages (and Adorno alike) is betrayed in the process of civilization and humiliated by the subjectification of sacrifice. On the other hand, the subject is for Adorno the historically constructed subject, which forms itself through a history of work, toil and effort. In other words, it is a subject that necessarily emerges through historical dialectics of self-sacrifice and emancipation.

For Adorno as for Klages, the subjectification of sacrifice conducive to individual formation is essentially 'rational', the product of subjective reason and its opposition to 'brute' nature. Yet unlike Klages, who contents himself with some scathing remarks on the creeping encroachment of the rational spirit into the sacrificial institution, Adorno furnishes a dialectical-materialist explanation for the historical process of the subjectification of sacrifice. He in a way seeks to 'enlighten' sacrifice by telling the story of its historical development through the example of the fictional subject Odysseus.

As we have seen, Odysseus is depicted in the *Odyssey* chapter as a hero of renunciation, who as such manages to escape the mythical threats that confront him, either in the form of unbounded libido (Circe, Calypso), or physical destruction (Poseidon, Cyclops). In Adorno's (re)narration of the *Odyssey*, the hero continuously sacrifices himself in order not to be sacrificed by the mythical forces that he encounters along on his path. In other words, Odysseus' rational dispositions – entailing self-sacrifice and renunciation of instincts – are for him a *necessity for survival*. Odysseus must constantly overcome himself in order to overcome the mythical jurisdictions that threaten his homecoming. From this perspective, Adorno's *lebensphilosophische* criticism of rationalism mingles in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* with pragmatic praise of Odysseus' highly developed instrumental faculty, which allows him to successfully oppose mythical prehistory and thus prevent the threat of regression (or even destruction) that the latter poses to him.

As I have shown previously, enlightened reason is for Adorno an instrument of power over nature and other men alike. In this sense, it does not differ entirely from older, less sophisticated and more direct forms of coercion. Yet precisely the form and stage of development of this power – more or less technologically, socially and even morally

[273] In his recent study on Adorno's 'poetics of critique' Stephen Helmling shows in detail the dialectical dynamics and transformations that the main concepts used by Adorno undergo in *DA* (see Helmling 2009).

advanced – is of decisive importance for Adorno[274]. It is not power per se that is bad, but rather the power that does not cater to the objective needs of the time and situation in which it is required. See from this perspective, Adorno's explanatory history of self-sacrifice in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* functions as a pragmatic justification of its necessity as a propulsive factor in the process of civilization. Odysseus' transformation of sacrifice into subjectivity, which manifests itself in his cunning, does not result from the hero's power-thirsty inclination, but rather from his will to save his own hide and return home:

> Die *Transformation des Opfers in Subjektivität* findet im Zeichen jener List statt, die am Opfer stets schon Anteil hatte. In der Unwahrheit der List wird der im Opfer gesetzte Betrug zum Element des Charakters, zur Verstümmelung des 'Verschlagenen' selber, dessen Physiognomie von den Schlägen geprägt ward, die er zur Selbsterhaltung gegen sich führte. Es prägt darin das *Verhältnis von Geist und physischer Kraft* sich aus. Der *Träger des Geistes*, der Befehlende, als welcher der listige Odysseus fast stets vorgestellt wird, ist trotz aller Berichte über seine Heldentaten jedenfalls *physisch schwächer* als die Gewalten der Vorzeit, mit denen er ums Leben zu ringen hat. … Niemals kann er den physischen Kampf mit den exotisch fortexistierenden mythischen Gewalten selber aufnehmen. Er muß die *Opferzeremoniale*, in die er immer wieder gerät, als gegeben anerkennen: zu brechen vermag er sie nicht. Statt dessen macht er sie formal zur *Voraussetzung* der eigenen vernünftigen Entscheidung. Diese vollzieht sich stets gleichsam innerhalb des urgeschichtlichen Urteilsspruchs, der der *Opfersituation* zugrundeliegt. (*GEO* 57, *DA* 75; my italics)

As already shown, Odysseus' cunning consists for Adorno in his capacity to initially adjust to the mythical forces that thwart his homecoming, in order to then undermine and finally overthrow them. Adorno thus traces Odysseus' self-sacrificial attitude back to his submission to the established 'sacrificial' practices of the mythical realms that he stumbles into during his Mediterranean journey. In order to overcome these practices, he has to first subscribe to their 'contract', which he then annuls by exploiting the 'legal' breach that is inscribed in it. Odysseus' self-surrender to myth is in truth a rational trick, a function of self-preservation: "Durch Kalkulation des eigenen Einsatzes bewirkt er die Negation der Macht, an welche der Einsatz geschieht. So dingt er sein verfallenes Leben ab" (*GEO* 51, *DA* 68-69). In terms of Adorno's criticism of instrumental rationality, this means that enlightened reason

[274] This is how I interpret Adorno's statement: "Das Wesen der Aufklärung ist die Alternative, deren Unausweichlichkeit die der Herrschaft ist" (*DA* 49). Enlightenment is the inescapable alternative to domination. As such it is an objective *result* of domination, therefore a form of coercion in its turn, yet a better, namely more mediated one than that it consciously opposes itself to. Adorno's idea on enlightenment from this perspective comes close to Foucault's 'structural' notion of power.

acknowledges the physical superiority of nature, yet only in order to emulate and finally command it:

> Gerade vom naturbeherrschenden Geiste wird die Superiorität der Natur im Wettbewerb stets vindiziert. Alle bürgerliche Aufklärung ist sich einig in der Forderung nach Nüchternheit, Tatsachensinn, der rechten Einschätzung von Kräfteverhältnissen. Der Wunsch darf nicht Vater des Gedankens sein. ... Nur die bewußt gehandhabte Anpassung an die Natur bringt diese unter die Gewalt des physisch Schwächeren. (*GEO* 57, *DA* 75)

This is the reason why rational subjectivity for Adorno remains bound to the principle of sacrifice, civilization enslaved to the logics of nature: "Das Selbst trotzt der Auflösung in blinde Natur sich ab, deren Anspruch das Opfer stets wieder anmeldet. Aber es bleibt dabei gerade dem Zusammenhang des Natürlichen verhaftet, Lebendiges, das gegen Lebendiges sich behaupten möchte" (*GEO* 54, *DA* 71). This remark contains in a nutshell the gist of Adorno's criticism of modern subjectivity as the product of a fundamentally instrumental attitude towards the self. At the same time, however, Adorno's remark is evidence for the crucial difference between his and Klages' criticism of civilization. The problem for Adorno is not – as it is for Klages – merely man's alienation from nature in the historical process of civilization, but rather the reinforcement and indeed escalation of the brutal logic of nature through its rationalization in modernity. Civilization does not simply violate nature, but rather radicalizes the violent and destructive tendencies that inhabit nature itself. Translated back into Adorno's epic allegory of enlightenment, this means that Odysseus radicalizes the sacrificial claim of the mythical forces of nature by *internalizing* it:

> In der Einschätzung der Kräfteverhältnisse, welche das Überleben vorweg gleichsam vom Zugeständnis der eigenen Niederlage, virtuell vom Tode abhängig macht, ist in nuce bereits das Prinzip der bürgerlichen Desillusion gelegen, das auswendige Schema für die *Verinnerlichung des Opfers, die Entsagung*. Der Listige überlebt nur um den Preis seines eigenen Traums, den er abdingt, indem er wie die Gewalten draußen sich selbst *entzaubert*. (*GEO* 58, DA76; my italics)

Odysseus' cunning involves 'bourgeois' disillusionment. The latter originates in renunciation, which Adorno defines as a form of introversion of sacrifice. This sacrifice is a libidinal one, in the broadest (i.e., Freudian) sense of the term. Adorno depicts Odysseus – admittedly in a

somewhat pathetic manner – as a self-denier tout court: he not only renounces his instinctual drives, but also his wishful dreams and desires, and thus ultimately forsakes his own life[275]. Odysseus' consequent self-sacrificial attitude results in the 'disenchantment' (*Entzauberung*) of his own self and a reification of his own soul. He becomes a thing for himself, petrifying and thus anticipating his own death even while still alive[276]. Odysseus' impassible countenance – which can actually be observed in many ancient portraits of the hero – represents for Adorno the stony face of civilization, expressing the violence that civilized man perpetrates on himself and others alike in order to be 'master' of the world.

Renunciation (*Entsagung*) is thus regarded by Adorno as the modern form of sacrifice, resulting from its introversion or 'migration' into individual subjectivity ("Einwanderung des Opfers in den Menschen", *GEO* 55). The notion of internalization of sacrifice allows Adorno to bring together Freud's notion of renunciation (and discontent of civilization) with Klages' criticism of the modern subjectification of sacrifice (and intellectualist anthropocentrization of the world). Odysseus, the prototypical modern subject, is for Adorno a hero of renunciation and self-sacrifice at the same time. As such, he is emblematic of the discontent of civilization (Freud) as well as the betrayal of life on account of instrumental rationality (Klages): both cultural critical arguments flow into Adorno's construction of Odysseus as the negative hero of a repressive civilization. Rationalization and disenchantment (Weber) along with reification and alienation (Lukács) are considered by Adorno as different aspects, indeed interrelated effects of the process of self-engineering occurring at the individual level through the rational introversion of sacrifice in the state of civilization.

Adorno's cultural critical diagnosis of modernity's diseases, however, does not result in a complaint about man's alienation from nature in modernity as is the case of Klages, but rather in a criticism of modern civilization on account of its being *still* tied to the 'sacrificial' logic of nature – a position that Klages would reject altogether. This anachronism does not foster, but rather destroys life, because it reflects a nature-bound yet nature-perverting, indeed

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[275] "Er eben kann nie das Ganze haben, er muß immer warten können, Geduld haben, *verzichten*, er darf nicht vom Lotos essen und nicht von den Rindern des heiligen Hyperion, und wenn er durch die Meerenge steuert, muß er den Verlust der Gefährten einkalkulieren, welche Szylla aus dem Schiff reißt. Er windet sich durch, das ist sein Überleben, und aller Ruhm, den er selbst und die andern ihm dabei gewähren, bestätigt bloß, daß die Heroenwürde nur gewonnen wird, indem der Drang zum ganzen, allgemeinen, ungeteilten *Glück* sich demütigt" (*GEO* 58, *DA* 76; my italics).

[276] Referring to a passages of the 20th book of the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus beats his chest, in order to force himself to be patient and wait before taking his revenge against Penelopes' maidservants, Adorno notes: "Der Affekt wird dem Tier gleichgesetzt, das der Mensch unterjocht. ... Das Subjekt, aufgespalten noch und zur Gewalt gegen die Natur in sich gezwungen wie gegen die draußen, 'straft' das Herz, indem es zur Geduld angehalten und ihm, im Vorblick auf die Zeit, die unmittelbare Gegenwart verwehrt wird. Sich an die Brust schlagen ist später zur Geste des Triumphs geworden: der Sieger drückt aus, daß sein Sieg stets einer über die eigene Natur ist. Die Leistung wird vollbracht von der selbsterhaltenden Vernunft. ... Dies neue Selbst erzittert in sich, ein *Ding*, der Körper, nachdem das Herz in ihm gestraft ward" (*GEO* 47, *DA* 65, footnote 5; my italics).

denaturalizing logic of domination. Instrumental reason can emulate and dominate nature only after having made it into a de-animated, dead body:

> Nur die bewußt gehandhabte Anpassung an die Natur bringt diese unter die Gewalt des physisch Schwächeren. Die Ratio, welche die Mimesis verdrängt, ist nicht bloß deren Gegenteil. Sie ist selber Mimesis: die ans Tote. Der subjektive Geist, der die Beseelung der Natur auflöst, bewältigt die entseelte nur, indem er ihre Starrheit imitiert und als animistisch sich selber auflöst. Mimesis tritt in den Dienst der Herrschaft, indem noch der Mensch vorm Menschen zum Anthropomorphismus wird. Das Schema der odysseischen List ist Naturbeherrschung durch solche Angleichung. (*GEO* 57-8, *DA* 75-76)

The process of objectification and subjugation of 'animistic' nature backfires on the subject: Odysseus' disenchantment of mythical nature involves a killing of life both without and within himself. The rational mimesis of lifeless nature entails an obliteration of man's own 'soul': under the cold eye of enlightened reason, even the human subject becomes a sham 'anthropomorphism' for himself[277]. Adorno's dystopian image reads as a negative inversion of man's self-mirroring in nature, as can be exemplarily found in Novalis' magical Romanticism (for instance in his short novels *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*). Adorno's modern subject no longer recognizes itself in living nature, but rather in its dead corpse. Adorno shares this quintessentially Romantic critical perspective with the Neo-Romantic Klages. However, for Adorno the problem is not as it is for Klages merely what men do to nature, but rather what they do to nature *and* themselves, namely their self-forgetfulness with respect to both in the process of civilization[278]. This means that cultural criticism has to consider them jointly, as two sides of the same coin. It is not man's alienation from nature per se, but rather "[der] Augenblick, in dem der Mensch das Bewußtsein seiner selbst als Natur sich abschneidet" (*GEO* 55, *DA* 73) that is the critical point of modern civilization according to Adorno. The catastrophe of modernity resides in man's loss of the memory of being part of nature, separated from yet fundamentally dependent on it.

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[277] "Als Grund des Mythos hat sie [Aufklärung, A/N] seit je den Anthropomorphismus, die Projektion von Subjektivem auf die Natur aufgefaßt. ... Das Übernatürliche, Geister und Dämonen, seien Spiegelbilder der Menschen, die von Natürlichem sich schrecken lassen. Die vielen mythischen Gestalten lassen sich der Aufklärung zufolge alle auf den gleichen Nenner bringen, sie reduzieren sich auf das Subjekt" (*DA* 22-23).

[278] This forgetfulness is both spatially and temporally determined, as Adorno-Horkheimer underline in a note titled *Le prix du progress* in the last section of *DA*: "Der Raum, der uns von anderen trennt, bedeutete für die Erkenntnis dasselbe wie die Zeit zwischen uns und dem Leiden unserer eigenen Vergangenheit; die unüberwindbare Schranke. Die perennierende Herrschaft über die Natur aber, die ... Technik schöpft ihre Kraft aus solcher Verblendung, sie wäre durch Vergessen erst möglich gemacht. ... Alle Verdinglichung ist ein Vergessen" (*DA* 263).

Adorno's 'ecological' criticism in *DA* is as radical as that of Klages in its diagnosis of the diseases of modernity, yet not equally fundamentalist in its conclusions. Adorno notoriously sees the only possible correction of modern man's forgetfulness of being part of nature in a self-reflective act of subjective 'remembrance of nature', a sort of "autoréflexion sous la forme d'une remémoration ou d'une méditation de l'antinomie entre la nature et la Raison dans le sujet lui-meme" (Agard 2005, 158). Significantly, for Adorno this remembering of nature can only happen within the process of civilization itself, through a 'surplus' of enlightenment:

> Durch solches *Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt*, in dessen Vollzug die verkannte Wahrheit aller Kultur beschlossen liegt, ist Aufklärung der Herrschaft überhaupt entgegengesetzt und der Ruf, der Aufklärung Einhalt zu tun, ertönte auch zu Vaninis Zeiten weniger aus Angst vor der exakten Wissenschaft als aus Haß gegen den zuchtlosen Gedanken, der aus dem Banne der Natur heraustritt, indem er als deren eigenes Erzittern vor ihr selbst sich bekennt. (*DA* 57-58; my italics)

I argue that Adorno's (and Horkheimer's) mention of the 'call' to arrest the process of enlightenment ("der Ruf, der Aufklärung Einhalt zu tun") ought to be read as an indirect reference to Klages' archaistic philosophy. The reasons for this reference should be quite evident by now. For Klages, man's remembering of being part of nature (or the 'cosmos') ideally happens through sacrificial ritual. As I have shown, Klages conceives of sacrifice – which is for him always sacrifice to archaic soul images – as the foremost means of connection between primitive cultures and nature. In this sense, Klages' sacrifice is clearly an anti-modernist ideologeme, expressing a claim to the recuperation of sacrifice in modern culture. According to Adorno, on the contrary, no sacrifice to archaic images of the past can be effective in restoring man's inner connection with nature. While Adorno's interpretation of Odysseus as a negative hero of civilization relies on Klages' criticism of the subjectivist and anthropocentric perversion of sacrifice in modernity, the former completely rejects the latter's idealization of archaic sacrifice. For Adorno, there has never been a good sacrifice, which would have been later perverted through a process of anthropocentric rationalization. Instead, sacrifice has *always* been perverse, a form of violence that man perpetrates on himself and nature alike.

3.4. The Explicit Confutation of Ludwig Klages' Theory of Sacrifice: Swindle and Rationality

In the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*, Adorno not only appropriates and embeds Klages' understanding of sacrifice into his critical discourse on civilization. He also confronts himself with it critically, with the intent of exposing its flaws and thus confuting it. Adorno seeks to show how Klages' understanding of the original meaning (*Ursinn*) of sacrifice is fundamentally wrong. Sacrificial practice does not foster man's connection with nature, but rather constitutes a rational swindle that man perpetrates on nature both within and without himself. This swindle is a form of cunning, analogous in spirit, yet less subtle and refined than Odysseus' enlightened cunning. This argument allows Adorno to deconstruct Klages' idealization of original sacrifice, while maintaining the latter's radical criticism of civilization as a state of introverted sacrifice.

Adorno illustrates this argument through his interpretation of Odysseus' encounter with the mythical figures of the *Odyssey*. As I have shown in my previous chapter, Odysseus' instrument of self-affirmation is 'cunning': "Das Organ des Selbst, Abenteuer zu bestehen, sich wegzuwerfen, um sich zu behalten, ist die List. Der Seefahrer Odysseus übervorteilt die Naturgottheiten wie ein zivilisierter Reisender die Wilden, denen er bunte Glasperlen für Elfenbein bietet" (*GEO* 48-49, *DA* 66). Adorno depicts Odysseus as a 'colonial' traveler who, on account of his superior intelligence and civilized slyness, overreaches the 'native' divinities or semi-gods that he encounters on his way to Ithaca, just as colonial conquerors dupe the backward aborigines.

Adorno takes the colonialist metaphor seriously, and develops it through the analysis of a specific instance of Odysseus' cunning, namely his practice of economic exchange: "Nur zuweilen freilich tritt er als Tauschender auf. Dann werden *Gastgeschenke* gegeben und genommen" (*GEO* 49, *DA* 66-67; my italics). As a matter of fact, Odysseus' encounters in the *Odyssey* are often accompanied by some sort of exchange. Whenever Odysseus and his comrades first meet foreign hosts, they either offer or (more frequently) are offered gifts, mostly in the form of food and accommodation[279]. According to Adorno, the most recurrent form of exchange in the *Odyssey* is that of the *present*, both for the guest and for the host (the

[279] Odysseus himself often directly asks his hosts for provisions that might help him along his journey. At times his respectful begging is not successful, as in the Cyclops episode, where his shipmates horribly become the victuals of the monster.

German word "Gastgeschenk" signifies both). The act of presenting in the *Odyssey* fulfils for Adorno a double function:

> Das homerische Gastgeschenk hält die *Mitte zwischen Tausch und Opfer*. Wie eine *Opferhandlung* soll es verwirktes Blut, sei es des Fremdlings, sei es des vom Piraten besiegten Ansässigen abgelten und Versöhnung stiften. Zugleich aber kündigt sich im Gastgeschenk das Prinzip des *Äquivalents* an: der Wirt erhält real oder symbolisch den Gegenwert seiner Leistung, der Gast eine Wegzehrung, die ihn grundsätzlich dazu befähigen soll, nach Hause zu gelangen. Wenn der Wirt auch dafür kein unmittelbares Entgelt empfängt, so kann er doch damit rechnen, daß er selber oder seine Anverwandten einmal ebenso aufgenommen werden: *als Opfer an Elementargottheiten* ist das Gastgeschenk zugleich eine rudimentäre Versicherung vor ihnen. (*GEO* 49, *DA* 67; my italics)

Adorno defines the exchange of presents between guests and hosts as a 'middle' form, an intermediate step (both conceptually and historically) between the archaic institution and immediate brutality of sacrifice and modern market exchange, along with the subtle, mediated inequality that goes with it. The discursive implication of this doubly anachronistic argument is that primitive sacrifice and market exchange are *two sides of the same coin, or rather* two stages of the same process[280]. Adorno understands both sacrifice and exchange as different yet related forms of interaction both within the community and between the community and nature (typically in the medium of 'natural' divinities). With this surreptitious argument, Adorno achieves a double effect. On the one hand, he points out the sacrificial component of modern market exchange. On the other hand – and even more importantly for the present

[280] Adorno's sentence suggests in truth a further implication, namely that there are two sides to the ritual present: a godly and a human one. The present on the one hand addresses the gods and seeks to ingratiate them; on the other hand it is a form of inter-subjective interaction that secures men from the gods. Adorno does not ascribe the sacrificial aspect of the present to the first, the economical aspect of it to the second order of relation. Both aspects (sacrifice and market exchange) are in fact present in both forms of relations (of men with gods and of men between themselves alike). For Adorno the principle of equivalence presides in general over the economy of exchange that Odysseus establishes with men and gods alike. Adorno accounts for this as usual in materialistic and pragmatic terms: "Die ausgebreitete, doch gefahrvolle Schiffahrt des frühen Griechentums bietet dafür die pragmatische Voraussetzung. Poseidon selber, der elementare Feind des Odysseus, denkt in Äquivalenzbegriffen, indem er immer wieder Beschwerde darüber führt, daß jener auf den Stationen seiner Irrfahrt mehr an Gastgeschenken erhalte, als sein voller Anteil an der Beute von Troja gewesen wäre, wenn er ihn ohne Behinderung durch Poseidon hätte transferieren können. Solche Rationalisierung aber läßt sich bei Homer bis auf die eigentlichen *Opferhandlungen* zurückverfolgen. Es wird für Hekatomben bestimmter Größenordnung je mit dem Wohlwollen der Gottheit gerechnet" (*DA* 49; my italics). Adorno's typical enlightenment argument (think of Feuerbach) brings the gods down to earth so to say, in so far as it ascribes to them a mode of thinking in equivalents that is typical for humans and their interaction through commercial exchange. The latter on the other hand is associated by Adorno with a mode of sacrificial thinking and acting – both ritualistic and symbolic – that modern culture deems to be backward and barbaric.

discussion – he manages to demystify Klages' mystics of primitive sacrifice by inscribing it with an economic motive and practical interest:

> Ist der Tausch die Säkularisierung des Opfers, so erscheint dieses selber schon wie das magische Schema rationalen Tauschs, *eine Veranstaltung der Menschen*, die Götter zu beherrschen, die gestürzt werden gerade durch das System der ihnen widerfahrenden Ehrung. (*GEO* 49, *DA* 67; my italics)

While Adorno's definition of market exchange as secularization of sacrifice is hardly surprising, as it fits into his Marxist critique of political economy, his interpretation of sacrifice as a form of primitive exchange in the passage is quite unexpected, and in my opinion should be read as a polemical reference to Klages' magical theory of sacrifice. This becomes clear in the continuation of the passage, in which Adorno gives a lengthy quote from Klages' *GW*:

> Den Zusammenhang von Opfer und Tausch hat (gegen Nietzsches materialistische Interpretation) Klages ganz magisch aufgefaßt: 'Das Opfernmüssen schlechthin betrifft einen jeden, weil jeder, wie wir gesehen haben, vom Leben und allen Gütern des Lebens den ihm unfaßbaren Anteil – das ursprüngliche suum cuique – nur dadurch empfängt, daß er beständig gibt und wiedergibt. Es ist aber jetzt nicht vom Tauschen im Sinne des gewöhnlichen Gütertausches die Rede (der freilich uranfänglich gleichfalls vom Opfergedanken die Weihe erhielt), sondern vom Austausch der Fluiden oder Essenzen durch Hingebung der Eigenseele an das tragende und nährende Leben der Welt' (*GEO* 49-50, *DA* 76, footnote 6)[281]

In a manner that is typical of his dialectical procedure, Adorno here makes a double argumentative move. On the one hand, he subtly suggests his commonality with Klages regarding the recognition of the genetic link and conceptual nexus of sacrifice and exchange ("der freilich ... erhielt"). On the other hand, however, it is precisely the recognition of this link that – at least in Adorno's implicit self-explanatory argument – grounds his materialistic and utilitarian interpretation of sacrifice, which he opposes to Klages' mystical-metaphysical understanding (testified by his use of vocabulary: "Fluiden", "Essenzen", "Eigenseele", "Leben der Welt"). In other words, Adorno follows Klages in tracing the act of exchange back to sacrifice, of which the former would be a secularized form. At the same time, however, Adorno subtly inverts Klages' straightforward genealogical argument, according to which

[281] Interestingly, this passage has been removed from the main text and transferred into a footnote in the final version of the *Odyssey* chapter.

sacrifice would be an original and as such healthy form of exchange between man and the natural environment; he does so by showing that primitive sacrifice itself is a form of 'rational' exchange aimed at duping and controlling nature, i.e., the natural deities that represent it. Adorno's inversion of Klages' linear genetic argument amounts to a reversion or *subversion* of the latter's naive understanding of sacrifice.

As it is the case with Borchardt, in the process of confutation of Klages Adorno speaks *both with and against him*. He does so by first appropriating and then turning Klages' arguments against him. The common strategy that Adorno puts to work against both Borchardt and Klages is suggested by Adorno himself in a passage of *GEO* in which he attributes to the restorative poet positions that are rather those of Klages: "Keineswegs aber stehen Betrug, List und Rationalität in einfachem Gegensatz zur Archaik des Opfers, wie es etwa im Sinn der Borchardtschen Theorie gelegen wäre" (*GEO* 51, *DA* 69)[282]. Just as Borchardt idealizes an original state of culture that would not yet be contaminated by the developments of Greek colonial civilization, Klages idealizes a primitive stage of culture in which sacrifice would be an integral part of a community living in harmony with the cosmos. For Adorno, on the contrary, it is not only the most advanced forms of market exchange based on abstract forms of rationality (as shown by Marx, Lukács and Simmel) that constitute a subtle, refined swindle perpetrated on man and nature alike; rather, the gist of *all sacrifice is swindle*, namely the fooling of the figure for which the sacrificial ritual is performed:

> Alle menschlichen Opferhandlungen, planmäßig betrieben, *betrügen den Gott*, dem sie gelten: sie unterstellen ihn dem Primat der menschlichen Zwecke, lösen seine Macht auf, und der Betrug an ihm geht bruchlos über in den, welchen die ungläubigen Priester an der gläubigen Gemeinde vollführen. ... *List entspringt im Kultus*. (*GEO* 50-51, *DA* 68; my italics)

Adorno exposes sacrifice – all forms of sacrifice, and not only its later, decadent forms, as Klages would have it – as a human, all too human cunning disposition, aimed at duping the divine figures to which it is addressed as well as the community of believers. By so doing Adorno, not only exposes Klages' notion of sacrifice as inadequate; more importantly, he also inscribes cunning – for Adorno the gist of instrumental rationality – into primitive sacrifice. He thus demonstrates how the very metaphysical principle that Klages had so forcefully opposed to the sacredness of life, namely the rational 'spirit', in fact lies at the core of the

[282] The sentence is present in both the earlier and later version of the *Odyssey* chapter, though the reference to Borchardt has significantly been expunged in the latter.

sacrificial institution. Adorno indeed goes so far as to state – with unmistakable polemical intention towards Klages – that cunning itself originates in cult ("List entspringt im Kultus", *GEO* 51, *DA* 68). Remarkable in Adorno's dialectical procedure with respect to Klages is that he confutes the latter's arguments by using his critical-genealogical – broadly speaking Nietzschean – tools to judge from the same value standpoint, namely that of 'life'. Adorno appropriates the core argument of Klages' criticism of sacrifice and reverses it against him. The result is a subtle deconstruction of Klages' idealization of primitive sacrifice, which is undermined from within by Adorno's critical appropriation of the former's arguments.

This deconstruction happens on two levels: the theoretical and the ideological. On a theoretical level, Adorno seeks to counter Klages' naturalistic and communitarian understanding of sacrifice as a cultic performance fostering man's sense of unity both with his community and with nature. As I have shown, he does so by arguing that sacrifice is a form of swindle, or violent self-assertion perpetrated simultaneously at the expense of nature and the community. Remarkably, the specific argument that Adorno uses to confute Klages' theory of sacrifice comes directly from *GW*. According to Adorno, the divinization of man that Klages sees as a late, decadent development of the sacrificial institution – and thus as a perversion of the original nature-worship – is always already inscribed in the sacrificial practice:

> Uralt muß die Erfahrung sein, daß die symbolische Kommunikation mit der Gottheit durchs Opfer nicht real ist: wenn Klages als Schwelle der Unwahrheit des Opfers die *Vergottung der Person* betrachtet, die an Stelle der Epiphanie der mythischen Wesenheit im Opfer treten soll, so vergißt er zuzugestehen, daß im Begriff der magischen Stellvertretung, den er bejaht, selber schon die Auserwähltheit des Ich gelegen ist, die er verwirft. Auserwähltheit aber ist die priesterliche Projektion dessen, an dem die Untat verübt wird, auf den Götterhimmel. (*GEO* 51, see also *DA* 69; my italics)

The self-centering of man in the sacrificial ritual represents for Klages a betrayal of the original meaning (*Ursinn*) of this practice, rooted in a sympathetic relation with the impersonal forces of life. Sacrifice thereby becomes a swindle perpetrated on the natural divinities, a form of impious superstition, slyly disguising the human will to self-assertion against nature[283]. Adorno shares Klages' criticism of 'irreligious' sacrifice – yet he turns it

[283] Klages has a similar argument in *GW*, which Adorno quotes in support of his thesis: "Es ist nicht mehr heidnischer Glaube allein, es ist auch schon heidnischer Aberglaube, wenn etwa bei der Thronbesteigung der Gottkönig schwören muß, er werde hinfort die Sonne scheinen und das Feld sich mit Früchten bedecken lassen" (*GW* 1408; *GEO* 50, *DA* 67, footnote 6).

against Klages himself by pointing out that man's hubristic self-empowerment is not merely a deviation, but rather the original motive of all sacrifice[284]. For Adorno, in fact, the principle of symbolic substitution (Klages' "magische[...] Stellvertretung", ibid.) in the sacrificial performance necessarily entails the *choice* of a surrogate sacrificial victim standing for the demonic essence that, according to Klages, is 'actually' sacrificed in the ritual. This choice is not the manifestation of a pious compliance with nature, as Klages would have it, but rather the result of a rational disposition determined by a specific will and interests[285]. For Adorno, there is always a tangible strategy behind the sacrificial institution, grounded on the election of a human subject ("Auserwähltheit des Ich") – either the priest or the victim, usually both at the same time – as the center and protagonist of the ritual[286].

In other words, it is always a concrete social subject, a self-appointed individual or group that determines who represents what in the sacrificial performance. The terms and conditions of symbolic representation in the sacrificial institution are for Adorno the result of a social disposition aimed at channeling communitarian violence through the creation of an arbitrary (and therefore 'irrational') opposition between the sacrificial collective and singular victimized individuals. The apparent fulfillment of the claims of nature in archaic sacrifice as Klages understand it is in truth according to Adorno a form of substitutional violence, which

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[284] Adorno criticizes Klages in the passage for not being able of seeing the intrinsic contradictoriness of the institution of sacrifice, and in general of all forms of positive religion. Yet his criticism in the passage – significantly expunged from the final version of the chapter – is rather mild: Klages merely neglects to admit ("Vergisst er zuzugestehen") the whole truth about sacrifice. It is a deplorable, yet not all too culpable omission. Adorno seems to almost justify Klages' flaws, thus in a way paying the latter an intellectual debt of gratitude for the insights on sacrifice that he has provided Adorno with.

[285] In other words, sacrifice always entails a willful self-election of the I ("Auserwähltheit des Ich") as the center – both priest and victim – of the sacrifice. This consideration bears some relevance for Adorno's understanding of Neo-Romantic poetic symbolism, as represented in particular by the priest-poet Stefan George. In his essay on the epistolary exchange between George and Hofmannstahl Adorno seeks to expose (amongst other things) the 'sacrificial' entailments of the former's poetry. Hofmannstahl himself according to Adorno would have suggested the connection between symbolism and sacrifice in his poetological fiction 'Georgedialog', in which he "sucht das ästhetische Symbol als Opferritual zu fassen" (*GS* 10.1, 233). Adorno underlines how Hoffmanstahl's 'Platonic' dialogue on poetry proposes a "blutrünstige Theorie des Symbols, welche die finsteren politischen Möglichkeiten der Neuromantik einbegreift" (ibid. 234). George, who is depicted by Hofmannstahl in his dialogue as the new poet of 'sacrificial' symbolism, is considered by Adorno as a someone who anticipates important aspects of Fascist culture. Furthermore, Adorno must have known that the 'divinization of the person' ("Vergottung der Person") entailed in sacrificial ritual had been the reason for the split between the former friends Klages e George. Klages had written a first admiring poetic biography of George (published 1902), and then separated himself from the latter due to the fundamental incompatibility of their personalities and world visions. The pseudo-religious character and ritual practices of the George-*Kreis* – all centered on the figure of the poet-priest-master George – must have heavily contributed to this split (see Breuer 1995 and Moretti 2001).

[286] Also according to Klages priest, victim and god are also fundamentally the same 'person'. However Klages veils the substitutional exchange of procedure in a mystic halo, and does not take into consideration the social entailments of the sacrificial procedure: "Es ist eine bequeme und für den, der Beschied weiß, auch unverfängliche Redewiese, wenn es etwa heißt, der pessinuntische Priester, der alljährlich dem Attis geopfert wurde, sein ein 'Stellvertreter' des Gottes gewesen; aber man muß sich hüten ... an ein Wesen ... zu denken... Der Priester war die Erscheinung (Epiphanie) des Attis selbst an ebendem Feste und in ebendem Augenblick, wo er – ein Opfer – fiel: der Attis dem Attis. Das enthüllt uns auf neue Weise, was überhaupt im Opferkult das 'anstelle' bedeutet und welche Folgen es haben kann, die uns verwunderlich dünken" (*GW* 1407).

is to say a scapegoating perpetrated on arbitrarily chosen victims[287]. In the final version of the *Odyssey* chapter, Adorno stresses this point with more emphasis than in the earlier version:

> Die im Opfer gelegene Stellvertretung, verherrlicht von neumodischen Irrationalisten, ist nicht zu trennen von der Vergottung des Geopferten, dem Trug der priesterlichen Rationalisierung des Mordes durch Apotheose des Erwählten ... solange Einzelne geopfert werden, solange das Opfer den Gegensatz von Kollektiv und Individuum einbegreift – und *kein überliefertes Opfer* führt hinter diesen Gegensatz zurück –, solange ist objektiv, sei‘s mit sei‘s ohne Bewußtsein der Priesterkaste der Betrug am Opfer mitgesetzt. (*DA* 69, see also *GEO* 51; my italics)

Here, sacrifice is not resolved in a simple univocal relationship between man and nature, community and cosmos, as is the case with Klages. Even when it portends to be a ‘natural’ fact, sacrifice is always socially mediated. Adorno considers sacrifice primarily as an institution regulating the economy of violence and the distribution of power and goods within the primitive community[288]. As such, this institution is characteristic of archaic times of penury and material necessity, as Adorno explains through the following historical-anthropological narrative:

> Die Theorie des Opfers, wie die Neo-Mythologen sie vertreten, bezieht es auf die Vorstellung des Kollektivleibs, des Stammes, in den das vergossene Blut des Stammesmitglieds als Kraft zurückströmen soll. Während *der heute beschworene Totemismus* schon zu seiner Zeit *Ideologie* war, markiert er doch einen realen Zustand, wo die herrschende Vernunft der Opfer bedurfte. Es ist ein *Zustand archaischen Mangels*, in dem Menschenopfer und Kannibalismus kaum sich scheiden lassen. Das numerisch angewachsene Kollektiv kann zuzeiten sich am Leben erhalten nur durch den Genuß von Menschenfleisch, oder wahrscheinlicher:

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[287] Adorno’s Klages critique seems to anticipate in many points the work of French literary scholar and anthropologist René Girard, who in opposition to the anthropological tradition of Frazer (and in the tradition of Durkheim) denies that sacrifice primarily has to do with nature, and conceives of it instead as a institution aimed at regulating social conflict in order to prevent socially destructive outbreaks of violence. In this sense sacrifice for Girard is a primitive form of society’s self-protection, originating in the ‘scapegoat mechanism’, which he sees as a grounding element of human life in society, indeed as the ‘origin’ of culture. Religion according to Girard controls the violence that emerges out of a ‘mimetic rivalry’, thus in a way domesticating and at the same time further producing it. Christian religion however would represent a break, in the history of Western civilization, with the scapegoat mechanism and the external sacrificial practices that are characteristic of many pagan religions. As a matter of fact, Girard’s theoretical polemics against Nietzschean philosophy and ‘Heideggerian’ post-modernism resembles in many respects Adorno’s critical confrontation with the post-Nietzschean Klages. For the complex of sacrifice and scapegoating in Girard see *La Violence et le sacré* (1972) and *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (1978); for the difference that the latter sees between pagan and Christian religion see *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (1999).

[288] Adorno’s social – rather than physical or natural – explanation of myth and ritual reminds the work of the prominent 20th century anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (see Segal 2004, 126 ff.).

> die Lust der historisch erstarkten Herrschenden war in einer Weise dem Kannibalismus verbunden, von der nur der Ekel vorm Menschenfleisch heute, das größte aller Tabus, Zeugnis ablegt. Gebräuche aus späterer Zeit wie der des ver sacrum, wo in Zeiten des Hungers ein ganzer Jahrgang von Jünglingen unter rituellen Veranstaltungen zur Auswanderung gezwungen wird, bewahren deutlich genug die Züge solcher *barbarischen und verklärten Rationalität*. Längst vor Ausbildung der mythischen Volksreligionen muß sie als *illusorisch* sich enthüllt haben: wie die systematische Jagd dem Stamm genug Tiere zutrieb, um das Verzehren der Stammesmitglieder überflüssig zu machen, müssen die gewitzigten Jäger und Fallensteller irre geworden sein am Gebot der Medizinmänner, jene müßten sich verspeisen lassen, zumal der Genuß von Menschenfleisch stets fast *Privilegierten* und *ihren Rackets* vorbehalten war. (*GEO* 52-3, see also *DA* 70; my italics)

This passage provides an example of Adorno's dialectical mode of argumentation. On the one hand, he 'justifies' sacrifice as a necessary institution in primitive times, where it was determined by a state of material necessity and penury. Immediately afterwards, however, he underlines that even then, sacrifice was not truly a 'rational' (i.e., 'general') disposition, as it only functioned to the advantage of a restricted, privileged group of people, and not for the benefit of the whole starving community[289]. Adorno's dialectical reversal of his own argument is in actuality tacitly addressed to Klages. While Adorno grants the latter an insightful understanding of the barbaric rationality of sacrifice, he exposes his notion of original sacrifice as an idealizing, romanticizing transfiguration of this barbaric practice[290]. In the above passage, Adorno provides a materialistic and sociological confutation of Klages' magic and collective theory of sacrifice. According to Adorno, Klages obliterates the coefficient of social violence and domination involved in the sacrificial institution; Klages' transfiguration of original sacrifice as a form of communication with nature is a trivializing mitigation, and as such a form of ideological rationalization of barbarism:

> Die magisch kollektive Interpretation des Opfers, die dessen Rationalität ganz verleugnet, ist seine *Rationalisierung*; die geradlinig aufgeklärte Annahme aber, es könne, was heute Ideologie sei, einmal die Wahrheit gewesen sein, zu harmlos: *die neuesten Ideologien sind nur Reprisen der ältesten*, die hinter die vorher bekannten

[289] Adorno supports this argument by quoting form the work of Finnish sociologist and anthropologist Eduard Westermarck *Ursprung und Entwicklung der Moralbegriffe* (1909-1913): "Bei kannibalischen Völkern wie denen Westafrikas durften 'weder Weiber noch Jünglinge ... von der Delikatesse genießen'" (*GEO* 53, *DA* 71, footnote 9).

[290] Here an example of Klages' mystical transfiguration of sacrifice: "Der Opfernde lebt in der Gabe, die er opfert, wie er in seinem Leibe lebt, oder zum mindesten: er wird eines mit ihr im Augenblicke des Opferns danke der Steigerung des Eros durch das Sichtrennenmüssen. Und die Gabe wird zur heiligen Gabe, ja zum Bilde des Göttlichen selbst und seines ewigen Untergehens durch den Anheimfall an die entmischenden Elementargewalten" (*GW* 1409).

> um ebensoviel zurückgreifen, wie die Entwicklung der Klassengesellschaft die zuvor sanktionierten Ideologien Lügen straft. (*GEO* 53-4, *DA* 70-71; my italics)

For Adorno, Klages' rationalization of sacrifice is 'ideological' in a twofold sense. Firstly, it is mystifying, since it conceals the bloodthirsty reality of sacrifice as a violent institution regulating social domination. Secondly, it is anachronistic, because it goes against the *historical tendency* of modern civilization, which for Adorno heads towards the abolition of external sacrifice[291]. Though Adorno declines his theoretical argument in Marxist terms ("Entwicklung der Klassengesellschaft"), the gist of his progressive plea for civilization remains unaltered. 's ideology critical argumentation would not change significantly if the Marxist vocabulary were not there. In terms of political ideology, Klages' rationalization of sacrifice is for Adorno reactionary (or, in his own words, 'restorative'), since it nostalgically summons up and thus retrospectively legitimizes a state of things that has long been surpassed in the history of Western civilization:

> Jedes Opfer ist eine *Restauration*, die von der geschichtlichen Realität Lügen gestraft wird in der man sie unternimmt. Der *ehrwürdige* Glaube ans Opfer aber ist wahrscheinlich bereits ein eingedrilltes Schema, nach welchem die Unterworfenen das ihnen angetane Unrecht sich selber nochmals antun, um es ertragen zu können. Es rettet nicht durch stellvertretende Rückgabe die unmittelbare, nur eben unterbrochene Kommunikation, welche die heutigen Mythologen ihm zuschreiben, sondern die Institution des Opfers selber ist das Mal einer historischen Katastrophe, ein *Akt von Gewalt, der Menschen und Natur* gleichermaßen widerfährt. (*GEO* 52, *DA* 69-70; my italics)

According to Adorno, Klages' backward orientation results in an illusory romantic idealization; his theory of sacrifice is not only deceptive and naively one-sided, but also badly Romantic. It forgets that the sacrificial institution serves to channel and thus regulate violence and conflict, as well as to exorcise the hostility of nature. The belief in symbolic communication with the cosmos and the dissolution of individuality within the ritual community – both idealized by Klages as the original value of sacrifice – for Adorno are in

[291] Klages' understanding of sacrifice for Adorno is ideological in Karl Mannheim's understanding of the term. For Mannheim 'ideological' is a worldview that fails to account for reality, because the latter threatens the status (social, cultural, political, economical) of its bearers. Ideological formations for Mannheim therefore attempt to conceal reality by approaching it through inappropriate, typically anachronistic and antiquated concepts, norms and categories (see Mannheim 1995). Adorno uses the term 'ideology' with reference to Klages in Mannheim's value-free understanding of the work: Klages' theory of sacrifice conceals a historical reality that, if accepted, would overthrow his theoretical construction, namely the idea of a mystic communal union in the sacrificial performance.

truth the result of a historical catastrophe, determined by material penury and social subjugation. The sacrificial institution is merely a primitive, inept regulator of this socio-historical catastrophe, as such useless for modern culture.

In the *Odyssey* chapter, Adorno thus inscribes a fissure into Klages' Neo-Romantic, naturalist and communitarian theory of sacrifice. Sacrifice per se is a swindle: the fissure of the harmonic union – both within the community and between the latter and the cosmos – is not a product of the rational 'spirit' as Klages would have it, but rather immanent to the sacrificial institution itself. The rupture of the imagined 'cosmic' harmony is grounded in the use of rational dispositions for the purpose of self-assertion:

> Der Doppelcharakter des Opfers ... die magische *Selbstpreisgabe* des Einzelnen ans Kollektiv – wie immer es damit bestellt sei – und die *Selbsterhaltung* durch die Technik solcher Magie, impliziert einen objektiven Widerspruch, der auf die Entfaltung gerade des rationalen Elements im Opfer drängt. Unterm fortbestehenden magischen Bann wird Rationalität, als Verhaltensweise des Opfernden, zur List. Klages selbst, der eifernde *Apologet von Mythos und Opfer*, ist darauf gestoßen und sieht sich gezwungen, noch im Idealbild des Pelasgertums zwischen der echten *Kommunikation mit der Natur* und der Lüge zu unterscheiden, ohne daß er es doch vermöchte, aus dem mythischen Denken selber heraus dem Schein magischer Naturbeherrschung ein Gegenprinzip entgegenzusetzen, weil solcher *Schein* eben das Wesen des Mythos ausmacht. (*GEO* 50, *DA* 67, footnote 6; my italics)

While Klages tries to save the essence of sacrifice in the ideal of a sympathetic communication between community and nature, Adorno denies that there has ever been such communication. Rationality also exists within the seemingly enchanted world of archaic myth and animistic religion, in its most debased form at that, namely as mere instrumental 'cunning' ('List'). The latter is for Adorno a form of rationality that necessarily develops within a sacrificial regime, in other words, as the result of a *sacrificial attitude*. The objective contradiction in sacrifice – and the reason for its untruth – is that the more it portends to control nature by seconding it, the more it violates the latter and thus estranges man from nature. This is why Klages' idealizing theory of sacrifice falls short of an explanation of the 'true' meaning (*Ursinn*) of the phenomenon it sets out to explore. Klages' idea of sacrifice as a holy practice that would pay the forces of life and the demons of nature their just due is a *sham Romantic ideal*. Furthermore, if sacrifice is a catastrophe – as it is for Adorno – the desire to absolve it must be regarded as a dangerous delusion. Klages' transfiguration of sacrifice is not only theoretically flawed, but also ideologically deplorable, since it conceals

and thereby indirectly legitimizes the reality of violence and domination that inhabits all sacrificial institutions from prehistory to modern times (namely from the archaic practice of immolation to modern market exchange).

It is not hard to see the kind of political-ideological implications that Adorno could see in Klages' philosophy at the time of writing of *GEO*. As a matter of fact, the final chapter of *GW* on the "Ursinn des Opfers" reads as an apologetics of sacrifice. In this chapter Klages for instance exalts the "Blutopfer des Kriegers im Kampfe" as "die bevorzugte Opferform heroischer Völker" (*GW* 1410); furthermore, he transfigures the 'twilight' of the gods (and therefore of men) through self-sacrifice as the necessary price for self-fulfillment and salvation ("nur im Untergehen Erfüllung, im Sterben der göttlicher Bilder Gewähr ihrer Ewigkeit" (*GW* 1410). In such passages, Klages seems to unwillingly anticipate the tragic-heroic rhetoric of Nazi propaganda, giving philosophical dignity to the *völkische* and nationalist imperative of sacrifice for *Heimat* and *Volksgemeinschaft* (see also Breuer 1995, 213). Klages' Romantic philosophy of life, nature and community there appears as a disguised metaphysics of *Blut*, *Boden* and *Volk*, conceived as the supreme values for which it is worthwhile – indeed necessary – to sacrifice one's own life[292].

Sacrifice, romanticized by Klages as a "Steigerung des Eros durch das Sichtrennenmüssen" (*GW* 1409), can indeed be regarded as the 'ethical' core of Klages' otherwise soft Neo-Romantic animistic philosophy, centered around such notions as 'cosmogonic eros' ('*kosmogonischer Eros*') and 'soul images' ('*Seelenbilder*'). From this perspective, it becomes understandable why Adorno bases his confrontation with Klages on the latter's theory of sacrifice, a true Achilles' heel of his philosophical work, with which Adorno could otherwise sympathize in many respects. It is Klages' archaistic idealization of sacrifice that in Adorno's view provides a conceptual bridge between his animistic metaphysics and the vulgar *Blut* und *Boden* mythology of the Nazis[293].

Certainly Klages cannot be considered a Nazi philosopher. His association with Nazi ideology is legitimate only to a very limited extent, and should not be overemphasized by any means. Adorno himself did not feel the urge to stress this link in his *Odyssey* chapter, but

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[292] At the end of his chapter on sacrifice Klages idealizes "[das] schmerzlich beglückende Opferfest", in which "man freiwillig, d.i aus unwiderstehlicher Nötigung des Inneren, alles Besten und Schönsten ... sich entäußert" (*GW* 1409). It appears that Klages' 'cosmic eros' essentially needs sacrifice in order to become tangible.

[293] Many of the terms used and praised by Klages – such as '*Volk*', '*heroisch*', '*Schicksal*' (see *GW* 1410) – as well as other right-wing intellectuals of his time (think of Spengler) were later appropriated and used as ideological slogans by the Nazis (see Sontheimer 1962). Against the background of Klages' archaistic praise of sacrifice it becomes comprehensible why Adorno should consider the latter's philosophy as a sort of metaphysics of death, akin in spirit to Heidegger's "Theodizee des Todes" (*GS* 6, 502), which Adorno will later critically deal with in *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*.

rather only suggested it through an allusive use of vocabulary ('myth', 'ideology', 'barbarism', 'restoration', 'violence' and so on). Klages was considered by Adorno to be a self-deceiving Romantic dreamer, rather than a proto-fascist mythologue. However, as was the case with Borchardt, Adorno also saw (with the benefit of hindsight) the ideological dangers of Klages' archaistic theory of sacrifice and anti-intellectualist criticism of civilization. For Adorno, Klages' archaistic philosophy was a form of theoretical barbarism, sharing a fundamental contempt for modern 'intellectualism' and a reactionary idealization of primitive barbarism with Fascist ideology[294]. This is the reason why the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* proposes a theory of sacrifice that dialectically reverses that of Klages and in so doing, incorporates it into Adorno's own progressive philosophy of civilization. The specific modes and topoi of this dialectical reversal and incorporation will be the topic of following sections of this chapter.

[294] As Kurt Sontheimer notes in his comprehensive study on anti-democratic thought in Weimar Germany: "Es hat wenig Sinn, darüber zu streiten, ob etwa Ludwig Klages ein Antidemokrat war oder nicht ... es geht ... vielmehr darum, deutlich zu machen, daß die antidemokratische Ideenbewegung der zwanziger Jahre ohne den allgemeinen Trend zum Irrationalismus gar nicht denkbar ist. Sie hat sich nicht nur an ihn angehängt, sondern ihn noch militant verschärft, und erst in der gewaltsamen Ummünzung der irrationalen Geisteshaltung auf die Erscheinungen des gesellschaftlich-politischen Lebens konnte sie ihre ganze Virulenz entfalten" (Sontheimer 1962, 61).

3.5. The Implicit Confutation of Ludwig Klages' Theory of Sacrifice: Odysseus as a Self-sacrificing Hero of Civilization

As we have seen, self-preservation (*Selbsterhaltung*) through self-surrender (*Selbstpreisgabe*) is for Adorno the basic scheme of Odysseus' self-sacrificial cunning ("Odysseus ... wirft sich weg gleichsam, um sich zu gewinnen", *GEO* 48, *DA* 65). Odysseus' cunning constitutes for Adorno the subjective development, by way of introversion, of the archaic sacrificial practice. Cunning, Odysseus' defining trait, represents for Adorno a subtle and refined, 'civilized' form of the swindle that is inscribed in all forms of sacrifice ("Das Moment des Betrugs im Opfer ist das Urbild der odysseischen List", *GEO* 50, *DA* 67-68). As a hero of self-sacrifice and renunciation, Odysseus perpetrates this swindle not only on others (the mythical figures that he encounters on his way), but also on himself, for "jeder Entsagende gibt mehr von seinem Leben als ihm zurückgegeben wird, mehr als das Leben, das er verteidigt" (*GEO* 55-56, *DA* 73). Odysseus practices renunciation and self-sacrifice during his Mediterranean wanderings by constantly forsaking his drives, desirers and dreams for the purpose of homecoming. Adorno represents him as a self-duping swindler, somebody who misses out on his own life in order to acquire power and keep control over himself and others alike.

Adorno's depiction of Odysseus as a self-sacrificial hero bears on the main philosophical questions raised in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. The figure of Odysseus is not only allegorical of the progress of civilization and its struggle against archaic myth, but also stands for the ominous survival of sacrifice in 'civilized' modernity. Sacrifice in modern times according to Adorno would have been merely 'introverted,' and thus secularized as a *sacrificial disposition*:

> Das Paradoxon, die Idee des auf sich selber zurückbezogenen Opfers, ist eine *Säkularisierung*, mag sie auch als Mythos, ja als Theologie auftreten. Es besagt nichts anderes, als daß die Kraft, die wissend dem bewußtlosen Lebendigen opponiert, doch darin bewußtlos bleibt, daß sie sich nicht als dessengleichen weiß und den Bann des Naturzusammenhangs um so genauer vollstreckt, je mehr sie sich auf dessen Negation einschränkt. *Die Feindschaft des Selbst gegens Opfer involviert ein Opfer des Selbst*, weil sie mit der Verleugnung der Natur im Menschen bezahlt wird um der Herrschaft über die außermenschliche Natur und über andere Menschen willen. Eben diese Verleugnung, der Kern aller zivilisatorischen Rationalität, ist die Zelle der fortwuchernden mythischen Irrationalität. (*GEO* 55; my italics)

Odysseus' resistance against external sacrificial practices necessarily involves a rational sacrifice of the self for the purposes of self-preservation and self-empowerment. In the process of secularization, sacrifice gradually becomes less apparent yet more radical the more forcefully the subject opposes itself to external forms of sacrifice. In truth, the denial (*Verleugnung*) of nature and the contempt for life involved in self-sacrifice are for Adorno the seeds of the 'mythical' irrationality that still inhabits the modern world. Such irrationality is emblematically testified for Adorno by the double-edged character of technological advancements (Odysseus is a hero of instrumental, i.e., technical reason). While on the one hand such advancements allow men to satisfy their needs and desires, and thus to realize dreams of self-empowerment, they also make them dependent on technological apparatuses, which threaten them with new unpredictable risks and catastrophic dangers.

Based on such presuppositions, in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*, Adorno – who at the time of writing this work was aware of the contemporary devastations and destructions of WWII – develops a radical philosophical criticism of modern civilization as a state of existence that is still intrinsically tied to the 'irrational' logic of nature. The seemingly pessimistic philosophy of history of *DA* is reminiscent of other grand historico-philosophical narrations of the interwar period, such as Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (see Agard 2005). From this perspective, *DA* indeed seems to be that 'dark' book on the decline of Western civilization that many readers and critics – admittedly for good reasons – have taken it to be[295]. Hegel's idea of the realization of the spirit in human history, as set forth exemplarily in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, seems to have been inverted by the Hegelians Adorno-Horkheimer into a "Phänomenoloie des Ungeists" (Geyer-Ryan/Lethen 1987, 45), strongly reminiscent of Klages' anti-intellectualist ('geistfeindlich') criticism of civilization.

Like Klages, Adorno finds that the development of the rational spirit in history involves not only self-sacrifice and renunciation, but also repression and subjugation of the technologically- and materially-backward other. The latter functions for civilized man as the reminder of a condition that he deems to have definitively surpassed through toil and effort in the process of civilization[296]. In Adorno's Homeric reading, Odysseus, the hero of

[295] Geyer-Ryan and Lethen think that the *Odyssey* "[wird] in den Händen der Frankfurter zur schwarzen Allegorie einer in instrumentelle Rationalität pervertierten 'Innerlichkeit'" (Geyer-Ryan/Lethen 1987, 46). As I argue in the present work, Adorno's Odysseus is far from being exclusively caught by his 'interiority'; his subjectivity rather emerges out of social antagonism (in the form of a struggle against the mythical figures) and interaction (with his ship crew and the characters that help him along his course).

[296] Civilization for Klages "rodet Wälder, streicht die Tiergeschlechter, löscht die ursprünglichen Völker aus, überklebt und verunstaltet mit dem Firnis der Gewerblichkeit die Landschaft und entwürdigt, was er von Lebewesen noch übrigläßt gleich dem Schlachtvieh zur bloßen Ware, zum vogelfreien Gegenstande eines schrankenlosen Beutehungers" (*MUE* 12ff.). Klages see the history of Western civilization as a history of domination and extermination of the 'weaker', particularly of those peoples and cultures that did not develop in

progressive civilization, feels compelled during his travels to erase – either by destroying or removing from both his and his comrades' sight – the unconscious representatives of such a past condition, as they summon up an image of happiness that threatens the course of civilization with the illusory promise of a return to primeval nature ("Glücksversprechen, von dem in jedem Augenblick die Zivilisation bedroht war", *DA* 33). Within the frame of Adorno's allegorical interpretation of the *Odyssey*, this promise of happiness is dangerous because it distracts Odysseus from his course of homecoming, inviting him to give up self-sacrifice and abandon himself to instinctual pleasure, unbounded desire and spiritual relaxation. This would imply for Odysseus relinquishing his goal of homecoming, which he instead holds onto firmly even in the hardest moments of his unwilled vagrancy.

The threatening seduction exerted on civilized man by his own (apparently overcome, in truth merely repressed) past explains civilization's hostility towards backwardness (or 'underdevelopment')[297]. Adorno sees this hostility at work in a subdued manner in Odysseus' driving his comrades out of the Edenic island of the lazily self-contented Lotus-eaters, or in his forcing himself away from the pleasure-yielding lovers Circe and Calypso. In a more brutal and direct way, this hostility manifests itself for Adorno in Odysseus' barbaric maiming, once back in Ithaca, of the disrespectful shepherd Melanthios, or in the brutal revenge that he takes on Penelope's unfaithful courtesans, who during his absence have flirted with the suitors of his wife. According to Adorno's interpretation of the episode, by yielding to sexual pleasure they have regressed into a polyamorous hetaeristic condition and thus violated the patriarchal order of society represented by Odysseus. The hero, who has practiced self-control and renunciation for years during his wanderings, cannot forgive them for this. With the help of Telemachus, he mercilessly unleashes his wrath, fed by the repressed energy accumulated in years of self-discipline and renunciation for the purpose of survival. In

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the direction of the 'spirit': "Die Primitiven, soweit sie solchem Prozeß sich nicht angliedern konnten, wurden von den weißen Eroberern ausgerottet und sind daher gegenwärtig im Aussterben begriffen" (*GW* 1239). Adorno's position is not much different from that of Klages. However, contrary to the latter, who almost exclusively focuses on the processes of subjugation and suppression of nature in the history of civilization, Adorno also suggests the *political entailments* of these processes, outlining in his *Odyssey* chapter a micro-theory of colonialism (see Müller-Funk 2006). The mythical figures that Odysseus encounters on his way are all endowed with some kind of magic qualities or powers, yet they are technically and culturally backward compared to Odysseus. They are therefore bound to be subjected or overcome by the 'colonial traveler' Odysseus.

[297] "Das Selbst, das die Ordnung und Unterordnung an der Unterwerfung der Welt lernte, hat bald Wahrheit überhaupt mit dem disponierenden Denken ineinsgesetzt, ohne dessen feste Unterscheidungen sie nicht bestehen kann. Es hat mit dem mimetischen Zauber die Erkenntnis tabuiert, die den Gegenstand wirklich trifft. Sein *Haß* gilt *dem Bild der überwundenen Vorwelt* und ihrem *imaginären Glück*" (*DA* 30; my italics). Interestingly, despite his criticism of 'dispositive' thought in the passage, Adorno describes 'primitive' happiness as (merely) imaginary. This marks the difference between Adorno and Klages: whereas the former uses archaistic fantasies and primitivist projections as dialectical tools of imagination, functional his critical discourse on civilization, the latter hypostatizes them as mythical truths.

Freudian terms, his long repressed libido turns destructive, and produces death. Odysseus has the unfaithful courtesans hanged by Telemachus on the balk of the main hall of his house, and sees them slowly die while floundering with their feet in the air.

Towards the end of his *Odyssey* chapter, Adorno dwells on such instance of primitive brutality in the Homeric epic, which, as Adorno remarks, is otherwise almost completely bare of barbaric slaughter and human sacrifice. According to him, through the brutal execution of the courtesans and the suitors at the end of his long journey, the civilized hero Odysseus paradoxically ends up resembling the hostile mythical figures that he has left behind during his Mediterranean wanderings. In the barbaric punishment that he reserves for the courtesans, his subtle cunning – consisting in the capacity to emulate mythical nature in order to finally overrule it – thus finally boomerangs back on him, in the form of a quasi-sacrificial bloody revenge:

> Odysseus ... wirft sich weg gleichsam, um sich zu gewinnen; die Entfremdung von der Natur, die er leistet, vollzieht sich in der Preisgabe an die Natur, mit der er in jedem Abenteuer sich mißt, und ironisch triumphiert die Unerbittliche, der er befiehlt, indem er als Unerbittlicher nach Hause kommt, *als Richter und Rächer der Erbe der Gewalten*, denen er entrann. (*GEO* 48, *DA* 65-66; my italics)

Nature eventually finds its revenge against Odysseus and, ironically, it does so through his very agency. Odysseus's subjective cunning (*List*), which has helped him throughout his Mediterranean roaming, inadvertently turns into the Hegelian *List der Vernunft*, the objective 'cunning' or irony of history[298]. Through his reading of the episode, Adorno seems to suggest

[298] Although Adorno denies that such a link between Odysseus' subjective *List* and Hegel's *List der Vernunft* exists. Adorno criticizes the philosopher Nicolai Hartmann – a foremost exponent of fundamental ontology and author of a phenomenological work on the 'spirit' (*Das Problem des geistigen Seins*) that Adorno reviewed in 1933 – for having associated subjective and objective 'spirit' in his work. I quote the passage in full, since it gives in my opinion an exemplary insight into Adorno's self-contradictory mode of argumentation: "'Die Macht' des Geistes '...besteht nicht in seinem Stärkersein. Gegen Naturgewalten als solche kommt der Mensch nicht auf. Die Überlegenheit des Geistes besteht im Ausnutzen vorhandener Mächte, die ohne ihn blind sich auswirken. Er tritt nicht in Gegensatz zu ihnen nimmt nicht den vergeblichen Kampf mit ihnen auf; er beherrscht sie vielmehr, und zwar indem er sich selbst mit seinen Zielen ihrer Wirkungsweise anpaßt. Er herrscht, indem er sie ihrer eigenen Natur gemäß wirken läßt, aber so, daß sie seinen Zwecken als Mittel dienen müssen. Er läßt sie für seine Zwecke arbeiten. Das ist ihm möglich, insoweit er ihre Wirkungen kennt, voraussieht und so zu seligieren weiß, daß sie das von ihm Bezweckte hervortreiben. Denn sie selbst sind richtungslos, ziellos, blind, sind auch nicht durch fremden Willen auf Zwecke festgelegt, es liegt nicht in ihrem Wesen, auf etwas Bestimmtes hinausgelangen zu müssen. Die Überlegenheit des Geistes ist also gerade die Zielgebung selbst. Er kann, was die Naturwesen nicht können: Zwecke setzen und Mittel für sie seligieren. So übt er eine Lenkung aus, mit der er die Naturmächte gleichsam 'überlistet''. ... Das kommt trotz der viel zu blanken Antithese von Geist und Natur zumindest ein Schema der homerischen List recht nahe. Ein krudes Mißverständnis freilich ist es, wenn Hartmann diese List der Hegelschen 'List der Vernunft' ... gleichsetzt, die doch nicht ein Verhalten bedeutet, 'den neutralen Naturprozeß vor seine Zwecke zu spannen', sondern auf den objektiven Geist sich bezieht, der sich

that barbarism and brutality, anthropogenic destruction and devastation in history are nothing but a result of civilization's self-forgetful 'progress' away from nature. The tragic irony of history would therefore consists in the fact that, no matter how hard men try to overcome their basest instincts and become more civilized by means of self-discipline and self-sacrifice (namely through work, education, legal institutions and other forms of regulated socialization), they repeatedly fall back into barbarism. This would be in the end merely the product of man's unbounded striving towards self-assertion at the expenses of nature.

This paradox, expressed in the formula "Naturverfallenheit besteht in der Naturbeherrschung, ohne die Geist nicht existiert" (*DA* 57), is the gist of *DA*, in particular of Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* as the paradigmatic narrative of the dialectic of enlightenment. The latter's reversal to myth, implying civilization's regression into barbarism, finds an emblematic representation in Odysseus' execution through the hanging of Penelope's courtesans and suitors. As somebody who seeks and finds blood revenge for the wrongs committed in his house during his absence, in this episode Odysseus seems to shake off his civilized character and turn into a *primitive executor of sacrifice*. This episode serves Adorno as proof of the fact that Odysseus' cunning, originating in his self-sacrificial attitude, fundamentally remains tied to primitive sacrifice. His civilized intelligence proves still invisibly bond to prehistory, and as such is bound to repeat – indeed to increase in scope – the brutality of nature in brief outbreaks of blind, unforgiving destructiveness.

If this were Adorno's only judgment of the Homeric hero, his interpretation of the *Odyssey* would effectively amount to that 'gloomy' criticism of civilization that many readers and critics – amongst others Jürgen Habermas – have taken it to be. Yet Adorno does not content himself with a verdict on Odysseus. The latter is not a mere self-sacrificing and self-denying swindler, who tricks and does violence to himself, nature and other men alike. In Adorno's eyes, he is rather a *self-conscious swindler*, who tricks nature out of necessity, namely for the purpose of survival: "Durch Odysseus wird einzig das Moment des Betrugs am

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bewußtlos, über die Köpfe hinweg, durchs Medium ihrer Leidenschaften durchsetzen soll. ... Hegels List der Vernunft ist eher dem Mythos verwandt als dem aufgeklärten Bewußtsein. Sie ist nicht die Verfahrungsart der Naturbeherrschung durch Individuen, sondern der Prozeß, welcher diese ans 'Allgemeine' aufopfert und preisgibt" (*GEO* 48-9). Adorno's refusal to link subjective and objective *List* shows in my opinion his difficulty in combining Klages' (and Nietzsche's) criticism of civilization with the Hegelian presuppositions of his philosophy of history. The fact that Hegel's *List der Vernunf* is closer to 'myth' than it is to enlightenment does not contradict, but rather *supports* his idea of the simultaneousness of progressive and regressive tendencies in history, and of the lurking threat of regression of subjective enlightenment (for which Odysseus stands) to primitive barbarism (as Odysseus' brutal violence on the maidens testifies). In fact, Adorno's dialectics of enlightenment consists in a varying exposition of this contradictory process, though his philosophy of civilization overall certainly cannot be reduced to it. As in many other passages of the chapter, Adorno here seems to contradict his polemical opponent only in order to contradict himself, i.e., his previously expressed positions.

Opfer, der innerste Grund vielleicht für den *Scheincharakter* des Mythos, zum Selbstbewußtsein erhoben" (*GEO* 51, *DA* 69). Odysseus' cunning is not just a refined form of sacrifice, but rather the 'elevation' of sacrificial deceit to self-consciousness. Such becoming-conscious imports for Adorno an incipient awareness of the restricted validity of sacrificial institutions. The enlightened, self-reliant subject no longer regards these institutions as eternal and immutable, but rather as passing and precarious, because dependent on the restricted power and subjective will of those who preside over them. Insight into the inconsistency of sacrificial practice furthermore necessarily results in an unmasking of its founding myths[299], which are now recognized as mere illusive 'appearances' ("Scheincharakter des Mythos"). In other words, for Adorno, Odysseus' cunning – a form of *self-conscious* sacrifice – becomes an instrument of enlightenment, which as such finally functions to dissolve sacrifice: "Die List ist nichts anderes als die subjektive Entfaltung [… der] objektiven Unwahrheit des Opfers, das sie ablöst" (*GEO* 52, *DA* 69-70).

Adorno understands the acquisition of awareness regarding the restricted validity and inconsistency of sacrifice not merely as a fact of consciousness (a product of the 'inner person'), but rather as an 'instrumental' procedure, grounded in the rational necessity of self-preservation. The dissolution of sacrifice results from the immanent development of the sacrificial attitude in the history of civilization, as Odysseus' struggle for survival and homecoming emblematically shows. Adorno's interpretation of Odysseus' confrontation with the mythical figures and of his overcoming of the sacrificial realms into which he stumbles can be read from this perspective as an ongoing, indirect counterargument (by way of allegory and allusion) to Klages' archaistic theory of sacrifice. The seemingly irrational character of sacrifice, which Klages praises as a mystery of communitarian and cosmic union, is for Adorno not the expression of a higher form of reason, extraneous to man's subjectivist Will to Power and anthropocentric self-assertion; such apparent irrationality is rather the expression of a stubborn and unjust anachronism. Sacrificial practice is not above, but rather below instrumental rationality: "Die vielberufene Irrationalität des Opfers ist nichts anderes als der Ausdruck dafür, dass die Praxis der Opfer länger währte als ihre selber schon unwahre, nämlich partikulare rationale Notwendigkeit" (*GEO* 54, *DA* 71). Adorno's verdict on the irrationality of sacrifice regards not primitive sacrifice alone, but rather all forms of sacrificial practices, ancient and modern alike. In other words, Adorno points out the *permanent*

[299] Adorno sees myth and sacrifice as strictly related to each other. In this sense he accepts the basic myth-ritualist tenet of modern anthropology and myth studies (see Segal 2004 61 ff.).

obsolescence of the sacrificial attitude, which represents a true scandal for enlightened reason regardless of its stage of historical development.

As I have shown in the preceding section of this chapter, for Adorno, some sacrificial practices may well posses a practical rationality at their beginning. They can in fact be functional in the symbolic distribution of power and channeling of violence and conflict within the community. Yet Adorno immediately corrects this utilitarian concession to the pragmatic rationality of sacrifice through a Neo-Marxist reversal of perspective, adding that all forms of sacrifice are irrational and false ('unwahr'), since they always primarily serve the needs of a dominant caste or restricted social group at the expense of the other members of the community. However, in order for this untruth to come to light – this would be the third step of Adorno's dialectical theory of sacrifice – the practical inefficiency of the established sacrificial order must be exposed by a subject (either singular or communal, and considered also in the adjective sense, as 'subjected' to external powers) struggling for self-empowerment and emancipation. This can only happen when the restricted rationality of a time-honored sacrificial practice is overruled by other, more effective forms of practical rationality, namely by new and more advanced sacrificial practices. The old sacrificial institutions are thus bound to expose the irrationality that was always inscribed in their use for particular (i.e., non-universal) purposes.

Hegel's master-slave dialectic (as well as Marx's dialectic of emancipation), is thus transposed by Adorno into a historical dialectics of sacrifice. The subject struggling for emancipation works his way towards the abolition of the established sacrificial order by cunningly exploiting its manifest irrationality: "Es ist dieser *Spalt* zwischen Rationalität und Irrationaltät des Opfers, den die List als Griff benutzt" (*GEO* 54; my italics). This is precisely what Odysseus, the civilized hero, does. He initially adjusts to the sacrificial practices that he finds in the mythical realms he passes through. However, this adjustment is only momentary: the experienced and well-traveled hero knows about the backwardness and ineffectiveness of such practices, which he is bound to overcome by means of his superior – i.e., instrumentally enlightened – intelligence[300].

As I have already shown, Adorno sees Odysseus' disenchantment of the mythical world not as an impious debunking of age-old myths – as Borchardt does, for instance – but rather as a necessity of survival. The hero cannot but trick his opponents and disenchant the

[300] "Daß das alte Opfer selbst mittlerweile irrational ward, präsentiert sich der Klugheit des Schwächeren als *Dummheit des Rituals*. Es bleibt akzeptiert, sein Buchstabe wird strikt innegehalten. Aber der sinnlos gewordene Spruch widerlegt sich daran, daß seine eigene Satzung je und je Raum gewährt, ihm auszuweichen" (*GEO* 57, *DA* 74-75; my italics).

mythical corners of the Mediterranean if he wants to stay alive and pursue his course of homecoming. It is this necessity, and not Odysseus' humanitarian – let alone noble or good – disposition that makes the travelling hero see the needlessness and futility of sacrifice: "Alle Entmythologisierung hat die Form der unaufhaltsamen Erfahrung von der Vergeblichkeit und Überflüssigkeit von Opfern" (*GEO* 54, *DA* 71). From an enlightened point of view, sacrifice is something that can be dispensed with, indeed, something that is dispensed with always anew, by force of necessity, in the history of civilization. The historical progress of civilization, entailing a growing rationalization of sacrifice, heads towards its final abolition.

Odysseus' ongoing disenchantment of myth and disruption of the sacrificial rules that he encounters on his way are emblematic of this development. As I have shown, Adorno agrees with Klages in saying that the rationalization of sacrifice derives from its subjective introversion, implying a radicalization of the sacrificial attitude. Yet unlike Klages, for Adorno the same process also entails a sublation (Hegel's *Aufheben*) and transformation of sacrifice into something else. Subjective formation cannot avoid self-sacrifice. However, as soon as the latter is illuminated by consciousness (i.e., enlightened), the first step towards its abolition is already made:

> Auch Odysseus ist eines, das Selbst, das immerzu sich bezwingt und darüber das Leben versäumt, das es rettet und bloß noch als Irrfahrt erinnert. Dennoch ist er zugleich *Opfer für die Abschaffung des Opfers*. Seine herrschaftliche Entsagung, als Kampf mit dem Mythos, ist stellvertretend für eine Gesellschaft, die der Entsagung und der Herrschaft nicht mehr bedarf: die ihrer selbst mächtig wird, nicht um sich und andern Gewalt anzutun, sondern zur Versöhnung. (*GEO* 56, *DA* 73-74; my italics)

This passage nicely exemplifies Adorno's ambivalent consideration of Odysseus' figure. Adorno on the one hand condemns him from a *lebensphilosophische* perspective for being the representative of a repressive civilization, equally hostile his own and others' lives. Yet Adorno immediately turns his condemnation into an unexpected apology for the civilized hero. The latter indeed misses out on his life, yet he does so for a greater purpose – both altruistic and utopian – namely the realization of a truly civilized state of existence, one in which sacrifice would be abolished once and for all. For Adorno, Odysseus is not merely a negative self-sacrificial hero, but also an "Opfer fürs Opferslose" (*GEO* 56).

The turn of Adorno's argument is also exemplary for his position towards Klages' criticism of civilization. Whereas the latter condemns the modern ('decadent' and 'civilized')

sacrificial attitude and looks back to older, putatively more 'natural' and less pervasive forms of sacrifice, Adorno suggests that the real catastrophe is in fact the survival of sacrifice (in the form of an introverted sacrificial attitude) in modernity. However, this ongoing historical catastrophe, linking modernity with prehistory, civilization with barbarism, must and indeed can only be faced within the present state of civilization[301]. The utopian realization of a condition of existence bare of sacrifice – which for Adorno entails truly liberated society – requires further self-sacrifice for the sake of the definitive abolition of sacrifice as such: "Es bedarf all der überflüssigen Opfer, damit die Opfer überflüssig werden" (*GEO* 56, see also *DA* 73).

This for Adorno is the dramatic paradox of modern civilization; the present sacrificial state of modernity can only be superseded by a rationally more advanced – which is to say more functional and effective – sacrificial regime. The introversion of sacrifice, which gradually abolishes the latter, at least in its external form, also makes it more radical and pervasive, permanent and ubiquitous. While archaic sacrificial practices require a restricted number of sacrificial victims, who would pay with their lives for the benefit of the whole community (or a select part of it), in modernity the ratio is inverted: sacrifice in principle gets introverted by a large number of individuals, who no longer need external sacrifice in order to foster their sense of belonging to the community and regulate their economy of exchange with the natural world. Distributed amongst a larger number of persons, sacrifice becomes superfluous in its more manifest and brutal forms, spreading as a subterranean universal tendency.

According to Adorno, the sacrificial attitude does not entirely disappear in the process, but rather transforms into something different, namely *individual responsibility*. Far from being a mere token of 'decadent' intellectualization, the individualization of sacrifice signifies a positive emancipation from both the external coercion of the sacrificial community and the scapegoat mechanism of the sacrificial ritual. This process results in the development of a critical, *enlightened individuality*, which refuses to recognize the substitutive victimization dictated by the appointed ministers of sacrifice:

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[301] In order to justify this 'realistic' claim – and therefore his confutation of Klages' visionary Romanticism – Adorno takes recourse to a social critical argument: "es ist die gesellschaftliche Not, daß der, welcher dem universalen, ungleichen und ungerechten Tausch sich entziehen, nicht entsagen, sogleich das ungeschmälerte Ganze ergreifen würde, eben damit alles verlöre, noch den kargen Rest, den Selbsterhaltung ihm gewährt" (*GEO* 56, *DA* 73). Adorno's 'play' with different critical positions allows him to both accept and reject Klages' criticism of civilization. In particular, Adorno's social-pragmatic and Marxist perspective allows him to decline Klages' aesthetic Romanticism in terms of a social Romanticism, as was typical for many exponents of the *Frankfurter Schule* both before and after the war – one needs only think of Herbert Marcuse's philosophy and his relation to the students' movement in the late 60s.

> Bedeutet der Glaube an die Stellvertretung durchs Opfer die Erinnerung an das nicht Ursprüngliche, Herrschaftsgeschichtliche am Selbst, so wird er zugleich dem *ausgebildeten Selbst* gegenüber zur Unwahrheit: das Selbst ist gerade der Mensch, dem nicht mehr magische Kraft der Stellvertretung zugetraut wird. *Die Konstitution des Selbst durchschneidet* eben jenen fluktuierenden *Zusammenhang mit der Natur*, den das Opfer des Selbst herzustellen *beansprucht*. (*GEO* 52, *DA* 69; my italics)

The individual subject struggling for self-emancipation no longer believes in the replaceability of subjective individuality and individual responsibility, either towards oneself or towards others. The harmonic unity that sacrifice claims ("beansprucht") to revive is merely an illusion for the mature, self-responsible individual. The idea of a primeval bond with both nature and community is itself a myth, indeed *the* Romantic myth of modernity par excellence (at least from Rousseau onwards).

Through his apparently ambivalent definition of self-sacrifice as the mode of formation of the modern subject and, at the same time, as the condition for the abolition of sacrifice in modernity, Adorno provides a dialectical inversion of Klages' Romantic, mystical and communitarian theory of sacrifice, based on the idea of a dissolution of individuality in the community through sacrificial ritual (*GW* 1409). In my view, Adorno's depiction of Odysseus as an anti-romantic hero of self-sacrifice for the abolition of sacrifice has a polemical function with respect to Klages' cosmic and neo-pagan philosophy. It is not mere chance that Odysseus is made into a sort of *Christian hero* avant la lettre, indeed a secular anticipation of Christ. For Adorno, Odysseus' self-sacrifice, much like Christ's, is supposed to be the *last* sacrifice, marking the passage to a new state of civilization:

> Das identisch beharrende Selbst, das in der Überwindung des Opfers entspringt, ist doch wieder nur ein hartes, steinern festgehaltenes Opferritual, das der Mensch, (indem er dem Naturzusammenhang sein Bewußtsein entgegensetzt), sich selber zelebriert. Soviel ist wahr an der berühmten Erzählung der nordischen Mythologie, derzufolge Odin als Opfer für sich selbst am Baum hing, und an der These von Klages, daß jegliches Opfer das des Gottes an den Gott sei, wie es noch in der monotheistischen Verkleidung des Mythos, der *Christologie***,** sich darstellt. *Nur daß* die Stufe des Selbst als des Opfers an sich selbst nicht sowohl die ursprüngliche Konzeption der Volksreligion ausdrückt, als vielmehr die *Einwanderung des Mythos in die Zivilisation*. (*GEO* 54-55, see also *DA* 72; my italics)

The 'modern' introversion of sacrifice, first announced in the history of the West by the Christian message, constitutes for Adorno the necessary condition for the final abolition of sacrifice. Christianity, the religion of the self-sacrificing God in the person of Christ, constitutes in this respect a decisive step towards the 'immigration' ("Einwanderung") of myth into civilization. This is an ambivalent step for Adorno, since Christian monotheism is part of the historical process of subjective enlightenment and anthropocentric rationalization of the world, subjecting all forms of non-human life to human purposes[302]. From this perspective, Adorno's Nietzschean criticism of Christian religion in the earlier version of the *Odyssey* chapter closely recalls that of Klages[303]. Yet this criticism does not prevent Adorno from incorporating the Christian message into his progressive philosophy of civilization[304].

The secularization of the Christian message contained in Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation can only be fully understood against the background of Klages' neo-pagan Nietzscheanism and, more generally, that of the widespread post-Nietzschean culture of Weimar Germany. It is legitimate to suppose that, at the time of writing *DA* (1942-1944), Adorno must have retrospectively regarded Klages' philosophy as an unwilled theoretical

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[302] As a result of this process, not only nature, but also the god that retracts itself from it becomes foreign to man, and tend to reverts to a 'mythological' being: "Mit jedem Stück Welt, das abgestoßen werden muß, um zur der reinen und transzendenten Gottheit zu gelangen, wird diese fremder und unverständlicher bis sie als das absolut Verschiedene der dialektischen Theologie in den Mythos zurückschlägt, der Gott Kierkegaards in den Dämon Abrahams, der blindes Opfer heischt" (*GEO* 45). Adorno's criticism of the Christian dogma of the one God (especially in its Protestant version) is much akin to that of Klages.

[303] Christianity is for Klages the paramount example of the perverse kind of *human divinization* entailed in decadent sacrificial practices and forms of religion: "Die Personvergottung wurde vom Christentum zum Prinzip erhoben, indem es den Gott als Person zu denken verlangte und jedes außerpersönliche Bild des Lebens für widergöttlich erklärte" (*GW* 1408). Similarly Adorno affirms: "Wenn die historische Tendenz der Antike, fortschreitende Rationalität, auf die Liquidation der vielen Götter in der Einheit zielt, so wird in dem *einen* übrigen alle Gewalt der Mythologie konzentriert, die der selber wieder nach dem Bilde des Menschen entworfenen einheitlichen Herrschaft über die Natur" (*GEO* 44; italics in original). Adorno's argument reads as a paraphrase of Klages' reflections on Christian monotheism. Just as for Klages Christianity represents in the history of religion the last stage of the process of man's 'intellectualist' alienation from life, the concentration of mythological violence in the one monotheistic God for Adorno is a form intellectual totalitarianism that subjects all forms of natural life to human purposes. As such, Christian monotheism can be regarded as the religious counterpart of the cultural process of enlightenment in modernity, entailing an absolutization of sacrifice. Significantly, Adorno's criticism of Christian monotheism has been canceled in the final version of the chapter.
It is possible that the authors of *DA* saw in this criticism the risk of a too close proximity to post-Nietzschean forms of philosophical paganism à la Klages, which Adorno in fact intended to counter in his *Odyssey* chapter.

[304] Adorno's transposition of the Christian message into his philosophy of civilization however does not refrain from submitting positive Christian religion to a Marxist criticism of society: "Insgesamt hat in der christlichen Anschauung vom Gottmenschen die Einheit von Mythologie und Entmythologisierung in der Klassengesellschaft ihren prinzipiellen Ausdruck gefunden. Jesus ist Logos und Halbgott in eins. Nicht trotz des Rückfalls des jüdisch-griechischen Monotheismus in Mythologie, sondern gerade durch die Mythologisierung der eigenen 'Rationalität' hat das Christentum triumphiert. Es ist zugleich diese Verschlingung rationaler Einheit mit dem Mythos, welche das Wesen der unauflöslichen christlichen Paradoxie ausmacht. ... Gesellschaftlich drückt diese Paradoxie die radikale Anerkennung von Rationalität in der Organisation der Arbeit bei gleichzeitiger Verhöhnung solcher Rationalität in der fortbestehenden Verfügung über, die organisierte Arbeit der andern aus" (*GEO* 45). Sure enough from Adorno's Neo-Marxist perspective Christianity is still not 'rational' enough. The complete realization of the Christian message would therefore require another 'step' in the course of civilization.

anticipation of the explicitly anti-Christian, neo-pagan and Germanic mythology of the Nazis. Adorno's subdued Christian inflection of Odysseus' figure becomes fully comprehensible and appreciable in relation to this historico-intellectual context.

Through his characterization of Odysseus as a hero of self-sacrifice in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*, Adorno offers an *individualistic theory of sacrifice* – opposed to Klages' communitarian one – as part of his progressive philosophy of civilization. However far Odysseus' adventures appear to be from our modern concerns and sensibility, interpretation of these adventures allows Adorno to make an argument in praise of bourgeois individualism (and individual responsibility) against all forms of communal inebriation and relinquishment of subjective individuality in the modern mob or *Volksgemeinschaft*[305]. Odysseus is for Adorno not only a champion of instrumental reason, but also and above all a mature and self-responsible individual ("Mündiger"**,** *GEO* 46), who is as such able to fence off all kinds of cheap archaistic solutions and regressive temptations[306]. His self-sacrifice is not merely aimed at self-affirmation, but also has an *altruistic*, *progressive* aspect to it[307]. From this perspective, Adorno's interpretation of Odysseus as a hero of self-sacrifice ought to be considered not so much as a dialectical elaboration of Klages' theory of sacrifice and *lebensphilosophische Zivilisationskritik*, but rather as a continuing polemical counterpoint to it. Odysseus in *DA*

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[305] From this perspective Adorno's undertaking in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* reminds one of Helmuth Plessner's criticism of contemporary social radicalism and irrationalist *Zivilisationskritik* in *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus* (1924). Adorno's evaluation of the 'bourgeois' in the *Odyssey* chapter can be fully appreciated if contrasted with the widespread anti-bourgeois pose and affect of the conservative nationalist movements (and of their intellectual spokesmen) during the Weimar Republic, particularly the revolutionary nationalists and the national-bolshevists (whose most prominent representatives were, respectively, Ersnst Jünger and Ernst Niekisch). As Sontheimer notes: "Im Typus des Bürgers oder pejorative: des Bourgeois, glaubte man den Menschen getroffen zu haben, der für all das stand, was man ablehnte: den Liberalismus und seine negative Staatsauffassung, den Kapitalismus und seinen skrupellosen Egoismus, den Materialismus und Immoralismus" (Sontheimer 1962, 342).

[306] For this reason I cannot agree with Wolfgang Buschlinger, who affirms that Adorno's Odysseus is "das Gegenteil ... von dem, was Adorno später einen mündigen Bürger nennen wird" (Buschlinger 2007, 21). Odysseus is in fact for Adorno a responsible individual, as such the prototype of bourgeois individualism. In his post-war essay "Auf die Frage: Was ist deutsch" Adorno defines the process of 'maturation' ("mündig zu werden") in terms of the capacity to resist the tendencies of regression that inhabit modern society ("sich den Regressionstendenzen zu entziehen", *GS* 10.2, 692).

[307] Geyer-Ryan and Lethen on the contrary consider Adorno's *Odyssey* reading as a anti-hegelian 'Phänomenologie des Ungeists', centered around Odysseus' "Ver-Bildung in das schlaue, egoistische und machtbewußte Subjekt" (Geyer-Ryan/Lethen 1987, 45). In my opinion however Odysseus is for Adorno not so much a "Modell des pervertierten Bildungshelden" (ibid.), but rather an enlightened hero of modern subjectivity, struggling for self-empowerment and the preservation of his own identity. Such readings of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter as that proposed by Geyer-Ryan and Lethen – in fact representative for a whole trend of critical confrontation with the legacy of *DA*, especially in the 80s – could only prove true in the absence of Adorno's anti-reactionary polemic in his *Odyssey* chapter. By showing the contradictions of the civilized hero Odysseus, Adorno in my opinion does not write a dark chapter of pessimistic cultural criticism, but rather exposes the inner contradictions of modern civilization. His Odysseus in fact contains the seeds of disaster and salvation alike: Hölderlin's *Patmos* verse "Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch" applies not only to Heidegger's reflections on technology, but also to Adorno's hero of instrumental reason.

does not feature solely as a negative hero of instrumental reason, but also as a positive hero of the human ‘spirit’, as such a true cultural hero of modernity (see Mayor 2006).

3.6. A Tacit Counterpoint to Klages' Archaic Theory of Images: Odysseus' Descent into the Underworld and the Search for *Heimat*

Through his ambivalent, at times seemingly self-contradictory and discursively multi-layered reading of the *Odyssey*, Adorno provides in *DA* a dialectization of Klages' Neo-Romantic and anti-modernist criticism of civilization. He does so by first appropriating the latter, and then turning it in a wholly different, namely ideologically progressive direction. Adorno's interpretation of Odysseus as a anti-romantic hero suggests that there is no straightforward way out of – and no way back from – the present state of civilization. A possible amelioration of the state of affairs is only conceivable within a civilized condition of existence. For this reason, Adorno's criticism of civilization, though sharing a number of common presuppositions with that of Klages, comes up to very different conclusions[308].

In the current section, I will show how Adorno puts into practice this dialectical turning or inversion of Klages' radical criticism of civilization through his interpretation of another episode of the *Odyssey*, namely that of Odysseus' descent into Hades. Before doing so, however, it is helpful to pause for a moment to consider what is philosophically at stake in Adorno's dialectical appropriation of Klages. The work of Adorno's fellow Marxist philosopher and friend Ernst Bloch is of great importance for this purpose. In particular, Bloch's *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1935) furnishes a key for understanding Adorno's tacit confrontation with Klages in *DA*. It is in this work that Bloch exposes his idea of a dialectization of the Romantic and reactionary ideology of Weimar Germany, which Adorno seems to have appropriated in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*.

The 'bequest' (*Erbschaft*) of his time (namely the 20s and 30s) consists for Bloch in the reactionary culture and ideology of Weimar Germany, which the Nazis were able to appropriate and use for their political purposes. The diverse forms of German conservative and right-wing anti-modernism – centered on such notions as "'Leben', 'Seele', 'Unbewußtes', 'Nation', 'Ganzheit', 'Reich', und ähnliche Anti-Mechanismen" (*EDZ* 18) –

[308] "Gut marxistisch – und zugleich hegelisch – halten Adorno und Horkheimer freilich daran fest, daß der Prozeß der Zivilisation zugleich ein Prozeß der *Aufklärung* ist; nur als dessen *Resultat* können 'Versöhnung', 'Glück' oder 'Emanzipation gedacht werden. Hiermit ist der Rückweg in das archaische Bilderreich Klages' als bloß illusorischer Weg zur Versöhnung abgeschnitten. Versöhnung kann nur als *Aufhebung* der Selbstentzweiung der Natur gedacht werden, erreichbar nur im Durchgang durch die Selbstkonstitution der Menschengattung in einer Geschichte der Arbeit, des Opfers und der Entsagung. Daraus folgt auch, daß der Prozeß der Aufklärung sich nur in seinem eigenen Medium – dem des naturbeherrschenden Geistes – selbst überbieten und vollenden könnte" (Wellmer 1985, 11-12; italics in original). This is why all throughout the *Odyssey* chapter Adorno argues against Borchardt's and Klages' Romantic anti-modernism and nostalgia of origins.

express for Bloch a fundamental a-synchrony or non-simultaneity (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*) with the historical tendencies of the present. In other words, they are forms of ideological anachronism[309]. Within this historico-intellectual context, Klages is considered by Bloch as the paramount exponent of the "Verschwörung gegen die Zivilisation" (ibid. 115) of the post-Nietzschean and Neo-Romantic culture of Weimar Germany. In a chapter titled "Philosophie von Unruhe, Prozeß, Dionysos" (subchapter "Der gesprenkelte Urfluss", ibid. 330), Bloch sums up the gist of Klages' irrationalist philosophy in the following terms:

> Mancher ... ratet dem Kopf, sich zu legen, in Traum zu legen. Dahin zog Klages vor allem, bequem, mit papierenem *Gesang*, auch *verführend* durchaus. Das bewußte Ich soll aufgegeben werden, dann erscheint ein Abgrund sozusagen. Worin alles *Rausch* ist; einer, der sich nicht vorwärtsbewegt, der auf der Stelle tritt, vielmehr, auf der Stelle quillt. Jede Art Wachheit, die gesamte Kultur wird als bloßer gehemmter Trieb verneint. Der Denker Klages will sie mitsamt der *Wurzel* abtragen. Diese ist ihm *verstandeshaft* schlechthin, von Anfang an. Der ursprüngliche Mensch steht gegen den bewußten, gezüchteten, zuchtvollen, Seele holt auf gegen Geist. Der heutige, gänzlich ausgelaufene Betrieb ist nur das Ende von Zerstörungen, welche von vornherein im *Willen und Verstand* angelegt waren. Alles dermaßen Gezüchtete ist dekadent, *Wachheit die Krankheit* an sich, Geist eine Überwucherung der grauen Hirnrinde. Zahllose Worte verwendet Klages *gegen das Bewußtsein*, das das Leben immer wieder in Ichs und Teile zerfällt; es hat von Anfang an eine zersetzende, zerstörende, analysierende, atomisierende Funktion. Nur das Ticken des Ich tötet den Strom, nur die Selbstsucht und das Ich-Bewußtsein, das ihr entspricht, bringen den Abfall von der Lebensganzheit; *geistige Kultur* überhaupt ist ein einziger Irrweg von den Lebensquellen fort. ... Der Mensch ist als einziges Wesen aus dem Instinkt und Lebensstrom herausgetreten, gerade als homo sapiens. Noch die Primitiven meistern ihre Seele nicht, sondern fühlen sich von ihr, als einer allgemeinen, als einem Bilderstrom, als einer objektiven Macht gespeist und abhängig. Aber in der 'Geschichte' drang da molochitische Wesen des *Bewußtseins* vor, sperrte die Menschen in sich ein, fraß die Gemeinschaft mit ihresgleichen wie mit dem lebenspulsenden, bilderdurchfluteten All. (ibid. 330-331; my italics)

This passage offers a comprehensive polemical summary of Klages' philosophy. Klages is described by Bloch as a radical Romantic, who uncritically rejects modern culture on the whole as a course straying from the path of nature. For Bloch, radical Romantics like Klages have a "doppelt falschen Bewußtsein" (ibid. 124). They do not see the *actual* contradictions

[309] In his theoretical chapter on the notion of '*Ungleichzeitigkeit*' Bloch offers a lucid analysis of the causes of the pervasiveness of anachronistic ideological formations in Weimar Germany (which he calls "das klassische Land der Ungleichzeitigkeit", *EDZ* 114), and provides a useful historico-intellectual contextualization for the reactionary *Kulturkritik* from Nietzsche onwards. Bloch accounts for German anti-modernism with the survival of "unüberwundenen Reste älteren ökonomischen Seines und Bewußtseins" (ibid.), which the Nazis were eventually able to exploit to their own advantage.

of the present, and thus prove unable to think of possible solutions for them (which for Bloch of course are of a Marxist-revolutionary kind). On account of this inability, they also flee into escapist mental constructions and worlds of romance, in the fallacious hope of recovering there the intact origins of life. However, this return to origins is a pious phantasmal illusion (“‘ursprügliche’ Natur ist daran nirgends”, ibid. 335). According to Bloch,

> Gerade die *echten* metaphysischen Umtriebe, die dem Großbürgertum noch geblieben und dialektisch brauchbar sind (so bei Bergson, dem eigentlichen Vitalisten), verbinden sich heute mit Wachheit, ja mit ‘Zivilisation’, nicht mit verärgerter Provinzseele. ... Die schlechte Entzauberten, die sich deshalb als Bewußtseinsfeinde erscheinen, haben im dionysischen Bewußtseinsrest noch nie Anderes gefunden als Archäologie, und wollten sie hier Substanz, so stießen sie erst recht auf heilloses Vorbei. (ibid. 336)

As it does for Adorno, Klages’ *Lebensphilosophie* (unlike that of Dilthey) represents also for Bloch a return to barbarism by way of a sham, chimerical metaphysics. This explains Bloch’s defense of modern civilization against Klages’ radical condemnation of it. In *EDZ*, however, Bloch does not entirely dismiss Klages’ anti-modernism as a form of Romantic escapism concealing a barbaric ideology. Surprisingly, given his Marxist presuppositions, he also points out the *utopian* component of Klages’ archaistic philosophy. Bloch explains his peculiar position towards the reactionary and Romantic cultural criticism of Weimar Germany in the following terms:

> Niemals ... wäre der subjektiv ungleichzeitige Widerspruch so scharf ... bestünde kein objektiv *gleichzeitiger*, nämlich der in und mit dem *heutigen Kapitalismus* selbst gesetzte und wachsende. Die anachronistische Verwilderung wie Erinnerung wird erst durch die Krise freigesetzt und antwortet auf deren objektiv revolutionären Widerspruch mit einem subjektiv wie objektiv reaktionären, nämlich eben ungleichzeitig. (ibid. 117-118; italics in original)

The reactionary Neo-Romantics’ opposition against ‘capitalist’ modernity (their “echter ungleichzeitiger Widerspruch”, ibid. 122), has for Bloch a revolutionary virtue. Based on this consideration, he formulates his ideas on the underground affinity between Communist revolution and reactionary anti-modernism: “Die zum Umschlag unkräftigen Momente des ungleichzeitigen Widerspruchs haben ... sentimental oder romantisch, *jener Ganzheit und Lebendigkeit* sich bereits erinnert, woraus der Kommunismus echte Materie gegen die

Entäußerung zieht" (ibid. 121). Reactionary Romanticism expresses "unaufgearbeitete Intentionsinhalte der Vergangenheit" (ibid. 117), and thus gives voice – though in a distorted way – to the Marxist utopia "des ganzen Menschen, der unentäußerten Arbeit, des Paradieses auf Erden" (ibid. 121). In the chapter of *EDZ* titled "Ungleichzeitigkeit und Pflicht zu ihrer Dialektitk" Bloch therefore lays the theoretical foundation for his project of dialectical appropriation of reactionary thought for Marxist and progressive (or rather revolutionary) ideological purposes. For Bloch, the task of dialectical materialism is that of appropriating or 'occupying' reactionary *Ungleichzeitigkeit* in order to fuel the oncoming Marxist revolution with its utopian images and ideas (see *EDZ* 16 ff.). The ultimate objective of Marxist thought, according to the Communist philosopher, should be that of fulfilling the cultural critical bequest of German reactionary Neo-Romanticism in a progressive sense, through its dialectization.

Bloch's notion of dialectization of conservative and reactionary thought and ideology sheds light on Adorno's subterranean confrontation with Klages' philosophy (as well as with Borchardt's poetic theory) in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. In it, Adorno seems in fact to put into practice what Bloch explicitly theorizes in *EDZ*. Adorno does so by practicing a subtle *dialectical appropriation* and *progressive inversion* of the Neo-Romantic and reactionary heritage of Weimar Germany, represented in Adorno's text by Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages. As a consequence of this strategy, Adorno's text reflects at the level of discourse the "Problem einer mehr-schichtigen Dialektik" (ibid. 122), which Bloch indeed saw as the main challenge for a philosophical interpretation of the present. For Bloch, the task of progressive philosophy at his time consisted therein,

> jene Totalität zu halten, welche der dialektischen Entwicklungstendenz ... eignet. Mehrzeitliche und mehrräumige Dialektik, die Polyrhythmik und der Kontrapunkt solcher Dialektik sind derart gerade das Instrument der *beherrschten* letzten Stufe oder Totalität; nicht jeder selbstverständlich schlechthin, sondern der kritischen, der nicht-kontemplativen, der praktisch einhakenden. (ibid. 124; italics in original)

Marxist thought should aim to conceptually *master* the non-simultaneity of the objective, material-economical tendencies and the subjective, cultural-ideological formations of the present ("des Ungleichzeitigen Herr [zu] werden", ibid.). This idea gives an important clue as to Adorno's 'poetics of critique' in *DA* (see Helmling 2009). In the *Odyssey* chapter of this work, Bloch's idea of a militant dialectical philosophy translates into a contrapuntal style of

thought that literally incorporates and in so doing inverts the Neo-Romantic anachronism or non-simultaneity of its ideological opponents. Adorno applies this procedure – further complicated in his text by an allegorical mode of exposition – particularly strongly with respect to Klages. Through his stylization of Odysseus as a willing and self-conscious, lucid and pragmatic, sly and alert hero, Adorno provides a sort of figurative counterpoint to Klages' fiction of the Pelasgians as a passive and natural, pious and image-bound aboriginal people. The result is a positive evaluation of civilization, not so much in its specific contemporary form, but rather as a condition of mind marked by self-awareness, alertness and lucidity. In truth, Adorno does not think it possible to conceive of a non-instrumental attitude of the 'spirit'. The difference between good and bad progress of civilization is the use that men make of their 'natural' inclination towards rational instrumentality.

In the present section of this chapter, I will concentrate on yet another example of Adorno's strategy of dialectical appropriation and inversion of Klages' philosophy, namely his interpretation of Odysseus' first descent into the underworld, referred to as the *Nekya* episode of the *Odyssey*. Adorno's reading of this episode has to be regarded as a tacit counterpoint to Klages' archaistic theory of images (*Bilder*). As I have shown previously, 'true' reality is for Klages not so much the reality of 'things', but rather the reality of sensed soul images. The latter represent the esoteric core, so to speak, of Klages' 'aesthetic ontology' (Moretti 2001), based on the tenet of man's imaginary relation to the world. Klages understands image perception (or rather 'reception') not in sensualistic terms, but rather as a hermeneutic process grounded in unique subjective experience (see *GW* 189). He calls this process '*Schauung*', which he defines as the "Eindringen[...] in die Tiefen des erscheinenden Wesens ... einen Vorgang, durch den ein aufnehmendes und empfangendes Lebenszentrum mit einem gebenden und wirkenden Lebenszentrum in Verkehrt tritt" (ibid. 182). Such highly subjective experience of reality through imagination is not arbitrary for Klages, but has its own kind of binding objectivity. As a matter of fact, only the 'absorption' of soul images makes true experience possible: "Da ... nur Ähnliches mit Ähnlichem sich ins Einvernehmen zu setzen vermag, so sind die unmittelbaren Inhalte alles nur erdenklichen Erlebens ... nicht etwa Dinge mit ihren Eigenschaften, sondern lebendige Mächte" (ibid. 190). These 'living powers' remain 'impressed' on the soul as contemplated images or "Anschauungsbilder", which Klages understands as "Erscheinungen, nicht zwar der in Wachheit ja gar nicht erscheinungsfähigen Dinge, wohl aber der Wesen oder Seelen, deren wolkenhaftes Werden, Wachsen, Vergehen, vom Schicksal der Welt der Sinn ist" (ibid. 182). Such images are the living expression of life 'powers', (the "Lebensäußerung" of a "Lebenszentrum"), which gets

‘interiorized’ from a passively receiving soul through a process that Klages describes as “Innerung einer Äußerung” (ibid. 182). Klages’ ‘’ are thus the essence of his idea of an animistic self-abandonment to reality. Consequently, Klages argues that, whenever they offer themselves to perception, these images cannot be ‘grasped’ through the intellect, but on the contrary are bound to grasp and take hold of the sensing subject (“niemals unmittelbar begriffen wird, weil es der Inbegriff eines schlechthin nur *Ergreifenden* ist”, ibid. 1253; my italics).

Klages’ theory of images proposes in earnest a modern version of animism, which tries to recuperate the deepest layers of subjective experience for philosophical knowledge. It is upon this idea of animistic experience that he bases his *lebensphilosophische* criticism of civilization and pseudo-anthropological fiction of the Pelasgians' world. My contention is that Klages’ overtly anti-intellectualist theory of images in a way shapes Adorno’s interpretation of Odysseus’ descent into the underworld in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. The *Nekya* episode of the *Odyssey* contains a number of narrative and fictional elements that enable Adorno to relate it to Klages’ theory of soul images, as I intend to show through a close analysis of Adorno’s text.

In the 10th book of the *Odyssey*, the sorceress Circe advises Odysseus to go to Hades, the underground abode of dead souls. There he shall receive instructions about what to do in order to find his way to Ithaca from the soul of the diviner Tiresias[310]. Odysseus follows

[310] “‘Ulysses, noble son of Laertes, you shall none of you stay here any longer if you do not want to, but there is another journey which you have got to take before you can sail homewards. You must go to the house of Hades and of dread Proserpine to consult the ghost of the blind Theban prophet Teiresias, whose reason is still unshaken. To him alone has Proserpine left his understanding even in death, but the other ghosts flit about aimlessly’. // I was dismayed when I heard this. I sat up in bed and wept, and would gladly have lived no longer to see the light of the sun, but presently when I was tired of weeping and tossing myself about, I said, ‘And who shall guide me upon this voyage – for the house of Hades is a port that no ship can reach’. // ‘You will want no guide’, she answered; ‘raise your mast, set your white sails, sit quite still, and the North Wind will blow you there of itself. When your ship has traversed the waters of Oceanus, you will reach the fertile shore of Proserpine’s country with its groves of tall poplars and willows that shed their fruit untimely; here beach your ship upon the shore of Oceanus, and go straight on to the dark abode of Hades. You will find it near the place where the rivers Pyriphlegethon and Cocytus (which is a branch of the river Styx) flow into Acheron, and you will see a rock near it, just where the two roaring rivers run into one another. // ‘When you have reached this spot, as I now tell you, dig a trench a cubit or so in length, breadth, and depth, and pour into it as a drink-offering to all the dead, first, honey mixed with milk, then wine, and in the third place wate – sprinkling white barley meal over the whole. Moreover you must offer many prayers to the poor feeble ghosts, and promise them that when you get back to Ithaca you will sacrifice a barren heifer to them, the best you have, and will load the pyre with good things. More particularly you must promise that Teiresias shall have a black sheep all to himself, the finest in all your flocks. // ‘When you shall have thus besought the ghosts with your prayers, offer them a ram and a black ewe, bending their heads towards Erebus; but yourself turn away from them as though you would make towards the river. On this, many dead men's ghosts will come to you, and you must tell your men to skin the two sheep that you have just killed, and offer them as a burnt sacrifice with prayers to Hades and to Proserpine. Then draw your sword and sit there, so as to prevent any other poor ghost from coming near the split blood before Teiresias shall have answered your questions. The seer will presently come to you, and will tell you about your voyage – what stages you are to make, and how you are to sail the sea so as to reach your home’” (Homer 1900, 10th book).

Circe's advice: the 11th book of the *Odyssey* reports his descent into the realm of the dead. Upon arrival in Hades, he offers prayers and animal sacrifices to the gods of the underworld, Hades and Proserpine. Having done this, the souls of the dead – including that of Odysseus' mother, who has departed during his long absence from Ithaca – approach him and his comrades, attracted by the split blood of the sacrificed animals (a ram and a black ewe). Though he is deeply moved by this vision, Odysseus does as he has been advised by Circe, and keeps the spirits away from the sacrifice. The ritual is in fact performed primarily for Tiresias, so that he might approach Odysseus and prophesize his future[311].

Adorno's presents Odysseus' visit to Hades in the 11th book of the *Odyssey* as a truly Klagesian '*Bilderschauung*'. However, this is a frightening and painful episode for the hero, not an ecstatic one. In the underworld, Odysseus encounters the souls of friends (above all that of the recently passed Elpeanor) and family (his mother); he is thus literally faced with his own past images and beloved memories. Yet the experience that he has in the underworld forces him to confront the unbridgeable gap separating the living and the dead. Adorno describes this experience as follows:

> Die äußerste Station der eigentlichen Irrfahrt ist eine im *Bilderreich*. *Aber* es ist der Hades. Die *Bilder*, die der Abenteurer in der ersten Nekyia *anschaut*, sind vorweg jene matriarchalen, welche die Lichtreligion verbannt: nach der eigenen Mutter, der gegenüber Odysseus zur patriarchalen zweckvollen Härte sich zwingt, die uralten Heldinnen. Jedoch das *Bild der Mutter ist ohnmächtig, blind und sprachlos*, ein Wahngebild. ... *Es bedarf des geopferten Bluts* als Unterpfandes lebendiger Erinnerung, um *dem Bilde* die Sprache zu verleihen, durch die es, wie immer auch vergeblich und ephemer, der mythischen Stummheit sich entringt. (*GEO* 83, see also *DA* 94-95; my italics)

In my view, the whole passage reads like an allusion to Klages' theory of soul images and animistic contemplation, as suggested by the invocation of Klagesian notions and vocabulary ("Bild", "Opfer", "Blut", "Anschauung"). In fact, it would be difficult to explain the apparently unjustified adversative particle '*aber*' in the above sentence otherwise than as a polemical reference to Klages' philosophy[312]. As Adorno says, Odysseus eventually comes to the 'realm of images' ("Bilderreich"), which *however* is merely Hades, the abode of *dead* soul

[311] "Then came the ghost of my dead mother Anticlea, daughter to Autolycus. I had left her alive when I set out for Troy and was moved to tears when I saw her, but even so, for all my sorrow I would not let her come near the blood till I had asked my questions of Teiresias" (Homer 1900, 11th book).

[312] In the final version of the *Odyssey* chapter the tacit polemical reference to Klages' 'realm of images' completely disappears: "Die äußerste Station der eigentlichen Irrfahrt ist keine ... Zufluchtsstätte. Es ist der Hades" (*DA* 95).

images. In this sense, one should also understand Adorno's remark that the images/souls of the dead – above all that of Odysseus' beloved mother – are blind and mute "blind und sprachlos"), powerless phantoms, as such unable to directly communicate with Odysseus.

Adorno on the one hand suggests that sacrifice is the only way these souls can be revived and *appear* to have some sort of communion with the living. It is indeed through the spilling of blood that they are momentarily brought to speech and become able to talk with Odysseus[313]. On the other hand, Adorno also underlines the fact that, even if conjured up through sacrifice, the souls are mere nostalgic appearances, pale shadows of living images. In spite of sacrifice, their coming to light is illusory. Odysseus experiences this bitterly as he tries to embrace the soul of his mother, who explains to him the truth about the condition of the souls of the dead in Hades[314]. The attempt to communicate (or enter a communion, as Klages imagines it) with the dead souls is in vain ("vergeblich und ephemer"), since they are not truly accessible to the living.

Adorno's remarks all implicitly point to the inadequacy of Klages' Romantic theory of 'images' and related understanding of sacrifice. The latter, according to Klages, is performed in the archaic community not only for the demons of nature, but also for the souls of dead ancestors[315]. In Klages' Pelasgian vision, not only the sacrificial cult of images, but also the related cult of the dead plays a fundamental role[316]. The ancestors represent the past of the

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[313] Adorno's interpretation is not allegorical, but strictly follows the text of the epic. After having heard Tiresias' prophecy, Odysseus asks him: "'Tell me true, I see my poor mother's ghost close by us; she is sitting by the blood without saying a word, and though I am her own son she does not remember me and speak to me; tell me, Sir, how I can make her know me'. // 'That', said he, 'I can soon do. Any ghost that you let taste of the blood will talk with you like a reasonable being, but if you do not let them have any blood they will go away again'" (Homer 1900, 11th book).

[314] After having heard from the soul of his mother about the cause of her death, Odysseus vainly tries to embrace her: "Then I tried to find some way of embracing my poor mother's ghost. Thrice I sprang towards her and tried to clasp her in my arms, but each time she flitted from my embrace as it were a dream or phantom, and being touched to the quick I said to her, 'Mother, why do you not stay still when I would embrace you? If we could throw our arms around one another we might find sad comfort in the sharing of our sorrows even in the house of Hades; does Proserpine want to lay a still further load of grief upon me by mocking me with a phantom only?' // 'My son,' she answered, 'most ill-fated of all mankind, it is not Proserpine that is beguiling you, but all people are like this when they are dead. The sinews no longer hold the flesh and bones together; these perish in the fierceness of consuming fire as soon as life has left the body, and the soul flits away as though it were a dream'". (Homer 1900, 11th book).

[315] Klages himself underlines the close connection between his theory of soul images and understanding of sacrifice in the following passage of *GW*: "Seele ist Schauung ... sie schaut aber die Wirklichkeit der Urbilder – Urbilder sind erscheinende Vergangenheitsseelen – zum Erscheinen bedürfen sie der Verbindung mit dem *Blute* leibhaft Lebendiger" (cited in *EDZ* 332; italics in original). Although Klages does not merely understand this blood connection in terms of bloody sacrifice, the latter is a constitutive part of his idea of communication with the souls of the past.

[316] In *EDZ* Ernst Bloch shows how this is a logical consequence of Klages' exclusive orientation towards the past: "das Bild [duldet] keine mögliche Nähe, keine Greifbarkeit wie das Ding, sondern ist Ferne schlechthin. ... Was aber in dieser Bildferne erscheint, die eigentümliche Klangfarbe der Sehnsucht in ihr, was an den Sternen gerade durch Abwesenheit glänzt und sie zu begehren verbietet: diese Ferne ist allemal zugleich das Urvergangene. In der räumlichen Distanz einen Gegenstands erscheint seine zeitliche ... und zwar erscheint sie nicht etwa als Ferne der Zukunft, die bei Klages zum unwirklichsten Hirngespinst wird, sondern lediglich als

community and therefore cyclically require a reverent homage from its members in the form of immolation. This is what Odysseus does in the *Nekya*; however his 'service to the dead' assumes in Adorno's reading an entirely different significance from the one Klages ascribes to it in his vision of Pelasgian culture. The polemical reference to Klages' philosophy becomes even more explicit in the continuation of the above passage, where Adorno seems to draw a tacit conclusion from his inexplicit comparison of Odysseus' Hades descent with Klages' theory of images:

> Erst indem Subjektivität in der Erkenntnis der *Nichtigkeit der Bilder* ihrer selbst mächtig wird, gewinnt sie Anteil an der Hoffnung, welche die Bilder vergeblich bloß versprechen. Das gelobte Land des Odysseus ist *nicht das archaische Bilderreich*. Alle die Bilder geben ihm endlich *als Schatten* in der Totenwelt ihr wahres Wesen frei, *den Schein*. Er wird ihrer ledig, nachdem er einmal als Tote sie erkannt und mit der herrischen Geste der Selbsterhaltung vom *Opfer* fortgewiesen hat, das er nur denen zukommen läßt, die ihm *Wissen* gewähren, dienstbar seinem Leben, darin die *Gewalt des Mythos nur noch als Imagination, in Geist versetzt, sich behauptet*. (*GEO* 84, *DA* 95; my italics)

Archaic images are inane shadows of memory, their corporeal appearance a mere illusion ("Schein"), and not a reality, as in Klages' theory of the '*Wirklichkeit der Bilder*'[317]. As such, they cannot serve for present purposes. Odysseus' mother herself points this out to him and consequently urges him to leave the underworld and resume his journey to Ithaca in the world of light. There, his wife is still waiting for him[318]. There is no hope for Odysseus in Hades: the

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Ahnenbild, als *Totenkult* des im Gegenstand geschauten Fernbilds" (*EDZ* 339, my italics). According to Bloch Klages is only able to conceive of archaic images ("kontempliert archaische ... Bilder", ibid. 340), which can have no possible significance for the present. At the end, his animistic philosophy of life paradoxically becomes a cult of death: "bei Klages utopisiert sich nur Vergangenes als solches und ewig; der Traum der Vergangenen wird zur Vergangenheit des Traums, zum Totenkult, weniger noch: zum *Totenkult der – Totenkulte selber*" (ibid.; my italics).

[317] Though this is not entirely in contradiction with Klages' theory, according to which soul images ought to be understood as a "schattenhafte[r] Rest ... [der] niemals unmittelbar begriffen wird, weil es der Inbegriff eines schlechthin nur Ergreifenden ist" (*GW* 1253). Adorno on the contrary intentionally underlines the unreality of the images of the underworld in the *Odyssey*. His interpretation in this respect might have been corroborated by the reading of Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, who considered the figures of the Hades as mere 'eidola' (therefore unreal) and traced the ritual of blood drinking to actual sacrificial practices for the dead still existing at Homer's times (see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1988, 194).

[318] "'Now, however, go back to the light of day as soon as you can, and note all these things that you may tell them to your wife hereafter'" (Homer 1900, 11th book). This touching scene fits Adorno's reading of the *Nekya*: the soul of Odysseus' mother herself urges him to go back to the realm of life and pursue his journey home, so that he might meet his wife again and tell her about all that he has experienced during his wanderings (above all in the Hades). The shadow of Odysseus' mother thus suggests the priority of his present concerns over the memory of the dead and the claims of the dead souls. The mother's wish that Odysseus might one day tell Penelope about his adventures in the underworld furthermore supports Adorno's thesis about the centrality of storytelling as both the motive and instrument of Odysseus' struggle for survival in the Homeric epic.

archaic realm of images is not his longed-for promised (home)land. Again, the reference to Klages is quite evident in the above passage[319]. Adorno's remark, "Das gelobte Land des Odysseus ist nicht das archaische Bilderreich" can in my opinion only be plausibly explained as an implicit reference to Klages' theory of images and archaistic philosophy[320].

The hope that Adorno refers to in this passage ("Hoffnung, welche die Bilder vergeblich bloß versprechen") is that of returning home – or maybe the wish to already *be* back home – which the images of the dead promise in vain. Though Odysseus is touched by the sight of them (especially that of his mother), the dead have no practicable knowledge to yield to the living, and therefore must be left behind by the rational-pragmatic hero as he heads towards his earthly home. Through the recognition of the souls' uselessness for the present, Odysseus is indeed reminded of the real goal of his striving, namely the return to his actual homeland, Ithaca. Translated into Adorno's theoretical vocabulary, subjectivity becomes truly self-empowered ("ihrer selbst mächtig") by realizing the inanity of a nostalgic relation to the past (in Freudian terms, it becomes mature by interiorizing the reality principle).

In this episode, Odysseus is once again depicted by Adorno as an anti-romantic, fully disenchanted, sober and lucid hero. He does not yield to the romantic temptation of nostalgia, and he does not let himself be enchanted and hampered in his homecoming journey by the chimera of a *promised land* that in truth has yet to be reached[321]. As Adorno points out, the hero duly pays his sacrificial homage only to the seer Tiresias, who can effectively show him his way home. His service to the memory of the ancestors – which Klages celebrates as a

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[319] Adorno's criticism also indirectly applies to the restorative archaism of Borchardt, whose project of "schöpferische[n] Wiedererlebnis der Vergangenheit", based on cultural critical rejection of the present, implied "wie Herakles in die Unterwelt zu gehen, um die Toten zu holen, oder wie Theseus den Freund" (cited in Breuer 1995, 167). This idea can also be found in Hofmannstahl's "Das Schrifttum als geistiger Raum der Nation". According to the Austrian literate the German national community ought to renew itself through a communication with the 'dead', that is to say through a conscious return to tradition in the medium of language (see Breuer 1995, 231).

[320] The description of the Hades as a "archaisches Bilderreich" is not an element of the Homeric epic, but rather the result of Adorno's reading Klages' theory into the *Nekya* episode of the *Odyssey*. Furthermore in no place of the *Odyssey* the Hades is described as Odysseus' 'promised land'. Odysseus himself is far from actually believing that he has reached such a place. Adorno's original connotation of the Hades is much rather due to his implicit polemic against Klages.

[321] Adorno's interpretation of the *Nekya* episode of the *Odyssey* as a central part of Odysseus' 'enlightement' parable is supported by the assumption of a number of classic philologists – like J. W. A. Kirchhoff (*Die homerische Odyssee*, 1879) and J. A. K. Thomson (*Studies in the Odyssey*, 1914) – that the legend of Odysseus' descent into the Hades pertains to the oldest layer of the *Nostos*, which represents the original narrative core of the epic: "Folgt man Kirchhoff in der Annahme, dass der Besuch des Odysseus in der Unterwelt zur ältesten, eigentlich sagenhaften Schicht des Epos gehört, so ist es diese älteste Schicht zugleich, in welcher ein Zug – so wie in der Überlieferung von den Unterweltsfahrten des Orpheus und des Herakles – über den Mythos am entschiedensten hinausgeht, wie denn das Motiv der Sprengung der Höllenpforten, der Abschaffung des Todes die innerste Zelle jeglichen antimythologischen Gedankens ausmacht" (*GEO* 84, *DA* 95-96).

cultic performance that is in itself significant – can only have a *progressive function*, namely that of ensuring his progress towards his civilized homeland.

Through his reading of the *Nekya* episode of the *Odyssey*, Adorno indirectly seeks to demystify Klages' archaistic exaltation of sacrifice to soul images by underscoring both their distance from and inanity for the purposes and concerns of the living. Adorno in a way thus submits Klages' animistic theory of images to a utilitarian criticism. The result is a confutation of Klages' philosophy by way of contradictory appropriation and dialectization. This process applies not only to Klages' theory of images and apologetics of sacrifice, but also to his entire animistic philosophy and archaistic worldview. As a matter of fact, in the above passage, Adorno seems to expand his progressive theory of sacrifice (as subjective self-sacrifice) into an enlightened theory of myth. The latter is not entirely liquidated through Odysseus' homecoming (i.e., in the process of civilization), but rather preserved in spirit, literally, through the work of – indeed *as* – imagination ("darin die Gewalt des Mythos nur noch als Imagination, in Geist versetzt, sich behauptet")[322]. The souls of the dead in the *Odyssey* do not hamper Odysseus' course, but rather help him further along by giving him precious advice (Tiresias) and spurring him to resume his journey in daylight (his mother). In other words, Odysseus retains that which is necessary for his homecoming from the figures of the ancestors (which have already become 'mythical' in Hades).

In a sort of tacit dialogue with Klages' animistic philosophy, through his reading of Odysseus' descent into the underworld Adorno suggests that the claims and concerns of the 'soul' can only be fulfilled and satisfied through the conscious activity of the spirit. The enlightened subject can only hope to find a 'home' by recognizing present duties and warding off all regressive temptations. This argument sounds like an inversion of Klages' anti-intellectualist philosophy, which Adorno absorbs and sublates into his enlightened theory of subjectivity and progressive philosophy of civilization.

Adorno's progressive dialectization of Klages' archaic philosophy is however not restricted to the latter's theory of sacrifice and images. In fact, Adorno uses his confrontation with Klages as a pretext to address a more general concern that he had at the time of writing *DA*, philosophical and personal at the same time. I am referring to his concern with the notion of '*Heimat*', which must have been of particularly burning relevance for the exiled philosopher in the early 40s. The temptation here would be to trace Adorno's reflections on this topic in *DA* back to his condition as a émigré in California at the time. Such interpretation

[322] Bloch uses the same argument against Klages in *EDZ*: "Gerade die Wurzel zu allen 'Mythen': das erstaunte Geheimnis des Menschen und der Welt – wandert immer wieder neu durch den *Bewußtseinsraum*" (*EDZ* 336; my italics).

of the *Odyssey* chapter would certainly be enticing, and would probably reveal something significant about what led Adorno to write about the *Odyssey in the way* he did. However, such an attempt could hardly do more than suggest the psychological implications of Adorno's depiction of Odysseus as an unvanquished hero of civilization, as well as the reasons behind a possible identificatory projection. Furthermore, such an attempt would not fit the objective of the present work, which aims to show the presence and influence of two conservative and reactionary intellectuals on the textual facture and argumentative structure of the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*. For this reason, I will leave aside the personal side of the story – namely Adorno's exilic condition – and concentrate instead on the textual evidence of Adorno's engagement with the notion of *Heimat*.

As I have shown in the previous section, Odysseus' promised homeland is for Adorno not Klages' archaic realm of images: "*Das Totenreich*, wo die depotenzierten Mythen sich versammeln, ist *der Heimat* am fernsten. Nur in der *äußersten Ferne* kommuniziert es mit ihr" (*GEO* 84, *DA* 95; my italics). Odysseus cannot truly communicate with the dead souls, impotent images of an irrecoverable past, which can only be brought to speak through bloody sacrifice. Yet Adorno also points out that the realm of the dead is not entirely extraneous to the returning hero. As a matter of fact, the encounter with the familiar images of home – his dead mother, friends and acquaintances – reminds Odysseus of his goal, and reinforces his hope of eventually reaching Ithaca. This is why Adorno affirms that, in utter distance from it, the underworld realm of images 'communicates' with Odysseus' *Heimat* ("in der äußersten Ferne kommuniziert es mit ihr").

Adorno's use of the term *Heimat* is not casual at this point of the *Odyssey* chapter. Here, the implicit polemic against Klages broadens onto a larger confrontation with the cultural and intellectual context in which Adorno's work ought to be located. *Heimat* was the guiding concept of all Neo-Romantic cultural movements, broadly speaking – from the *Heimat*- and *Naturschutzbewegung* to the *Wandervogel* and *Jugendbewegung*, just to name a few (see Sieferle 1984, 161 ff. and 166 ff.) – that had emerged in Germany around the turn of the 20th century in response to the sweeping processes of modernization that had radically transformed the country in the preceding decades[323]. Furthermore, *Heimat* was traditionally a

[323] In his comprehensive study of the German tradition of *Fortschritts*- and *Technikkritik* Rolf Peter Sieferle has shown the programmatically anti-modernist positions of the variety of 'life reform' movements of turn-of-the-century and Weimar Germany: "Natur und Landschaft wurden auf einmal mit neuen Augen gesehen. Im gleichen Augenblick, da man hoffte, in ihnen drücke sich da überlegen deutsche Wesen aus, mußte man entdecken, daß ihre Eigenart kurz vor der Zerstörung, vor der industriellen Nivellierung stand. Viele suchten jetzt einen Weg aus den Steinwürsten der Zivilisation, eine Jugendbewegung brach in die Wälder auf, trieb Sport, gruppierte sich um Lagerfeuer und schwärmte vom ‚einfachen Leben'. Eine verwirrende Vielfalt von Reformbewegungen trat hervor, die dem Bedürfnis nach einer neuen, wahrhaftigeren Lebensführung, einer Abkehr von der Äußerlichkeit

key concept of conservative and reactionary thought, along with the different forms of anti-modernist *Zivilisationskritik* that it tended to produce[324]. This was the case both before and during the Weimar period, when it also became a fundamental ideologeme (or ideological 'image') of the *völkische* movements. The term was finally appropriated by Nazi ideology, becoming a cornerstone of the Germanic mythology of blood, earth and origins ('*Blut und Boden*') and a propaganda catchword standing for the whole complex of Germanness (i.e., Germanic roots, German homeland), with all that this implied (*Lebensraum* politics, Germanization of space, culture, etc.). By the time of the Nazis, this semantically polyvalent, affect-laden German word had lost its innocent Romantic connotation, becoming a frightening ideological phantom[325].

It is through this history of misappropriation and misuse that Adorno perceived the word in the early 40s, at the time of writing of *DA*. This history explains the reasons for Adorno's engagement with the notion of *Heimat* in the final part of his *Odyssey* chapter, immediately following – not by chance – his interpretation of Odysseus' descent into Hades. My contention is that Adorno's apparently fleeting remark, towards the end of the chapter, that the realm of the dead is 'farthest from home' ("der Heimat am fernsten") is evidence of his preoccupation with this central conceptual category and ideological cornerstone of much German anti-modernist thought and reactionary *Zivilisationskritik* in his time (one need only think of Heidegger's earth-bound philosophy). In what follows I would like to show how, in the last part of his work on the Odyssey, Adorno critically targets the Romantic and reactionary notion of *Heimat* as a 'mythical' nexus between nature and culture, a space of

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und dem Protzentum der Gründerjahre gerecht werden wollte. Erwähnt seien nur der Vegetarismus, Makrobiotik, Antialkoholismus, Freikörperkultur, Reformtrachten (gegen Korsett und BH), Ausdruckstanz, Wandervogel und Gartenstadtbewegung" (Sieferle 1984, 156).

[324] "Die romantische Utopie prägte das Denken derjenigen, die überhaupt einen Sinn für die herausziehenden Umweltveränderungen besaßen. Inhalt dieser Utopie war die Idee der '*Heimat*': Sie beschwor den *Dreiklang von Volk, Natur und Individuum*, eine organische Symbiose, die Wurzel jeder wahren und lebendigen Kultur sein sollte. 'Natur' wurde in diesem Zusammenhang als eine ganz bestimmte Landschaft aufgefaßt, die den eigentümlichen Lebensraums des Volkes bildete, das diese Landschaft als Kulturlandschaft geschaffen hatte und dessen 'Wesen' mit dieser Landschaft harmonisierte. Das Volk besitzt seine nationale Seele, seine ,'eigentliche' Identität in dieser Landschaft, ohne die es 'entwurzelt' und verloren ist" (Sieferle 1987, 187; my italics). The persistence of this Romantic ideology also explains the literary phenomenon of the *Agrarromantik*, in particular the success, well into the 30s, of the genre of the *Bauernromane*, which idealized life in the countryside, enclosed within the horizon of the 'original' community and at close contact with the native sod (see Delabar 2010, 177 ff., Haß 1985). At a philosophical level, Oswald Spengler is a prominent exponent of this reactionary *Heimat*-ideal: "Die Weltstadt bedeutet den Kosmopolitismus an Stelle der '*Heimat*'. den kühlen Tatsachensinn an Stelle der Ehrfurcht vor dem Überlieferten und Gewachsenen, die wissenschaftliche Irreligion als Petrefakt der voraufgegangenen Religion des Herzens, die 'Gesellschaft' an Stelle des Staates, die natürlichen statt der erworbenen Rechte" (Spengler1988, 46).

[325] The term '*Heimat*' also plays an role in Adorno's 1957 essay "Zum Gedächtnis Eichendorffs", in which Adorno calls into question the conservative cult that had developed around him in the one hundred years after his death: "Er war kein Dichter der *Heimat* sondern der des Heimwehs, im Sinne des Novalis, dem er nahe sich wußte" (*GS* 11, 73).

quasi-organic earth bondage and belonging, where 'primordial' nature and 'original' culture would meet; this conceptualization of the term *Heimat* can be found prominently in the cultural critical philosophies of both Ludwig Klages and Oswald Spengler. Adorno subsequently seeks to re-define *Heimat* as a transcendental – that is to say constitutive yet shifting – horizon of (inter-)subjective formation in the process of civilization. The Odyssey, as the paradigmatic Western narration of homecoming, serves Adorno to semantically charge *Heimat* with connotations opposite to its Neo-Romantic and *völkische* transfiguration.

For Adorno, nostalgia (literally 'homesickness', as '*Heimweh*') is an important concept for understanding the Odyssey, or at least his Odyssey: "Heimweh ist es, das die Abenteuer entbindet, durch welche Subjektivität, deren Urgeschichte die Odyssee gibt, der Vorwelt entrinnt" (*GEO* 85, *DA* 97). This sentence can be understood in a twofold sense, literally or figuratively. The first meaning is plainly evident. The story of the Odyssey begins roughly where the Iliad ends, with the hero coming home after 10 years of war in Troy. As we have seen, Adorno reads the Homeric epic as an allegorical narrative of the enlightened subjects' formation and struggle for self-preservation against the threat of regression to barbaric prehistory as represented by archaic myth. In this sense, Odysseus' homecoming stands for civilization's struggle against (and progress away from) barbarism in history.

The second, figurative sense suggested by Adorno in the above-quoted sentence is that the Odyssey is a narrative of self-trial and adventures, of discovery of unheard-of places and conditions of existence, furthermore of encounter and confrontation with the other. The Odyssey can be – and in fact often has been – read from this perspective as an endless 'nostalgic' search for the unknown, motivated not only by Odysseus' necessity of survival and the final goal of homecoming, but also by his curiosity, thirst for knowledge and drive for self-discovery. In this sense, the Odyssey is described by Adorno as an *Abenteuer*- and *Bildungsroman* ahead of its time, a proto-modern voyage of self-formation through trial and adventure.

However one wants to understand Adorno's statement about the nostalgic character of the Odyssey, its theoretical content is unambiguous: for Adorno, enlightened subjectivity forms within the horizon of homesickness, spurring the individual subject onto a journey of discoveries and adventures leading to self-development and maturation. In accordance with his ambivalent understanding of homesickness (*Heimweh*) as both the physical and metaphysical motor of the Odyssey, Adorno conceptualizes *Heimat* as an ambivalent notion; Odysseus' promised homeland is both concrete and transcendental:

> Wenn die feste Ordnung des Eigentums, die mit der Seßhaftigkeit gegeben ist, die Entfremdung der Menschen begründet, in der alles Heimweh und alle Sehnsucht nach dem verlorenen Urzustand entspringt, dann ist es doch zugleich Seßhaftigkeit und festes Eigentum, an dem allein der Begriff von *Heimat* sich bildet, auf den alle Sehnsucht und alles *Heimweh* sich richtet. (*GEO* 85, *DA* 97; my italics)

The strategy of dialectical self-inversion that is typical of Adorno's argumentative style produces in this passage a concept of *Heimat* that is intentionally multiple. *Heimat* is thereby constructed as an unstable concept, or rather as a 'dialectical image' (see Großheim 1997). '*Heimweh*' is consequently conceived as a double-track affective dynamics. The quoted passage consists in fact of two apparently contradictory statements, which stand for two different cultural critical arguments. The first part of the sentence seeks to provide a Marxist and materialist explanation of Romantic nostalgia: the property conditions and economic relations that are correlated with a sedentary condition of existence (as opposed to a nomadic one) are responsible for the alienation of man. Such alienation determines in its turn a Romantic, escapist nostalgia for the 'lost paradise' ("verlorenen Urzustand"), the original state of nature that has been abandoned and forgotten throughout the course of history. The sentence can thus be read as an allusion to the Neo-Romantic *Zivilisationskritik* and archaistic philosophy of Klages, for which Adorno provides a Marxist explanation – indeed almost an unexpected justification – by understanding it as a mere Romantic *reaction* to a given state of affairs (namely, as suggested by Adorno's Marxist's vocabulary, capitalist modernity).

The second part of the above sentence, however, presents a dialectical inversion of the preceding argument, as is typical of Adorno's intentionally self-contradictory procedure. The gist of this argument is as follows: while it is true that the material order – i.e., the property conditions and labor relations – of society determines man's alienation, and therefore the nostalgic search for a state in which this alienation still was not (or no longer will be) there, all genuine – i.e., not merely escapist – nostalgia is directed towards the stability, security and possibility of planning that only sedentary life ("Seßhaftigkeit und festes Eigentum") is able to provide[326]. Adorno seems to suggest that it is on these very concrete material and social premises that the notion and ideal of *Heimat* must be grounded. Romantic nostalgia alone is no sufficient condition and reliable guarantee for the achievement or realization of a truly human home.

[326] "Es schlägt sich darin die Erinnerung an Geschichte nieder, welche Seßhaftigkeit, die Voraussetzung aller *Heimat*, aufs nomadische Zeitalter folgen ließ" (*GEO* 85, *DA* 97).

Adorno's reflections about *Heimat* are no mere conceptual spinning of a Romantic literary figure and philosophical category. In the above passage, Adorno in fact concisely pins down the contradictory gist of the politically and ideologically laden discourses surrounding *Heimat* in Weimar Germany. The ambivalence of Adorno's reflections about *Heimat* mirrors the tensions inhabiting this and similar notions in Germany in the interwar period. In climate marked by ideological radicalism, opposing political parties, cultural streams and ideological formations – from the communist and socialist to the nationalist and *völkische* – would often combat each other through the use of similar discursive topoi and rhetorical arguments, slogans and catchwords (such as '*Volk*', '*Heimat*', '*Kultur*'; see Bollenbeck 1999 194 ff., Bollenbeck 2000).

Considering this context, '*Sehnsucht*' and '*Heimweh*' are apt words to convey the philosophical anthropology grounding the variety of cultural critical discourses in Weimar Germany, regardless of differing political orientations (see Merliot 2005, 86). As Gilbert Merliot notes, "La formule romantique de Novalis définissant l'homme comme quelqu'un qui va à la maison … est au fond l'image de la *patrie perdue* de la Kulturkritik conservatrice ou de la *patrie à venir* de la Gesellschaftskritik de gauche" (Merliot 2005, 102; my italics). Adorno himself refers to Novalis' *Heimat*-phrase in his *Odyssey* chapter, and appropriates it for his progressive ideological intentions[327]. Despite his contradictory conceptualization of *Heimat*, Adorno in fact leaves no doubt as to how he wants the term to be understood: "Die Definition des Novalis, derzufolge alle Philosophie Heimweh sei, behält recht nur, wenn dies Heimweh *nicht im Phantasma* eines verlorenen Ältesten aufgeht, sondern die *Heimat*, Natur selber als das dem Mythos erst Abgezwungene vorstellt" (*GEO 71, DA* 97; my italics). This passage reads as a tacit counterargument to both Klages' embedment of *Heimat* into a mythically conceived nature and Borchardt's reduction of *Heimat* to an earth-bound and past-oriented culture[328]. Adorno's explicitly anti-mythical inflection of Novalis' definition of

[327] In actuality in *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* Novalis defines philosophy (and not 'man' in general) as the drive to be (and not to go) at home 'everywhere': "Die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh – Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein".

[328] In his essay on the epistolary exchange between George and Hofmannsthal, in which he tries to 'save' the former from his own conservative political inclinations and aristocratic habitus, Adorno depicts him as a nomadic poet, belonging to that category of 'deracinated' literates that Borchardt and other right-wing cultural critics of his time directed their fierce tirades against: "Borchardt kontrastiert Hofmannsthal der 'zernichteten Bagage, die von keinem Hause mehr weiß als dem Kaffeehause, dem Pfandhause und dem verrufenen'. Solch schändliches Lob könnte George nicht gespendet werden, davon zu schweigen, daß der Wiener Schauplatz der Freundschaft mit Hofmannsthal nach allen Zeugnissen des Briefwechsels eben das Café ist. Klagend über einen unterbliebenen Besuch Hofmannsthals findet George ein Wort, das allein genügt, ihn untauglich zu machen zur Hetze gegen den Literaten: das von der 'landschaft als haus'. Die chthonische Erfahrung, die es anmeldet, ist aufs tiefste verschränkt mit der des Obdachlosen. *Homer* hat sein ganzes Epos aus dem *Heimweh* dessen hervorgesponnen, der Ithaka noch einmal sehen will. *Die Chthoniker von heutzutage kennen das Heimweh nicht. Sie sind immer bei sich zu Hause*. In Gedichten wie der ´Rückkehr´ des *Jahres der Seele* zeigt George ihnen sich

philosophy as a form of nostalgia functions as an implicit criticism of both Klages' and Borchardt's backward philosophical and cultural orientation, which gets exposed in the passage as form of misconceived Romanticism.

Furthermore, the reference to Novalis manifests the ideological 'service' that Adorno intends to provide with his allegorical interpretation of the Homeric epic. The passage indeed offers a definition of *Heimat* that is – in Adorno's intention at least – diametrically opposed to its 'mythical' Romantic transfiguration into pure nature, as was common in (or presupposed by) the predominantly conservative, nationalist and *völkische* discourses on the topic in Weimar Germany (see Sieferle 1984, 211 and Sontheimer *1962*, 307 ff.), and also contained in Klages' exaltation of nature as the origin of culture. Pulling together the threads of his anti-romantic Odyssey interpretation, in the last pages of the Odyssey chapter Adorno points out how *Heimat*, the familiar world of man, ought not to be (mis)understood as primordial and intact, but rather as tamed and humanized nature. In other words, a true *Heimat* can only be conceived of as a state of civilization – or in Adorno's words, as nature – when it has been 'forced away' ('abgezwungen') from myth, that is to say materially appropriated and intellectually penetrated, cultivated and 'humanized' ("Natur selber als das dem Mythos erst Abgezwungene", *DA* 97).

This conceptual (re)definition of *Heimat* at the end of Adorno's Odyssey chapter does not occur by chance; his reading prepares the ground for such conceptualization all along. Just as Odysseus, the civilized hero, manages to escape the threat of myth by holding firm to his individuality, humanity's civilizing progress is for Adorno a constant escape from the possibility of being drawn back into a barbaric and inhuman (not Romantic and natural) past, which had resurfaced in Adorno's present with catastrophic and indeed deadly consequences. Given that civilization constitutes in Adorno's allegorical Odyssey reading a process of escape ('*Entrinnen*') from myth and the mortal regression that it represents, *Heimat* ought to be conceived as the successful result of such escape: "Heimat ist das Entronnensein. Darum ist der Vorwurf, die homerischen Sagen seien jene, 'die der Erde sich entfernen', eine Bürgschaft ihrer Wahrheit. 'Sie kehren zu der Menschheit sich'"[329] (*GEO 71, DA* 97). As suggested by the Homeric narration, the true 'home' of man should be regarded as the accomplishment of the civilizing process, the condition of 'having escaped' ("Heimat ist das

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weit überlegen: 'Du wohntest lang bei fremden stämmen · / Doch unsre liebe starb dir nicht'. – Solche Verse freilich verdanken sich eher dem mächtigen Kindergefühl bei Indianergeschichten als dem Gedanken an gentile Gesellschaftsformen, der dem früheren George verhaßt war" (*GS* 10.1, 208, footnote 20*;* my italics).

[329] The quote in the passage comes from the first strophe of Hölderlin's poem *Der Herbst*: "Die Sagen, die der Erde sich entfernen, / Vom Geiste, der gewesen ist und wiederkehret, / Sie kehren zu der Menschheit sich, / und vieles lernen Wir aus der Zeit, die eilends sich verzehret".

Entronnensein"), indeed of escaping always anew from the lurking threat of a regression into barbarism that haunts civilization along its course.

This understanding of *Heimat* leads to an indirect confutation of the *lebensphilosophische Kulturkritik* and Neo-Romantic cultural theories – not only that of Klages, but also those of Borchardt, Spengler and other conservative-revolutionary intellectuals of the interwar period (see Sloterdijk 1985 and Sontheimer 1962, 65 ff.), whom Adorno saw as intellectual forerunners of Fascism. Adorno himself explicates the political-ideological dimension of his discourse on *Heimat* in the following terms: "Daß der Begriff der Heimat dem Mythos entgegensteht, den die Faschisten zur Heimat umlügen möchten, darin ist die innerste Paradoxie der Epopöe beschlossen" (DA 97; my italics)[330]. Significantly, Adorno speaks of the *paradox* of the Homeric narration, consisting in the fact that 'home' is represented as opposed to archaic myth. As it is often the case with Adorno's argumentative style, this passing mention deserves more attention than one might expect at first. Adorno's hermetic phrase about the paradox of the opposition of *Heimat* to myth in the *Odyssey* can be explained in two ways. First of all, the paradox is that of nostalgia itself (*Heimweh*), torn between the desire to restore a past origin-in-pleasure (in Freudian terms: the pleasure principle), and the need for practical self-realization in the present. From this perspective, the productive paradox of nostalgia in the Homeric epic results from the objective tension inhabiting Odysseus himself, fluctuating between the dream of an immediate *restitutio in integrum* – namely that of winning back a home of comforts and pleasures, as some of the mythical figures seem to offer him – and the lucid awareness of the necessity to reach back to his *actual* home, where someone is still waiting for him.

The paradox that Adorno points to, however, is also that of Odysseus' individual character and spiritual search for a home. The paradox in this case is that Odysseus' *Heimat* remains opposed to myth only as long as it not achieved as a place of ultimate security and

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[330] This political dimension of Adorno's discourse on *Heimat* in the *Odyssey* chapter comes to the fore clearly in the final version of the chapter, where the reactionary and archaistic'enemies' of modern civilization are dubbed as 'Fascists'. In the original version of the chapter however they are merely defined as 'slaves' of civilization*:* "Daß der Begriff der *Heimat* dem Mythos entgegensteht, den die *Knechte* der Zivilisation zur *Heimat* umlügen möchten, darin ist die innerste Paradoxie der Epopöe beschlossen" (*GEO* 85; my italics). Adorno saw the mythical transfiguration of *'Heimat'* provided by Neo-Romantic and *völkische*, reactionary and conservative-revolutionary intellectuals in Weimar Germany as a sign of weakness, namely of an unconscious submissive attitude towards the coercive and self-repressive forces that he – with Freud – saw at work in the process of civilization. Such submission according to Adorno was the indication of an incomplete subjective appropriation of the 'burden' of civilization, resulting in Romantic escapism and a primitivist idealization of nature and cultural origins (similarly, in his Klages chapter of *EDZ* Bloch refers to the anti-modernist cultural critics of Weimar Germany as "die schlechte Entzauberten", *EDZ* 336). Furthermore (and worst of all) this missed subjective appropriation harbored for Adorno the seeds of socio-political regression and was therefore prone to commit itself to archaistic mythologies and primitive political ideologies that were deeply hostile to the basic moral principles and socio-political achievements of modern Western civilization (as Fascism was for Adorno).

possessions, which is to say as long as it does not freeze into a condition of exclusive, absolute belonging, leading to a state of blunt self-contentedness and dull domination. The *Odyssey* does not give an account of Odysseus' life back in Ithaca. However, the different variants of the myth – notably Dante's 26th canto of the *Inferno* – unmistakably show how, in the history of reception of the Homeric epic, Odysseus has always been seen not merely as a cunning hero, but also as a restlessly searching champion of intellectual curiosity, as such unable to become fully self-contented[331]. It is precisely as a travelling and discovering hero that Odysseus functions in Adorno's Homeric reading as well, a torchbearer of civilization, an agent of man's growing appropriation of and familiarization with the world. Throughout his travels, Odysseus opens up and enlightens the dark corners of the Mediterranean, loosening up the 'mythical' resilience of nature and making it accessible to man's work and knowledge.

This aspect of Adorno's Homeric reading is probably the one that best shows the ideological implications as well as limits of his progressivism[332]. Adorno reads the *Odyssey* as the *unending nostos* (or 'homecoming') of enlightened reason towards a *Heimat* that must not be entirely reached, for fear that the subject's progressive force would slacken, and his quest turn into a self-contented, conservative or regressive attitude, grounded in the security given by unchanging social relationships and stable property conditions. In other words, the 'sedentary' bondage to a specific place, which on the one hand provides the basis for any concrete idea of *Heimat*, on the other hand constitutes the condition for all intellectual, moral

[331] In Dante's *Divina Commedia*, once come back to Ithaca, after some time has elapsed Odysseus feels the urge to continue travelling in order to discover unexplored lands. He tries to convince his former shipmates to join him into this new adventure by flattering their intellectual faculty and arousing their curiosity: "'O frati', dissi, 'che per cento milia / perigli siete giunti a l'occidente, / a questa tanto picciola vigilia // d'i nostri sensi ch'è del rimanente / non vogliate negar l'esperïenza, / di retro al sol, del mondo sanza gente. // Considerate la vostra semenza: / fatti non foste a viver come bruti, / ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza'". ("'O brothers, who amid a hundred thousand / Perils,' I said, 'have come unto the West, / To this so inconsiderable vigil // Which is remaining of your senses still / Be ye unwilling to deny the knowledge, / Following the sun, of the unpeopled world. // Consider ye the seed from which ye sprang; / Ye were not made to live like unto brutes, / But for pursuit of virtue and of knowledge'"; translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow). At the end of Dante's canto Odysseus will die in the sea with his comrades because of his insatiable curiosity, which is incompatible with Dante's Medieval Christian world vision. Adorno on the contrary underlines how, even though Odysseus' endless search is a token of hubris – as Dante depicts it – it also has an altruistic, namely civilizing function.

[332] In his interesting work Patrick J. Deneen has sought to show how the main limit of Adorno-Horkheimer's theory in *DA* is their incapability to accept death: "their submerged sympathy for enlightenment can be located in their fundamental rejection of death ... in the lives, philosophies and finally myths of human beings" (Deneen 2003, 170). This rejection would reflect "Critical Theory's own unwillingness to afford death, and hence the solace of myth, an appropriate place in modern philosophy" (ibid.). This would result in an "empty political philosophy, one that ultimately must seek solace not in the *sensus communis* of shared myth but in the hollow cry of the lonely self" (ibid.). Deneen's argument about Critical Theory's 'refusal' to philosophically cope with death, as well as his remark on the emptiness of the political philosophy allegorically expressed in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*, are certainly worth discussing. Not equally legitimate is in my opinion his criticism of the authors of *DA* for not seeking solace in a mythological common sense, which the exiled philosophers could only associate in their time with the repressive and totalitarian regime that they had left behind in Nazi Germany. The 'lonely self' of Odysseus, striving and hoping to come back to a civilized place, was for them the only possibility to survive contemporary mythical 'evil'.

and cultural regression. Things *always* have to change, men always have to be on the move: according to Adorno, this is the best guarantee for a 'progressive' attitude and state of mind[333]. Accordingly, it is by constantly travelling and being confronted with the unknown that Odysseus becomes truly enlightened and can thus exerts his civilizing function in Adorno's reading of the epic. Outside of this searching mode, enlightened reason risks losing its progressive drive and therefore regressing into myth. This is the ideological gist of Adorno's interpretation of the *Odyssey* in *DA*. As paradoxical as it may sound – and Adorno himself defines it as a paradox – Odysseus' civilizing force resides precisely in his will to progress towards an *unreachable* Ithaca.

This brings us to the more genuinely political aspect of Adorno's discussion of *Heimat*, which is in Adorno's allegorical reading of the epic not so much a native homeland or place of exclusive individual origins, but rather the promised land of a utopian civilization. Odysseus' homecoming becomes for Adorno the allegory of a quest that does not yield to the temptation of a return to natural origins (as is the case with Klages), nor to the illusory idea of a 'barbaric' re-foundation of culture on localist and earth-bound premises (as is the case with Borchardt). This search for a home instead holds onto the project of a construction or restoration of a civil condition of existence 'back home', namely with one's own relatives, who are not related by blood alone, but also by social kinship. Odysseus himself is considered by Adorno to be a civilized realist, opposed to the 'cultural fascists' ("Kulturfaschisten", *DA* 62) of his time, who turned the German *Heimat* into a regressive panacean myth of blood bonds, natural community and cultural origins. Adorno's *Odyssey* reading suggests that, unless it be a swindle – and a dangerous, self-destructive swindle at that – *Heimat* is only available as a *fictional origin*, that is to say as a self-conscious construction, apt to sustain the subject's continuous progress towards the concrete utopia of a socially more familiar world, and not backward to a chimerical past, which in truth only represents a more primitive form of social organization and relation to nature.

Adorno understands this process of familiarization as a humanization of the world, not determined by the place in which it happens, but rather by the social 'home' that men are able

[333] Certainly it is a bitter irony that Odysseus, the re-founder of a civilized political community in Ithaca, "as Teiresias predicts, and as Dante later expands ... may not long be able to remain in the community he founds but may have to leave the community he creates to be maintained by the citizens for the polis" (Deneen 2003, 17). Teiresias foretells Odysseus his destiny during the latter's descent into Hades: "Death shall come to you from the sea, and your life shall ebb away very gently when you are full of years and peace of mind, and your people shall bless you. All that I have said will come true" (Homer 1900, 11th book). In other words, Odysseus will die because of the sea (indeed probably *in* the sea, as Dante narrates the story), the place of his numberless adventures, yet his people will always be grateful to and prosper because of him. The Homeric narrative thus reveals Odysseus as a hero of individualism, who is nonetheless beneficial to his community.

to establish. Adorno tacitly contrasts this idea of home to the *Heimat*-myths informing the variety of conservative and right-wing ideologies of Weimar Germany, particularly in their archaistic and anti-modernist declensions. I argue that this is the significance of Adorno's inexplicit polemical remark[334]*:* "Darum ist der Vorwurf, die homerischen Sagen seien jene, 'die der Erde sich entfernen', eine Bürgschaft ihrer Wahrheit. 'Sie kehren zu der Menschheit sich'" (*GEO* 71, *DA* 97). According to Adorno, the fact that the Homeric epic is 'distant' from the earth is a token of its human – i.e., anti-mythical – verity.

In the last part of his Odyssey interpretation, Adorno thus in a way literally de-territorializas the German notion of 'homeland' and implicitly reconceptualizes it as a socio-cultural construct. While "Heimat ist das Entronnensein" (DA 97) for Adorno, "Rede selber, die Sprache in ihrem Gegensatz zum mythischen Gesang ... ist das Gesetz des homerischen Entrinnens" (ibid. 98). This means that the true home of man can only been erected through narrative and communication, namely as a shared fiction that needs to be projected always anew as a joint effort by the members of the 'public sphere'[335]. Adorno thus redefines *Heimat* through his Odyssey interpretation as a transcendent, which is to say both shifting and constitutive horizon of inter-subjective self-formation[336]. This horizon can only be conceived as civilized. Herein resides Adorno's daring intellectual provocation with the last pages of his Odyssey chapter: *Heimat* and *Zivilisation*, so often brought into opposition by German conservative and reactionary anti-modernism in the interwar period, are made to correspond in the idea of a civilized condition of existence secured by a well-functioning public sphere and just social organization, both of which were annihilated in Germany upon the Nazi seizure of power. In spite of all manifest *Zivilisationskritik* in DA, Adorno seems to suggest that the predicament of modern civilization can only be overcome by further proceeding in the course of civilization – which Adorno during his exile years imagines as a progressive homecoming, or as a return 'back home' from present barbarism – and not by reverting to the dangerous chimeras of lost cultural origins and natural bonds, such as those that were ultimately manipulated for dire political purposes in Fascist Germany.

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[334] Probably allusive to Rudolf Borchardt (see 2.5. and 2.6.).

[335] As I have suggested elsewhere, Adorno's emphasis on Odysseus' narrative and communicative ability seems to anticipate – in a figurative, indeed quasi-literary way – Habermas' theory of communicative action. Adorno's reconfiguration of the concept of '*Heimat*' as a space of intersubjective self-formation furthermore seems to point in the direction taken by Axel Honneth's critical social theory, anticipating the latter's notion of a 'struggle for recognition' in a society grounded on rights and solidarity.

[336] As we have seen, Adorno not by chance considers Odysseus as a narrating hero, who only as such is able to endure his long-lasting castaway condition and exposition to foreign mythical powers. Only within a inter-subjective narrative horizon is he able to survive and finally overcome myth (see 2.8.).

3.7. Adorno's Reading of the *Odyssey* as a 'Fable' of Civilization

While the process of homecoming to civilization for Adorno can only be conceived as a progressive escape from a primitive past-in-nature – and the threat of regression that it represents for man – this course is not straightforward and univocal, but rather circuitous and ambivalent. Despite its progressive horizon and overall civilizing significance, Odysseus' *nostos* is full of contradictions, and constantly threatened by the possibility of a regression into barbaric prehistory. As I have already mentioned, there is one specific episode in the Odyssey in which according to Adorno this possibility becomes a frightening actuality. This is the episode portraying Odysseus' brutal killing of Penelope's maidservants, together with the suitors and the traitor shepherd Melanthius after having returned to Ithaca. Adorno seems indeed to have been particularly struck by this episode depicting a savage outbreak of violence, which appears to contradict both his thesis of the civilized character of the Homeric epic and his interpretation of the character Odysseus as a hero of civilization[337]. It is not by chance that Adorno dedicates to this episode the last lines of his *Odyssey* chapter, which, although somewhat cryptic, are crucial for an understanding of his allegorical reading of the *Odyssey* in oppositional relation to the *Zivilisationskritik* of Klages (and of Borchardt).

In the 22nd book of the Odyssey, Telemacus executes his mother's maidservants by hanging, as a retribution for having betrayed their lord Odysseus with his wife's suitors during his long absence. In truth, Telemacus merely carries out his father's order, and functions in the episode as the agent of Odysseus himself (one should furthermore remember that when Odysseus lands in Ithaca and reveals his true identity to Telemacus, the suitors have already planned to kill the latter). This is how Adorno sums up the episode in the last pages of his Odyssey chapter:

> Im XXII. Gesang der Odyssee wird die Strafe beschrieben, die der Sohn des Inselkönigs an den treulosen Mägden, den ins Hetärentum Zurückgefallenen, vollstrecken läßt. Mit ungerührter Gelassenheit, unmenschlich wie nur die impassibilité der größten Erzähler des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, wird das Los der

[337] As Deneen notes, "If the action of the *Odyssey* moves from lawlessness to justice, from a violent world to one of moderation, the development of Odysseus' character moves in the opposite direction, from moderation toward violence, from restraint toward anger. Odysseus by the end of the poem must become more *like* Achilles than his opposite; he must learn not to *control* his anger, a restraint he practices throughout the poem, but to *release* it. ... Odysseus must found anew a political order, which calls forth a different skill than that with which he apparently ruled earlier through frequent assemblies" (Deneen …66; italics in original).

> Gehenkten dargestellt und ausdruckslos dem Tod von Vögeln in der Schlinge verglichen, mit jenem Schweigen, dessen Erstarrung der wahre Rest aller Rede ist. Daran schließt sich der Vers, der berichtet, die aneinander Gereihten 'zappelten dann mit den Füßen ein weniges, aber nicht lange'. Die Genauigkeit des Beschreibers, die schon die Kälte von Anatomie und Vivisektion ausstrahlt, führt romanmäßig Protokoll über die Zuckung der Unterworfenen, die im Zeichen von Recht und Gesetz in jenes Reich hinabgestoßen werden, aus dem der Richter Odysseus entkam. Als Bürger, der der Hinrichtung nachsinnt, tröstet Homer sich und die Zuhörer, die eigentlich Leser sind, mit der gesicherten Feststellung, daß es nicht lange währte, ein Augenblick und alles war vorüber. Aber nach dem 'Nicht lange' steht der innere Fluß der Erzählung still. Nicht lange? fragt die Geste des Erzählers und straft seine Gelassenheit Lügen. Indem sie den Bericht aufhält, verwehrt sie es, die Gerichteten zu vergessen, und deckt die unnennbare ewige Qual der einen Sekunde auf, in der die Mägde mit dem Tod kämpfen. Als Echo bleibt vom 'Nicht lange' nichts zurück als das Quo usque tandem, das die späteren Rhetoren nichtsahnend entweihten, indem sie die Geduld sich selber zusprachen. (*GEO* 87-88, *DA* 98-99; my italics)

Adorno points out how the narrator's brief yet detailed, impassible description of the execution scene – depicted by Adorno as a sort of *neusachliche* report ("Protokoll") – is immediately followed by the assurance that the maids' suffering was short, as they scrambled with their feet in the air only 'a bit, but not too long' ("ein weniges, aber nicht lange"). For Adorno, the adverbial phrase 'not too long' in this verse unwillingly conveys the uneasiness of the narrative voice with the representation of violence[338]. This uneasiness for Adorno reflects an objective contradiction in the sentence, namely that between the brutal content of the episode, and the civilized poetic language and mode of representation of the Homeric epic. Adorno reads the 'not too long' – added as a sort of fleeting mitigating appendix at the end of the verse – as an indication of the bad conscience of the narrative voice, proving that it cannot bear the burden of the brutality it portrays. The logic of vendetta and blood retribution – a remnant of archaic sacrificial violence – is not compatible with the civilized allegorical content and overall literary facture of the *Odyssey*[339].

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[338] Adorno has been inspired to dwell on this verse of the *Odyssey* by the work of British philologist Gilbert Murray *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (1911): "Auf die tröstende Intention des Verses macht Gilbert Murray aufmerksam. Seiner Theorie zufolge sind in Homer durch zivilisatorische Zensur Folterszenen getilgt. Stehen geblieben seien der Tod des Melanthios und der Mägde. Dessen Darstellung sieht Murray das Werk des älteren Dichters. 'There follows instantly the ... saving verse: 'Their feet struggled for quite a little while, not at all long!'. The torture of women was unpleasant even to an audience which approved the cruelty to the goatherd'" (*GEO* 88, cf. *DA* 99). In the final version of the *Odyssey* chapter the latter and similar passages of philological scholarship on Homer have been either abridged or erased (see for instance *GEO* 86-87). The result is an obliteration of a number of important sources of inspiration and scholarly support for Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation.

[339] The episode Adorno refers to is truly brutal and bloody in its detailed description of the planned murder. After Odysseus has slaughtered the suitors he has the old nurse Euryclea call the twelve maidens who have betrayed him with the suitors: "Euryclea left the cloister to tell the women, and make them come to Ulysses; in the meantime he called Telemachus, the stockman, and the swineherd. 'Begin,' said he, 'to remove the dead, and

As I have shown in the previous chapter, according to Adorno the *Odyssey* is a "zivilisatorische Epopöe" (*GEO* 73) not only in its narrated story and related allegorical content (Odysseus' homecoming and civilization's overcoming of the threat of regression into barbarism, respectively), but also in its poetic language and the resulting moral effect. For Adorno, the enlightened content of the Homeric epic is reflected in its 'exoteric' or myth-disenchanting form of representation, which he opposes to the closed form and self-contained language that Borchardt praised in Pindar's aristocratic poetry (see 2.5.). The already-literary character of the *Odyssey* – Adorno underlines that the audience of the Homeric epic are already 'readers'[340] – testifies to its emancipation from the barbaric world of archaic Greece, and thus has to be regarded as an indication of its both poetically and morally 'civilized' quality[341]. The novelistic mode of representation of the epic – at least as Adorno understands it – makes it possible to narrate, depict and report facts in a precise and veridical manner: "Die kalte Distanz der Erzählung, die noch das Grauenhafte vorträgt, als wäre es zur Unterhaltung von Mächtigen selber bestimmt, läßt zugleich das Grauen erst hervortreten, das im Liede zum Schicksal feierlich sich verwirrt" (*GEO* 87, see also *DA* 98). The realistic representation of facts of the Odyssey is thus for Adorno the technical precondition for a civilized reception of the story by listeners/readers. According to Adorno, Homer's reportage-like narrative style in such episodes as the one portrayed in the 22nd book of the Odyssey

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make the women help you. Then, get sponges and clean water to swill down the tables and seats. When you have thoroughly cleansed the whole cloisters, take the women into the space between the domed room and the wall of the outer court, and run them through with your swords till they are quite dead, and have forgotten all about love and the way in which they used to lie in secret with the suitors.' // On this the women came down in a body, weeping and wailing bitterly. First they carried the dead bodies out, and propped them up against one another in the gatehouse. Ulysses ordered them about and made them do their work quickly, so they had to carry the bodies out. When they had done this, they cleaned all the tables and seats with sponges and water, while Telemachus and the two others shovelled up the blood and dirt from the ground, and the women carried it all away and put it out of doors. Then when they had made the whole place quite clean and orderly, they took the women out and hemmed them in the narrow space between the wall of the domed room and that of the yard, so that they could not get away: and Telemachus said to the other two, 'I shall not let these women die a clean death, for they were insolent to me and my mother, and used to sleep with the suitors.' // So saying he made a ship's cable fast to one of the bearing-posts that supported the roof of the domed room, and secured it all around the building, at a good height, lest any of the women's feet should touch the ground; and as thrushes or doves beat against a net that has been set for them in a thicket just as they were getting to their nest, and a terrible fate awaits them, even so did the women have to put their heads in nooses one after the other and die most miserably. Their feet moved convulsively for a while, but not for very long. // As for Melanthius, they took him through the cloister into the inner court. There they cut off his nose and his ears; they drew out his vitals and gave them to the dogs raw, and then in their fury they cut off his hands and his feet" (Homer 1900, 22nd book).

[340] He mentions "die Zuhörer, die eigentlich Leser sind". As I have shown, Adorno considers the Odyssey as proto-modern novel, that is to say a piece of written literature.

[341] Basing on Gilbert Murray's *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (1911) Adorno underlines the "zivilisatorische Zensur" (*DA* 99) at work in the Homeric epics, where sacrifice and torture are almost completely absent: "Menschenopfer im eigentlichen Sinn [kommen] bei Homer nicht vor. ... Die *zivilisatorische Tendenz des Epos* macht sich in der Auswahl der berichteten Begebenheiten geltend" (*GEO* 50; my italics). Thus the content, the form and the moral effect of the *Odyssey* all testify for Adorno to the civilized quality of the Homeric epic. Adorno thus reads the *Odyssey* not only as an allegorical *narration of civilization*, but also as a stylistically as well as morally *civilized narrative*.

makes the public of the epic aware of the (broadly speaking) moral dimension of the events portrayed. It is in fact the technique of epic representation that substantially distinguishes the Homeric epic, as the foremost narrative of Greek colonial civilization, from the other poetic genres of archaic Greece (such as the heroic and choric poetry that Borchardt idealizes in Pindar).

As is usual in Adorno's Odyssey chapter, this argument has a philosophical side to it as well. Transposed onto the historico-philosophical level of his *Odyssey* reading, Adorno's appraisal of the Odyssey as a realistic proto-novel suggests that the difference between civilization and prehistory is above all one of representative or narrative order: "Furchtbar ist die Rache, die Zivilisation an der Vorwelt übt, und in ihr … gleicht sie der Vorwelt selber. Wodurch sie jener entragt, ist nicht der Inhalt der berichteten Taten. Es ist die Selbstbesinnung, welche Gewalt innehalten läßt im Augenblick der Erzählung" (*GEO* 86-87, *DA* 97). In the violence that it perpetrates on nature and barbaric prehistory alike, civilization is no different from both – as testified by Odysseus' brutality towards representatives of primitive cultures – but only disposes over a greater power (as '*Gewalt*', both force and violence) of assertion. In the vocabulary of Adorno's dissertation on enlightenment, this means that instrumental reason, both the principle of enlightenment and the technological motor of civilization, tends to become another form of mythical coercion if not accompanied by a corrective counterpart, which Adorno identifies in narrative and communicative reason.

As we have seen, throughout its progress civilization emulates and finally incorporates nature according to Adorno, thus ratifying its dominance over man's destiny. 'Civilized' humanity indeed continues the violence of the natural forces by perpetrating violence on itself and others alike (especially on the backward other, perceived by the civilized individual as a weaker image of himself, specifically of his own past-in-nature). The 'conservative' tendency of instincts, which for Freud determines a repetition compulsion at the level of individual psychology, for Adorno manifests itself in the history of civilization in the compulsion to repeat on others, as a sort of unconscious revenge ("Rache"), the violence that civilized man had to perpetrate upon himself by means of instinctual repression and sublimation throughout the civilizing process. History's recurring cycles of regression and outbreaks of barbaric violence would thus be grounded in the coercive mechanism that is at the core of the civilizing process itself. According to Adorno, this coercive course was far from coming to an end at his time. As a matter of fact, he saw a survival of prehistory in Western modernity, a true 'entanglement' in which civilized humanity, despite all its material and technological advancements, was still trapped in the early 40s ("Verstrickung, in der es in der

Vorgeschichte befangen bleibt", *DA* 56). 'Entanglement' ("Verstrickung") is the metaphor that Adorno uses in *DA* to refer to this direful nexus between civilization and barbarism in contemporary history.

However, this entanglement is not ultimate for Adorno. If it is true that every further step in the progress of civilization potentially contains the seeds of regression ("Der Fluch des unaufhaltsamen Fortschritts ist die unaufhaltsame Regression", *DA* 53), the latter is not a destinal necessity. It is in fact not progress itself, but rather *unreflected* progress that is responsible for the recurrent lapses into barbarism that mark the history of civilization from time immemorial. Adorno's statement that the difference between civilization and barbaric prehistory ("Vorzeit") consists in the faculty of introspection ("Selbstbesinnung"), which puts violence on hold ("innehalten lässt") in the moment of narration ("im Augenblick der Erzählung"), suggests that civilization is bound to lapse back into violence, coercion and brute domination whenever it is not accompanied – and thus 'checked' – by a mental 'stocktaking' in the form of narration.

The putting on hold that Adorno talks about here is not just a momentary interruption of an unbroken line of historical violence, but rather a moment of fixation of (and on) this very violence in a frozen image emerging from the narrative flow itself. This fixation invites the storyteller as well as the listener/reader to reflect upon the narrated events as something past, thus suggesting the possibility that these events may one day become – or maybe already be – in the past once and for all. Referring to the interruption of the narrative report by the narrator's reassuring temporal indication 'not too long', Adorno notes: "Das Innehalten in der Rede aber ist die Zäsur, die Verwandlung des Berichteten in längst Vergangenes, kraft deren der Schein von Freiheit aufblitzt, den Zivilisation seitdem nicht mehr ganz ausgelöscht hat" (GEO 87, DA 98; my italics). The interruption of the narrative discourse in the moment of introspection provides for an 'epochal' caesura (a sort of phenomenological 'epoché', in Husserl's sense), which announces the eschatological abolition of all violence by transforming the brutality of the reported event into something long past, i.e., no longer necessary[342.] To put it differently, while showing in detail the unbearable brutality of violence,

[342] Adorno probably borrowed the concept of 'Zäsur' from Benjamin, who in his turn borrowed it from Hölderlin: "Hölderlin definiert die Zäsur als 'gegenrhythmische Unterbrechung', die dem Fluss der Vorstellungen widersteht, um die 'Vorstellung selber' erscheinen zu lassen, das heißt nicht nur die Verkettung der Bilder, sondern die Arbeit des imaginierenden Denkens selbst. ... Die Zäsur ist also – im Denken Hölderlins und auch Benjamins – eine hervorstechende Figur der erlösenden Unterbrechung" (Gagnebin 2001, 106). Adorno transposes this notion onto his historico-philosophical reading of the *Odyssey*. In his interpretation of the 22nd book of the epic the self-reflective interruption of the narrative frees the reader/listener from the coercive mechanism inhabiting civilization. Adorno's sentence about the interruption of violence through the introspective caesura can be understood in two ways. First, violence is interrupted during narration, only in order to continue it afterword. This would be the consolatory function of art. The second, in my opinion intended meaning of

the epic narrative hints at the future, but in fact virtually present possibility of finally overcoming such violence.

*The r*eflective hold permitted by the narrative caesura, transforming the reported event into something 'long past', interrupts the nature-bound, coercive course of civilization and thus offers an appearance or illusion of freedom ("Schein von Freiheit aufblitzt"[343]). The latter is vital for civilization's further progress and ultimate realization. The 'Schein' of freedom might well be an illusion – for it is unlikely that violence in history would ever stop – and yet it is also a necessity of practical reason (in Kant's understanding of the term). As Odysseus' heroic parable shows, men need to believe in their own progress if they want to pursue their civilizing, self-empowering course and thus guarantee their survival (for civilization according to Adorno is man's only possible guarantee of survival).

Thus, by demonstrating that violence is no longer necessary, the caesura in the narrative flow in Adorno's view appeals to the moral conscience of the narratee, since it suggests the possibility of a condition of existence free from violence and coercion[344]. The acquisition of awareness of such possibility – which one might see as a process of catharsis through fiction – plays a central role in Adorno's *progressive narrative theory* of civilization as formulated in *DA* (see 2.8.). By assuring that the violence practiced on itself and others will not occur again, the civilizing narrative functions as a moral incentive for all who take part in it (whether actively, as storytellers, or passively, as hearers/readers). Through the introspective hold of the narrative flow, the possibility of a truly liberated human existence flashes up from within the narrative texture itself, inducing hope for a future free of coercion, namely a fulfilled state of civilization: "Hoffnung aber knüpft sich im Bericht von der Untat daran, daß es schon lange her ist. Für die Verstrickung von Urzeit, Barbarei und Kultur hat Homer die tröstende Hand im Eingedenken von Es war einmal. Erst als Roman geht das Epos ins Märchen über" (*GEO 88, DA 99).* The 'there once was' or 'once upon a time' of the epic

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Adorno's sentence is that, by eliciting a critical introspection, narration spurs the work of imagination and invites to interrupt the reported violence for good.

[343] Adorno talks of the "Schein von Freiheit ... den Zivilisation seitdem nicht mehr ganz ausgelöscht hat". The question then arises: what does the 'ever since' ("seitdem") in the text refer to? The sentence construction suggests that the 'appearance' (or idea) of freedom has not been extinguished from the moment in which it first 'flashed up' ("aufblitzt") through the civilizing narrative – or better, through the caesura in the narrative flow. The 'ever since' in this sense might also refer to the Homer epic, as the first 'civilized' narration of the Western literary tradition; or even to the moment in which men first began to tell stories about themselves, their own lives and struggles for survival, unintentionally interrupting their narratives in brief moments of unplanned introspection.

[344] This argument is probably the best proof of the idealistic component of Adorno's philosophy. It also comes in support of Habermas' criticism of *DA* for still being tied to a subjectivist *Bewusstseinsphilosophie*, though Habermas' rather directs his criticism to the pessimistic aspects of *DA*. Anyway, in the *Odyssey* chapter Adorno at times unintentionally exposes the idealistic premises and entailments of his philosophy, as for instance when he overvalues the role and power of individual consciousness in 'making' history.

‘fable’ cleanses the civilizing enterprise of the crippling sense of repetition of the cycles of violence and coercion that mark the history of mankind since its beginnings. By casting brutality back in an irretrievable, distant past, the civilizing narrative obliterates the morally corrosive suspicion of a lack of progress in history, thus fostering man’s awareness of his free agency and spurring civilization’s further course[345].

The caesura provided by the fable is regarded by Adorno as a moment of inner liberation from the compulsion to repeat by which nature acts through civilization itself. The self-reflection of the narrative can effect a correction of civilization’s course, and thus function as an agent of progress at the level of individual consciousness. In other words, the self-reflection enabled by the introspective hold of the narrative flow is understood by Adorno as a guarantor of true moral progress. This progress can only occur through a subjective process of ‘remembering’ nature, which he defines as the ‘unrecognized truth’ of all culture (see *DA* 58). Adorno attributes this function not only to the conceptual work of philosophy, but also to the representational work of narration (and art in general). Both are for him forms of “Selbstbesinnung ... des Denkens” (*DA* 57).

Towards the end of his Odyssey chapter, Adorno provides a kind of moral theory of narration in between the lines of his text. This theory complements the critical theory of instrumental reason that he manifestly exposes with Horkheimer in their joint work on enlightenment. Significantly, the narrative form that Adorno finds most apt to illustrate his ideas about the liberating potential of narratives is the fable. Adorno’s enigmatic phrase at the very end of his Odyssey chapter (“Erst als Roman geht das Epos ins Märchen über”) ought to be read within the theoretical frame provided by his progressive philosophy of civilization. At the same time, however, Adorno’s mentioning of the fable form is not intrinsically motivated by his Homeric interpretation, and thus requires further explanation. It is my contention that, the sibylline sentence that concludes the *Odyssey* chapter in fact ought to be understood against the background of Ernst Bloch’s and Walter Benjamin’s theories of the fable. It is from these two fellow philosophers and their Marxist narrative theories that Adorno derives his understanding of the fable as the basic narrative form of subjective emancipation.

Both Ernst Bloch’s and Walter Benjamin’s thoughts about the fable and other narrative forms seem to have exerted a deep influence on Adorno’s Homeric interpretation. It

[345] Through the sense of mastery over past events that it conveys, the narrative confirms the narrator’s as well as the listener’s (and reader’s) sense of his individual freedom and independence from external forces. Just as Odysseus’ self-narration saves him by constantly reassuring him of his individuality, civilization for Adorno needs to secure its own existence through the narration of its progress, namely the progress of its independence from nature. This would be the ‘ideological’ function (in Althusser’s sense, in terms of an imaginary relation to reality) of progressive narratives. Adorno merely hints at it – for instance through his ‘colonialist’ depiction of Odysseus – yet does not develop this insight thoroughly in his *Odyssey* chapter.

is first of all Benjamin who comes into consideration, given his personal and intellectual closeness to Adorno. In particular, Benjamin's famous essay on the storyteller ("Der Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows", 1936) can plausibly be regarded as the first and most likely source of inspiration for the final lines of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter. In his renowned essay, Benjamin considers novel and story (*Roman* and *Erzählung*) as two complementary narrative forms, both deriving from the same ur-form of the ancient epic (see (Benjamin 1991-II, 453). Benjamin defines the epic as the form of indifference or non-distinction between novel and tale, particularly with respect to their different ways of narratively relating to and representing the past, namely remembrance (*Eingedenken*) and memory (*Gedächtnis*), respectively. Benjamin sees these two modes of narrative memorial representation in a relationship of complementary opposition:

> Das verewigende Gedächtnis des Romanciers im Gegensatz zu dem kurzweiligen des Erzählers. Das erste ist dem einen *Helden* geweiht, der einen *Irrfahrt* oder dem einen Kampf; das zweite den vielen *zerstreuten* Begebenheiten. Es ist, mit anderen Worten, das Eingedenken, das als das Musische des Romans dem Gedächtnis, dem Musischen der Erzählung, zur Seite tritt, nachdem sich mit dem Zerfall des Epos die Einheit ihres Ursprungs in der Erinnerung geschieden hatte. (Benjamin 1991-II, 454*;* my italics)

Benjamin's reflections on the novel and the story are relevant for the present discussion because they represent the tacit presupposition of Adorno's allusive discourse on narrative forms in the last lines of his *Odyssey* chapter[346]. Considering that Benjamin equates fable and

[346] Adorno exposes his ideas on epic narration towards the end of his earlier *Odyssey* chapter (*GEO* 78-83). These pages, containing poetic and aesthetic reflections on epic realism (ancient and modern alike) have been removed in the final version of the chapter, and later published separately in Adorno's essay "Über epische Naivetät" (*GS* 11, 34). An analysis of Adorno's essay on epic naiveté in relation to the rest of the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* would prove interesting, yet also exceed the limits of the present study. An excerpt from this section of Adorno's earlier *Odyssey* chapter might suffice to show how Adorno understands the *Odyssey* the way Benjamin defines the narrative ur-form of the epic, combining the immortalizing, 'novelistic' remembrance of the individual hero and the short-termed representation of diverse and diffuse occurrences that for Benjamin is typical of the 'story'. In this passage Adorno metaphorically defines the *Odyssey* "als der Versuch, dem stets erneuten Anschlagen des Meeres auf die Felsenküste nachzuhorchen, geduldig nachzuzeichnen, wie das Wasser die Klippen überflutet, um rauschend von ihnen zurückzuströmen und in tieferer Farbe das Feste leuchten zu lassen. Solches Rauschen ist der Laut der epischen Rede, in dem das *Eindeutige und Feste mit dem Vieldeutigen und Verfließenden zusammentrifft*, um davon gerade sich zu scheiden. Die gestaltlose Flut des Mythos ist das Immergleiche, das Telos der Erzählung jedoch das Verschiedene, und die mitleidslos strenge Identität, in der der epische Gegenstand festgehalten wird, dient gerade dazu, dessen Nichtidentität mit dem schlecht Identischen, dem unartikulierten Einerlei, seine Verschiedenheit selber, zu vollziehen. Die Epopöe will berichten von etwas Berichtenswertem, von einem, das nicht allem andern gleicht, nicht vertauschbar ist und um seines Namens willen verdient, überliefert zu werden" (*GS* 11; my italics). It is clear from the second part of the period that Adorno's emphasis falls on the novelistic quality of the *Odyssey*, which, despite its being made of different mosaic-like stories, for him truly is a proto-modern subjective novel. Besides Benjamin, Adorno derives his

tale (*Märchen* and *Erzählung*), and in fact regards the latter as a subspecies of the former ("der erste wahre Erzähler ist und bleibt der von Märchen"; "das Märchen ... lebt insgeheim in der Erzählung fort", ibid. 457), Adorno's cryptic statement that the 'novelistic' narration of the *Odyssey* finally transforms into a fable becomes more understandable. *In the chapter-closing dictum* "Erst als Roman geht das Epos ins Märchen über", Adorno seems to have appropriated and compressed into a pill Benjamin's ideas on the relationship between the epic, the novel and the story.

Adorno seems in particular to implicitly rely on Benjamin's understanding of the epic as the original ur-narrative, containing in itself both novel and tale, respectively understood by Benjamin as individual and collective forms of narration[347]. The Homeric epic is indeed both, for Adorno: a 'novel' of subjective formation and individuation against the self-dissolving primeval forces of nature, and an allegorical 'story' (or fable) of humanity's civilizing progress, or civilization's struggle against the regressive forces of myth. Both aspects make for the intrinsically civilized character and civilizing function of the Homeric epic. While throughout the first part of the *Odyssey* chapter Adorno's reading of the Homeric epic as a 'novel' prevails – also in light of Adorno's polemical confrontation with Borchardt's poetic theory – in the final part, the focus gradually shifts from Odysseus' vicissitudes to his allegorical function as a representative of civilized humanity's struggle for emancipation from myth. This shift allows Adorno to project his utopian vision of civilization onto the epic hero and therefore on the *Odyssey* as a whole. Though this shift in focus does not result from a systematic intention of Adorno's work – which is in fact quite rhapsodic, and at times rather elliptical – there is an implicit reason for it, revealed by Benjamin's essay:

> Der erste wahre Erzähler ist und bleibt der von Märchen. Wo guter Rat teuer war, wußte das Märchen ihn, und wo die Not am höchsten war, da war seine Hilfe am nächsten. *Diese Not war die Not des Mythos*. Das Märchen gibt uns Kunde von den frühesten Veranstaltungen, die die Menschheit getroffen hat, um den Alp, den der

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insight into the 'double' character of the Homeric epic as a both a novel and a collection of disparate stories (first brought together by one author and later elaborated by different other authors) from Wilamowitz (see Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1988, 174 ff. and 199 ff.).

[347] Benjamin describes the novel as a subjectivist form of narration, grounded in the modern individual's irremediable solitude in front of death, and contrasts it to the pre-modern oral tale as a narrative form functional to the exchange of experiences and knowledge within the traditional community. As a narrative form living and growing with(in) the community, the tale for Benjamin overshoots individual death so to say through an infinite chain of oral transmission. It is precisely in this sense that the *Odyssey* for Adorno becomes a fable of civilization (as which it has indeed been told and passed over in Western culture). As a collection of 'tales' of the hero's confrontation with myth the Homeric epic in fact exceeds Odysseus' individuality, and becomes allegorical of man's struggle for self-empowerment against the primeval forces of nature (both without and within man himself).

> Mythos auf ihre Brust gelegt hatte, abzuschütteln. Es zeigt uns in der Gestalt des Dummen, wie die Menschheit sich gegen den Mythos 'dumm stellt'; es zeigt uns in der Gestalt des jüngsten Bruders, wie ihre Chancen mit der Entfernung von der mythischen Urzeit wachsen; es zeigt uns in der Gestalt dessen, der auszog das Fürchten zu lernen, daß die *Dinge durchschaubar sind,* vor denen wir Furcht haben; es zeigt uns in der Gestalt des Klugen, daß die Fragen, die der Mythos stellt, einfältig sind, wie die Frage der Sphinx es ist; es zeigt uns in der Gestalt der Tiere, die dem Märchenkinde zu Hilfe kommen, daß die Natur sich nicht nur dem Mythos pflichtig, sondern viel lieber um den Menschen geschart weiß. Das Ratsamste, so hat das Märchen vor Zeiten die Menschheit gelehrt, und so lehrt es noch heut die Kinder, ist, *den Gewalten der mythischen Welt mit List und mit Übermut zu begegnen*. So polarisiert das Märchen den Mut, nämlich dialektisch: in Untermut (d.i. List) und in Übermut. Der befreiende Zauber, über den das Märchen verfügt, bringt nicht auf mythische Art die Natur ins Spiel, sondern ist die Hindeutung auf ihre Komplizität mit *dem befreiten Menschen*. (Benjamin 1991-II, 458; my italics)

According to Benjamin, the function of fables is to help men to overcome their fear of myth. They accomplish this by advising the 'weak' human subject to encounter the physically superior mythical forces with cunning and audacity, intelligence and fearlessness ("List" and "Übermut"). Fables in Benjamin's view encourage, comfort and fortify the ones who listen to them and live according to their spirit. They show that even the most obscure things and the most frightening situations can be made transparent and thus changed by man through action. 'Cunning' and 'audacity' are also for Adorno the characteristic qualities of Odysseus. In the *Odyssey*, the hero's behavior constantly fluctuates between audacity (or even presumption and cockiness) on the one hand, and humble slyness, modesty and feigned stupidity on the other. As we have seen, Adorno sees Odysseus' cunning as a subtle form of humility, through which the hero eventually gets the better of the mythical powers that he subjects himself to at first[348].

[348] Adorno's interpretation of Adorno's encounter with the Cyclops shows how both humble slyness and hubristic arrogance determine Odysseus' attitude towards the mythical figures. After having gotten the Cyclops drunk Odysseus saves himself from the giant's savage plan by 'playing dumb' when the former asks him for his name, upon which the hero notoriously answers 'Nobody': "Aufschneiderisch und verzückt verspricht der Berauschte dem Odysseus Gastgeschenke, und erst die Vorstellung des Odysseus als Niemand bringt ihn auf den bösen Gedanken, das Gastgeschenk abzugelten, indem er den Anführer als letzten frißt – darum vielleicht, weil dieser sich Niemand genannt hat und also für den schwachen Witz des Kyklopen nicht als existent zählt" (*DA* 85). Odysseus pretends to be dumb and thus exposes the actual dumbness of the mythical giant ("Dummheit des Riesen", ibid. 86). However, Adorno gives a dialectical turn to this, by showing how Odysseus' slyness eventually becomes arrogance and leads him to act stupidly, thus putting at risk his and his comrades' life: "Der um seiner selbst willen Niemand sich nennt und die Anähnelung an den Naturstand als Mittel zur Naturbeherrschung manipuliert, verfällt der Hybris. Der listige Odysseus kann nicht anders: auf der Flucht, noch im Bannkreis der schleudernden Hände des Riesen, verhöhnt er ihn nicht bloß, sondern offenbart ihm seinen wahren Namen und seine Herkunft, als hätte über ihn, den allemal eben gerade Entronnenen, die Vorwelt noch solche Macht, daß er, einmal Niemand geheißen, fürchten müßte, Niemand wieder zu werden, wenn er nicht die eigene Identität vermöge des magischen Wortes wiederherstellt, das von rationaler Identität gerade abgelöst ward. Die Freunde suchen ihn vor der Dummheit zu bewahren, als gescheit sich zu bekennen, aber es gelingt ihnen nicht, und mit genauer Not entgeht er den Felsblöcken, während die Nennung seines Namens wahrscheinlich den Haß des Poseidon … auf ihn lenkt. Die List, die darin besteht, daß der Kluge die Gestalt der

Benjamin's reflections on the function of nature in fables are also significant for Adorno's conclusive lines in the *Odyssey* chapter. Benjamin remarks that fables bring nature into play, not in a mythical way or through a mythological mode of representation, aimed at showing or transfiguring its power, but rather by displaying nature's fundamental complicity with a liberated humanity. Adorno takes up this insight in his *Odyssey* chapter and transposes it onto a historico-philosophical level. His understanding of the *Odyssey* as a fable – endowed as such with a liberatory and therefore civilizing potential – owes much to Benjamin's conceptualization of fables as parables of human emancipation from natural necessity. In the case of of Adorno's *Odyssey* interpretation, the fable becomes one of *eschatological liberation,* namely the self-liberation of humanity from the coercive mechanism through which a fundamentally hostile, still mythical nature continues to determine its historical course. As we have seen, civilization, the true *Heimat* of man, is for Adorno "Natur selber als das dem Mythos erst Abgezwungene" (*GEO* 86 *DA* 97).

All civilizing 'fables' – and the Odyssey for Adorno is the first and foremost civilizing fable of the Western literary tradition – serve the purpose of liberating humanity, even just through a brief illumination of consciousness, *from* its compulsory (i.e., cyclically violent and regressive) determination. In this sense, they are constitutively progressive, for they kindle and *sustain* a moral flame, namely the 'appearance' or 'illusion' of freedom that is necessary for the prosecution of humanity's civilizing course and, possibly, for the final achievement of a truly human, i.e., civilized, state of existence[349].

Adorno's philosophical horizon is clearly eschatological; his argument, however, is not abstractly utopian, but rather grounded in social-pragmatic considerations. Men have to reconcile themselves with their civilizing course if they want to live in a pacified social environment that is conducive to a good and secure life. All truly progressive narrations fulfill this purpose of reconciliation, according to Adorno. They are literally *in the service of civilization*, in so far as they reconcile individuals with the constraints and restrictions that

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Dummheit annimmt, schlägt in Dummheit um, sobald er diese Gestalt aufgibt" (ibid. 87). It is a fact in the *Odyssey* that Odysseus is repeatedly criticized by his companions for being overly audacious and self-confident when he comes to face unknown peoples and places.

[349] Adorno was possibly inspired to (or at least fortified in) this insight by Gilbert Murray's *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (1911), which counts as one of the 'hidden' (and sparingly quoted from) philological sources of his *Odyssey* chapter. Referring to the Greek epics the English philologist states that "all the intellectual elements of poetry are progressive" and poetry itself "can be taken both as evidence of the progress attained by a society, and as a force in its further progress" (Murray 1911, 22-23). Adorno's orientation towards British classical philology for his *Odyssey* interpretation is not a mere chance, given his intention to expose the "Verschränkung von Barbarei und Kultur ... auf dem Grunde des neueren Philhellenismus" (*GEO* 88, *DA* 98 note 61) of turn-of-the-century and Weimar Germany. The liberal-progressive ideological assumptions of the British tradition of 'individualist' philological criticism (as Cecil Marcel Bowra defines it in his sociological essay on Greek poetry, see Bowra 1937) availed Adorno to oppose the predominantly conservative and culturally pessimistic disposition of classical philology in Germany, from Nietzsche and Wilamowitz to Jaeger and Borchardt (see 2.3. and 2.5.).

civilized life imposes on them, and which, as Freud thought, in principle run counter to individual happiness (this why according to Freud, civilization produces so much '*Kulturfeindlichkeit*'; see 2.8.). Such reconciliation happens through a reflexive hold on the course of civilization in the process of narration. The introspective caesura of the civilizing narrative interrupts civilization's nature-like course, thus offering a fleeting yet indispensable glint (or glimmering illusion, depending on how one understands "Schein von Freiheit") of man's freedom from the compulsive mechanism that inhabits the course of civilization.

Adorno's argumentation is ambivalent to the end. The introspective interruption of violence ("die Selbstbesinnung, welche Gewalt innehalten läßt im Augenblick der Erzählung", *GEO* 87, *DA* 97), is not only external, but also internal to the narrative flow itself. By reporting violence with accuracy, the narrative in a way ratifies and thus confirms it. This would be the ideological function, broadly speaking, of narrative representation. However, while maintaining its own report, the narrative also unwillingly interrupts and obliterates the violence that it represents by casting it in a distant past ("Das Innehalten in der Rede aber ist die Zäsur, die Verwandlung des Berichteten in längst Vergangenes", *GEO* 87, *DA* 98). The caesura is thus one *of* the civilizing narrative itself, and not merely a break in the violence while it is 'merely' being reported and contemplated through its retrospective account. The course of civilization according to Adorno is upheld by the projection of the glimmer or appearance (or even illusion) of freedom – made possible by an act of narrative introspection – onto a *Heimat* that ought never to be reached as a firm possession, but rather gained continuously, always anew, through man's self-civilizing work.

In the final lines of his *Odyssey* chapter, Adorno seems to incorporate Benjamin's literary-anthropological understanding of the fable as the basic narrative form of human emancipation into his fundamentally progressive and pro-Enlightenment philosophy of civilization. However, Benjamin's thoughts about the fable in the storyteller essay rely in turn on another probable, more outspokenly Marxist source of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter, namely Ernst Bloch's *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, which I have already considered in relation to Klages. Bloch's work was published in 1935 – shortly before Benjamin's essay – and contains reflections on the fable that closely resemble those of Benjamin (Bloch's influence on Benjamin is testified by the fact that the latter's storyteller essay refers to Bloch's work). Either firsthand or through Benjamin's essay, Adorno must have been acquainted with Bloch's *EDZ*, particularly with the theory of the fable (and other narrative forms) therein expounded.

In the chapter of this work entitled "Über Märchen, Kolportage und Sage" (*EDZ* 168), Bloch offers an anthropological theory of the fable that – even more so than is the case with Benjamin – seeks to define the latter as the quintessential narrative form of human emancipation, focusing on its liberatory, or rather *revolutionary* potential. Bloch generally understands fables – as Benjamin and Adorno do after him – as tales of emancipation of the weak from the immutable and coercive forces of myth. He describes the prototypical fable hero as "schwach und listig, stark durch *List*, die verstehet, das Böse zu betrügen, und hat das Recht dazu" (*EDZ* 168). The 'evil' for Bloch is that of myth: "das Märchen ist ... die List Hänschens ... gegen die mythische Mächte" (*EDZ* 183). Such understanding of the fable and of the fable hero helps one better understand Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey*, in particular his treatment of Odysseus in relation to the mythical figures that he encounters. As we have seen, cunning for Adorno is the quality that allows Odysseus to overcome the physically stronger mythical figures, which are deceived by the superior intelligence and spiritual faculty of the sly hero[350].

As for Benjamin, also for Bloch the intelligence of the fable hero has a fundamentally enlightening function. Fables are a first form of anti-mythical enlightenment, indeed a document of enlightenment before the latter historically emerged as an overarching intellectual movement ("ein Stück Aufklärung, lange bevor es diese gab", Bloch 1985, 411). Bloch therefore describes fables as "Aufklärung des Banns" (*EDZ* 182): by enlightening and elucidating the ban that keeps men spellbound and subjected to the mythical powers, they disenchant and disrupt seemingly immutable laws. These laws on the contrary according to Bloch are transfigured in narrative forms that are opposite in spirit to the fable, namely mythical legends and sagas: "Ist im Märchen Aufruhr des Kleinen und meint es Aufklärung des Banns, bevor es eine gab, so berichtet die Sage still von Unabänderlichem" (ibid. 182); "Das *Märchen* ... bezeichnet Revolte, die *Sage*, abstammend vom Mythos, erduldetes Geschick" (ibid.; italics in original). Bloch therefore defines "Sage als ... Macht-Verehrung, Bann-Vergoldung" (ibid. 186) and "verkleinerte Mythologie" (ibid. 183; italics in original). It is against the mythical powers transfigured in sagas that the hero of the fable revolts.

As a matter of fact, fable and saga for Bloch are not entirely different narrative forms: "Märchen und Sage sind so dicht und schlicht nebeneinander, als zeigten sie nicht ganz verschieden Zeit. Als bezeichneten sie nicht ganz verschiedene Welt" (ibid. 182). According

[350] In a chapter of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (1938-1947) titled "Mut des Klugen" Bloch further characterizes the heros of all true fables as endowed with cunning, audacity and intellectual understanding: "Mut und List sind ihr Schild, ihr Spieß der Verstand. Denn Mut allein hülfe den Schwachen wenig gegen die dicken Herren, er würfe ihnen nicht den Turm zu Boden. *List des Verstandes* ist dem Schwachen sein menschlicher Teil" (*PH* 411; my italics).

to Bloch, they rather represent two opposite positions and attitudes towards the *same* world, standing respectively for change and conservation, self-empowerment and subjugation, emancipation from and submission to the status quo. For this reason, these two forms lend themselves to, respectively, progressive and conservative appropriation. For Bloch, fables are eschatological anticipations of the ultimate liberation of man from mythical coercion. In the manner of biblical prefiguration, they have already happened, and will (always already) happen again:

> Das Märchen ... schwebt wie die Zeit, worin sein Triumph geschehen ist; und wo er geschehen ist, stehet dahin. Die Sage dagegen hat sich zeitlich wie lokal durchaus *niedergelassen*, sie ist moralisch wie die Unterdrückung, stationär wie eine Chronik und passiv genau wie das Zeremoniell ihrer Inhalte. (*EDZ* 183-4; italics in original)

Fables cannot be located in space, but rather inhabit a utopian-revolutionary horizon, waiting for their realization. Their constitutive dimension is temporal, and as such quintessentially progressive. Sagas on the contrary resemble in Bloch's vision the mythical figures of Adorno's *Odyssey* reading: self-same and immutable, they haunt specific localities and are thus bound to their specific places. Here, their inhuman protagonists function as absolute masters, dictating their unchangeable 'law' upon \ passersby through their spellbinding chant or bewitching performance.

Like fable and saga for Bloch, for Adorno enlightenment and myth, emancipatory narrative and 'captivating' chant are complementary, indeed simultaneous aspects of Homer's poetry (see 2.6.). Adorno considers the latter as a middle or passage form – both stylistically and historically – between modern epic of subjectivity (i.e., the novel), and archaic choric poetry. The defining quality of the Homeric epic would be that of showing, both in its poetic facture and narrative content, the transformation of myth into novel, or in other words, the self-forming emancipation of the subject from the mythical figures that inhabit the world of sagas on which the *Odyssey* is originally based. For Adorno, the *Odyssey* draws upon (and thus participates in) this archaic layer of mythical worldmaking, yet at the same time distinguishes itself from it through new content and style (see 2.6.).

Particularly with respect to this argument, Adorno seems to have relied on Bloch. The chapter of *EDZ* titled "Über Märchen, Kolportage und Sage" deals not only with fable and saga, but also with the narrative genre of *Kolportage*, meaning adventure stories and novels such as those by Karl May, who was still quite popular in Bloch's time. According to the

latter, adventure stories are "Mischwesen zwischen Märchen und Sage", their heros "lebende Übergänge zwischen den Schwachen des Märchens und den Gewaltigen der Sage, die dadurch aus ihr heraustreten" (ibid. 185). Such are for Bloch in general the heros of popular imagination, "der 'edle' Räuber" (think of Robin Hood) as much as "[die] Herren der Wüste" (a reference to Karl May's homonymous novel): "Solche große Herren sind dann stellvertretend für die Rache- oder Glückwünsche der Kleinsten und führen sie zum Sieg ... irregulär die einen, illegal die anderen" (ibid.). Such a master-hero ('Herr') is Adorno's Odysseus, who repeatedly saves himself and his ship crew from the figures of myth through cunning and deceit. Odysseus is depicted in the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* as a sort of *middle figure* between the weak and the strong. He is a submissive subject and a pitiless dominator at the same time: self-subjected to the mythical forces of the Mediterranean, which he initially submits to and finally disrupts by overthrowing their immutable laws from within[351].

Though they are middle forms between fable and saga, adventure stories for Bloch are more akin to the first, since just like classic fables, their narrative function (in structuralist terms, namely the way Todorov studied fables) is that of disenchanting myth: "Kolportage, recht angewandt, [ist] noch einmal so stark, daß auch sie den Mythos auflockert, wo er am dicksten ist" (ibid. 186)[352]. Bloch's understanding (and appreciation) of popular adventure novels as emancipatory fables resonates in Adorno's interpretation of the *Odyssey* not only as an anti-idealistic *Bildungsroman*, but also as a novel of adventures (*Abenteuerroman*) or robinsonade ahead of its time[353] (see *DA* 64). Both aspects, namely self-formation and

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[351] Geyer-Ryan and Lethen underline this 'middle' quality of Odysseus, yet play it against Adorno's putatively reductive interpretation of the hero as a egoistic and power-driven subject ("schlaue, egoistische und machtbewusste Subjekt", Geyer-Ryan/Lethen 1987, 45): "Obwohl Odysseus im Epos die zentrale Figur ist, wird er doch niemals zum Mannesmonument, das um so erekter wird, je isolierter es in seiner Sozialmüdigkeit erscheint. Odysseus ist nicht der Superheld – er ist weder der Ranghöchste (das ist Agamennon) noch der stärkste und strahlendste (das ist Achill). Eher verkörpert er den mittleren Helden im Sinne Walter Scotts. Und seine Geschichte ist nicht die Herausmodellierung des Subjekts aus dem Stoff der Natur als rationales oder aus dem Stoff der Sozietät als transzendentes. Odysseus' Geschichte ist im Gegenteil die Sage der mühseligen Reintegration vom asozialen Kriegsschauplatz in die Gesellschaft Ithakas und die Reedukation vom Krieger in den Menschen" (ibid. 48-49). In my opinion what is meant as a criticism by Geyer-Ryan and Lethen sums up the (admittedly contradictory) gist of Adorno's treatment of Odysseus' figure as both an individualistic and altruistic, egoistically goal-oriented and socially civilized hero. As a matter of fact, the two strains of Adorno's interpretation of the figure of Odysseus in my opinion do not exclude each other.

[352] Bloch considers *Kolportageromane* as the popular fables of his time (though they are rather a product of the 19th century). In a chapter of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* titled "Das wilde Märchen" Bloch describes *Kolportage* as "eine wilde, gleichsam reißende ... Märchenart", endowed with a "Märchenaura wilder Art; die *Aura der Stevenson-Welt*" (*PH* 427): "das reißende Märchen also ist die *Abenteuergeschichte*" (ibid. 426; my italics). In this kind of fable the hero is active: "[er] wartet nicht ab ... bis ihm das Glück in den Schoß fällt, er bückt sich auch nicht", but rather stands up against the violence of the powerful forces that thwart him. Bloch's mentioning of Robert Louis Stevenson, (the famous Victorian novelist and author of the *Treasure Island*), finds an indirect correspondence in the *Odyssey* chapter, where Adorno compares the *Odyssey* to what is probably the prototype of all adventure novels, namely Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (see *GEO* 64, *DA* 81).

[353] In the third chapter of *DA* one reads: "die Kolportage ... ist das homerische Epos, nachdem es die letzte mythologische Hülle noch abgeworfen hat" (*DA* 138).

adventure, combine in Adorno's reading of the *Odyssey* as a fable of enlightenment and human emancipation.

Adorno thus appropriates in *DA* Bloch's characterization of the fable, in particular of *Kolportageromane* as anti-mythical narrative forms, yet transforms Bloch's revolutionary pathos and praise of the weak hero's revolt against mythical oppression into Odysseus' civilizing struggle against myth and the barbarism that its revival represents in modernity. This struggle in Adorno's *Odyssey* reading is allegorical of civilization's ongoing struggle against both intellectual and social regression in the form of anti-modernist *Kulturkritik* and political reaction. Thus, the declared political dimension of Bloch's Marxist revolutionary theory of the fable is transposed by Adorno onto a broader historico-philosophical level of speculation, where it perfectly serves the purpose of his anti-reactionary polemic and Homeric reading.

After this overview of Benjamin's and Bloch's theories of fabulistic narrative forms, it should be more clear why Adorno closes his *Odyssey* chapter with the enigmatic phrase, "Erst als Roman geht das Epos ins Märchen über". The latter has to be taken literally. According to Adorno, the *Odyssey* truly is an allegorical fable telling about the escape of civilized humanity from the threat of regression into barbaric prehistory. This fable, however, is narrated as an individual 'novel' of adventures and subjective formation. In fact, only as a proto-novelistic narrative form centering on the subject in his struggle for enlightenment and self-empowerment does the *Odyssey* become for Adorno a universal story of man's liberation from myth by force of enlightenment. Such interpretation of the *Odyssey* enables Adorno to provide a graphic counterargument to the poetic and cultural theories of the Neo-Romantic reaction of Weimar Germany, represented in *DA* by Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages: "Die Versetzung der Mythen in den Roman, wie sie in der Abenteuererzählung sich vollzieht, verfälscht nicht sowohl jene, als daß sie den Mythos mitreißt in die Zeit, den Abgrund aufdeckend, der ihn von *Heimat und Versöhnung* trennt" (*GEO* 86, *DA* 97; my italics). Adorno's tacit polemic against Borchardt's idealization of archaic mythical chant and Klages' transfiguration of pre-historical origins immediately transforms in this passage into a claim to the 'concrete utopia' (to use Bloch's expression) of a civilized *Heimat* to come, diametrically opposed to the deceiving reactionary mythologies of *Heimat*, *Blut* und *Boden* of Adorno's time.

The Homeric epic, considered by Adorno as a "zivilisatorische Epopäe" (*GEO* 73 *DA* 89), becomes in his reading a 'myth' in its own turn, *a literary myth of civilization*, which Adorno intentionally contrasts with the Neo-Romantic reactionary mythologies of Weimar

Germany. Odysseus is for Adorno a heroic yet human figure, a 'mythical' hero of modernity struggling for the final abolition of archaic myth and sacrificial violence. He is a figure containing, in Bloch's words, "uneigentlich Mythisches in ihr, Mythisches, das durchaus bannend und statisch wirkt und trotzdem nicht außerhalb der Menschen ... märchenhaft *entronnen*, obwohl naturhaft ruhend" (*EDZ* 185; my italics). 'Entronnen' is the word that Adorno uses to conceptualize the human *Heimat* that Odysseus is striving for ("Heimat ist das Entronnensein", *DA* 97). Adorno thus seems to owe this further element of his *Odyssey* interpretation, namely the utopian definition of *Heimat* as a realm of fable, to Ernst Bloch[354].

As a matter of fact, both the progressive horizon and the eschatological perspective of Adorno's Homeric reading seem to heavily rely on Bloch's straightforwardly political understanding of narrative forms:

> Das Märchen ist ebenso die erste Aufklärung wie es, in seiner Menschennähe, Glücksnähe, das Muster der letzten bildet; es ist allemal kindliche Kriegsgeschichte der List und des Lichts gegen die mythische Mächte, es endet als Märchen vom menschlichen Glück, als gespiegeltes Sein wie Glück. Die Sage dagegen erzählt mythischen Bann, gibt seine heteronomen Reize, ist eine Gespenstergeschichte älterer Ordnung, ist das einzige Feld woraus die *Reaktion* ihre Bilder holen kann. (*EDZ* 184; my italics)

The affinity of Adorno's anti-reactionary *Odyssey* reading to Bloch's positions in *EDZ* is quite apparent. Though Bloch's direct influence on Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter cannot be proven, a number of elements strongly suggest it. As I have already argued, in *EDZ* Bloch explicitly theorizes what is presupposed and practically executed by Adorno in his *Odyssey* chapter. Both authors are concerned with the exposition of the flaws of the Neo-Romantic philosophies and anti-modernist cultural criticism of Weimar Germany, particularly those of Ludwig Klages. The confrontation of both philosophers with the latter revolves around the notion of 'image'. As Adorno does through his interpretation of the *Nekya*, Bloch underlines the future orientation of all true utopian 'images': "Erst eine Klasse mit Zukunft [kann] den 'Fernduft des Horizonts' und die 'Bilder', welche darin stehen, gebrauchen und das

[354] According to Bloch fable heros are always 'escaped' ("entronnen") from an overpowering danger. The hero of the fable swindles mythical evil "und hat das Recht dazu" (*EDZ* 168). In other words, his cunning is motivated by his fight against injustice. Similarly, in his storyteller essay Benjamin characterizes the heroes of Lesskov's stories as 'just' heroes ('Gerechten'). Benjamin closes his essay with the dictum "der Erzähler ist die Gestalt, in welcher der Gerecht sich selbst begegnet" (Benjamin 1991-II, 465). This sentence also applies to Adorno's Odysseus, who is a storyteller ("Rede selber … ist das Gesetz des homerischen Entrinnens", *GEO* 87, *DA* 98) and (as such) a 'just' hero of civilization ("Opfer für die Abschaffung des Opfers", *GEO* 56, *DA* 73-74).

Verkapselte heraussprengen: nämlich die in eine unabgegoltene Vergangenheit eingekapselte Zukunftsbedeutung der Bilder" (ibid. 340). Genuine utopian images ('Bilder') are as follows:

> Spiegelungen eines unbekannten Endes, eines noch nicht vorhandenen Alls im kleinsten Detail. Dazu taugen die bloß archaischen und vor allem kontempliert archaisch gehaltenen Bilder eines Klages nicht, wohl aber die echten: teils aus Archaismen ausgewickelt, teils neu im Unterwegs entstanden, gerade aus dem *Exodus des Unterwegs*. Insofern tauchen sie aus der Unruhe der Dialektik auf, sie betten sich unterwegs schon ein als ebenso weitertreibende wie 'bedeutungsvolle', als Tendenz-Gestalten nicht nur, sondern fast schon als mögliche *Tendenz-Endgestalten*. (ibid. 342; my italics)

Utopian 'images' are for Bloch anticipations of a possible future, as such only accessible to a progressive, future-oriented consciousness and 'dialectical imagination' (Jay 1973), able to decipher the present and thus 'foresee' the future. According to Schlegel's dictum, historians are prophets looking back at the past; similarly for Bloch "Prophetie [ist] das Urelement aller Geschitsschreibung" (*EDZ* 350). True utopian images cannot exclusively consist of archaistic fantasies and bricolage 'archeology', but rather must contain elements of the present, and point to a future direction. In other words, they have to develop 'underway' ("Unterwegs") and always be on the move, just like Adorno's Homeric hero. In this sense, Klages' archaic (as well as Carl Gustav Jung's 'archetypical') images

> wollen weniger erinnert werden als realisiert ... denn ein rechter Archetypus drängt aus dem Bild zum Dasein, aus dem Opium zum Licht. Kurz: das rechte Urbild liegt nicht als gewesen *unterhalb des Bewußtseins* ... es ist vielmehr *in Fahrt*, ein summum bonum revolutionär-dialektischer Fahrt und wandelt sich mit ihr. (ibid. 351; my italics)

Such "Urbilder" are for Bloch "die des 'Märchen' im 'Mythos'" (ibid. 350). They are the equivalent of Adorno's images of the underworld in the *Nekya*, prefiguring Odysseus' return to his actual *Heimat*. In Adorno's epic interpretation, these images develop out of Odysseus' travels through the realms of myth (to use Bloch's vocabulary, they are "in Fahrt"). After Odysseus' visit in Hades, they travel further with him. He is not captivated by them on the spot ('*bildgefesselt*', like Klages Pelasgians), but rather, fully conscious and awake, takes them with him on his way home, as living indicators of his actual goal. Odysseus' journey cannot be stopped by a static contemplation of illusory remembrances of the past, but rather has to lead him further, ahead to his concrete homeland. This is for Adorno Odysseus' realm

of fable, the place where he will be able to narrate his multifarious stories and perilous adventures to his loved ones someday; above all, it is the place where he might live '*happily ever* after' having returned. For Adorno, the place of this happiness is not an archaic place of myth, but rather a civilized society. Again, Bloch has the right words to explain the gist of the last passages of the *Odyssey* chapter of *DA*:

> Fragt man nach diesen echten Bildern ... es sind bereits die im Märchen enthaltenen Wunschbilder ... die Hoffnungsbilder des betroffenen Staunens ... jene 'Formen' der Erhabenheit, welche, wie Kant sagt, eine Ahnung unserer *künftigen Freiheit* übermitteln. Und gerade diese Bilder werden nur von der Höhe des *fahrenden Bewußtseins* her konkret sichtbar, von jenem Neuesten her, das das 'Älteste' allein mit sich führt, um es – in voller Wachheit – aufzulösen und zu beerben. Bei Klages selbst geschieht das mitnichten, seine Rückschau ist, an Ort und Stelle, vom echten Bild so getrennt wie das Moratorium der Technik (um des Kapitals willen) vom sozialistischen Zweistundentag. (ibid. 343; my italics)

Similarly, Adorno notices that the 'promised land' of Odysseus is not the archaic realm of 'images', which is in fact "der Heimat am fernsten" (*DA* 95). This must be in the future, socially as well as technologically advanced, as such diametrically opposed to that of Klages, and more in general of the conservative and reactionary representations of *Heimat* in Weimar (and Nazi) Germany.

Adorno and Bloch thus share the same fundamental critical attitude towards Klages' cultural criticism of modernity. Yet there is a fundamental political-ideological difference between the two: while for Bloch the critical confrontation with the anti-modernist ideology of Weimar German ought to be directed towards the goal of a Marxist revolution, Adorno conceives of this 'revolution' from within bourgeois liberal society. His Odysseus remains, with all his contradictions, a bourgeois hero of civilization, and never becomes a socialist or communist hero[355]. He is a promising figuration of a future state of civilization – that is to say of a civil society governed by just laws and binding rules – and does not stand for an utterly revolutionized society in which traditional property conditions and labor relations would be abolished. In other words, he is a middle hero of bourgeois civilization, not an epic socialist hero (nor an aristocratic Nietzschean individualist). Adorno in fact transforms Bloch's heroic revolutionary pathos into the individualistic and bourgeois, sober and down-to-earth heroism of Odysseus. The latter proves himself alone against 'mythical' nature – he is a true

[355] This might be the reason why Adorno and Bloch, as the latter once declared, could never agree on the notion of utopia (see *Europe* 2008, 55 ff.).

individualist hero in this sense – yet at the same time he is also directed towards his original society, where his family, workers and possessions are still waiting for him. His antagonism against myth is not merely a heroic matter of principle, but rather a pragmatic and social (yet not socialist) necessity.

In sum, through his *Odyssey* interpretation Adorno graphically concretizes Bloch's idea, formulated some years before Adorno in *EDZ*, of appropriating, dialecticizing and in this way sublating the reactionary philosophy and anti-modernist cultural criticism of Ludwig Klages (and like thinkers). However, Adorno's practice of ideological dialectization does not so much result in a call to the socialist revolution – as it does for Bloch – but rather in a philosophical plea for bourgeois civilization more similar to that provided, as far back as 1924, by his fellow social philosopher and future academic colleague and friend Helmuth Plessner, with his *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft. Eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus*. Certainly the tracks of Adorno's critical confrontation with German intellectual radicalism and anti-modernism between Weimar and Nazi Germany are very different from those beaten by the social philosopher Plessner. Adorno's specific literary-critical and cultural-philosophical work in *DA* instead reflects Thomas Mann's intention, declared in a letter to Kerény of 1941, to take myth from Fascist culture and 'convert' it in a humane way ("Man muß dem intellectuelen Fascismus den Mythos wegnehmen und ihn ins Humane umfunktionieren. Ich tue längst nichts anderes mehr", cited in Frank 1982, 31)[356]. It is one of the many productive contradictions of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter that his progressive dialectization of the radical anti-modernist Ludwig Klages should end in a defense of bourgeois modernity and Western civilization that runs counter to all forms of radicalism, right and left alike.

[356] Interestingly, Mann alludes in his letter to *Doktor Faustus*, a work for which Adorno collaborated with the writer during their joint Californian exile in the early 40s (see Müller-Doom 2003, 474 ff.).

CHAPTER IV.
Adorno and Anti-Modernist Cultural Criticism: *Dialektik der Aufklärung* and after

4.1. A Reassessment of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter in the Light of Neo-Romantic Anti-Modernism in the Interwar Period

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to demonstrate how Adorno's famous *Odyssey* excursus in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* is the product of a thorough confrontation with the anti-modernist cultural criticism of the restorative poet Rudolf Borchardt and the archaicist philosopher Ludwig Klages. In a typical Romantic fashion, both of them conceived of "modernity as the loss of the divine and loss of community" (Murphy/Roberts 2004, 7), and were therefore "drawn irresistibly to the image of the original community, the organic totality of Greek culture and its mythical self-representation" (ibid.). Their poetic and philosophical attempts at a re-mythologization of the world aimed at a comprehensive "refoundation against the revolutionary rupture of modernity" (ibid. 7). Such mythological refoundation would be able to restore the 'natural' order of culture, based on localism, social closure, shared beliefs and traditions. In this sense, there can be no doubt that both Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages were essentially Neo-Romantic thinkers. As Peter Murphy and David Roberts contend, "as the critique and counter-movement to the project of modernity as conceived by the enlightenment, romanticism opposes to the *denaturalization* of man the call for his *renaturalization*" (ibid. 3; italics in original). Borchardt and Klages envisioned precisely such a 'renaturalization' of the world – regardless of whether 'nature' is identified with organically grown forms and traditions (Borchardt) or with an anti-intellectualist notion of 'life' (Klages).

In contrast to the Neo-Romantic idea of nature as the origin of culture, and as the base of a social order that has been perverted by the cultural revolution of the Enlightenment, Adorno seeks to define the 'nature' of man in terms of 'civilization'. As I have shown so far, Adorno's discourse on civilization in *DA* rejects the "appeal of mythic origins" and the Neo-Romantic attempts to "renaturalize man by re-embedding him in a natural-historical world prior to the modern illusions of a self-grounding subjectivity" (ibid. 7). Odysseus, Adorno's

civilized hero, is a modern subject throughout, i.e., individualist and rational. His figure represents in Adorno's Homeric reading a universal, both technical and social *Zivilisation*, opposed to the "organic originality of particularism" (ibid. 6), incarnated in the *Odyssey* by the mythical figures that thwart the hero's homecoming. These figures inhabit specific places and impose their unchangeable, 'natural' law to whoever passes by them. They stand in Adorno's *Odyssey* reading for a local, organic and earth-bound *Kultur*, as Adorno's Neo-Romantic antagonists conceived of it.

It is against the background of the Neo-Romantic anti-modernism and, more generally, the radical criticism of civilization in the Weimar years that the progressive character of Adorno's philosophy (and criticism) of civilization in *DA* comes to the fore, despite his conservative sympathies and reactionary 'flirts'. And it is against this background that *DA* should be reread and revaluated today. The assessment of Adorno's underground confrontation with Borchardt and Klages in the *Odyssey* chapter might serve to revise a still common opinion, according to which *DA* is a 'dark', pessimistic book on the dire condition of modern civilization (cf. Buschlinger 2007 and Müller-Funk 2006). This interpretative strain is prominently represented by a second-generation thinker of the *Frankfurter Schule* (and Adorno's former disciple), namely Jürgen Habermas. In his 1985 essay on *DA*, entitled "Die Verschlingung von Mythos und Aufklärung: Horkheimer und Adorno", Habermas imputes to the two authors an overly radical questioning of the "vernünftigen Gehalt der kulturellen Moderne" (Habermas 1985, 146). This criticism of modernity is grounded, in Habermas' opinion, in a "puristisches Vorhaben, ähnlich dem Vorhaben der Ontologie, Sein und Schein kategorial, d.h. mit einem Schlage zu trennen" (ibid. 157). Habermas attributes to the authors of *DA* a 'Heideggerian', i.e., fundamentally ontological stance. In his view, their cultural criticism "hat die undialektische Aufklärung des ontologischen Denkens ... fortgesetzt" (Habermas 1985, 156), and has therefore come too close to the Enlightenment-critical tradition of German philosophy from Nietzsche onwards (some elements of which were appropriated by the conservative-revolutionary movement in the interwar period; see Mohler 2005, 47).

Habermas' criticism of *DA* has initiated, or at least reinforced, a history of reception of Adorno-Horkheimer's work as a culturally pessimistic, indeed apocalyptical accusation of modern civilization and the self-destruction of enlightenment. According to this view, which continues to find some resonance today, *DA* is the expression of that Neo-Romantic, organicist and aesthetic criticism of modern civilization which the two authors actually

intended to polemicize against in their work[357]. Based on my close analysis of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter – particularly in its earlier version – I think that Habermas' assimilation of *DA* to Heidegger's ontology, and more generally to post-Nietzschean anti-modernism, is not entirely tenable. "Sein und Schein zu trennen" is in fact not so much Adorno's intention as it is that of Borchardt and Klages. It is *their Kulturkritik*, and not Adorno's, which seeks to strictly differentiate between 'healthy' culture and 'decadent' civilization, organic substances and artificial creations, religious piteousness and modern nihilism. And it is *their* fundamental ontology of culture that leads them to repudiate cultural modernism on the whole. Habermas' criticism of *DA* – and particularly of the *Odyssey* chapter, which constitutes his primary object of criticism – results in my opinion from his disregard of the work's historical and intellectual *situatedness*. *DA* feeds on the widespread anti-modernist *Kulturkritik* of Weimar Germany, yet it also takes a polemical stance towards this discursive tradition. The reconstruction of this level of Adorno's *Odyssey* text, of the kind that I have attempted to provide through my reading, shows that Adorno-Horkheimer's *Kulturkritik* in *DA* is not grounded on ontological foundations. Nor is it motivated by a purist intention, as Habermas suggest, but rather sets out to 'rescue' cultural modernity, and modern civilization at large, from its Neo-Romantic and reactionary detractors[358].

Adorno's theoretical exposition of the 'entanglement' ("Verstrickung", *DA* 99) of myth and enlightenment, resulting in a seemingly catastrophic narrative of civilization's fallback into barbarism, does not prevent him from ultimately 'saving' the *Odyssey* as an

[357] In their insightful study *Dialectic of romanticism* for instance Peter Murphy and David Roberts express this view: "Horkheimer and Adorno unmask enlightenment ideas as dangerous myths, they appeal to romantic dreams of reconciliation with a nature that is at once innocent, archaic and redemptive. It is this romantic myth that allows them to picture the history of technology as the self-traumatizing drive of human beings to dominate nature. Dialectics of Enlightenment depicts the relentless power of progress that is one with the progress of power. Human beings adapt themselves to ever more commanding powers that demand self-sacrifice in the name of self-preservation. Progress is achieved, not as dream but as nightmare. It is a black vision but no less 'all consuming' for this. There is no escape from progress, no point outside of it" (Murphy/Roberts 2004, IX). It is true that for Adorno-Horkheimer there is no escape from 'progress', yet this is not an argument against, but rather for civilization. Adorno's position in this respect is well expressed by a passage from his 1942 essay on Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, entitled "Aldous Huxley und die Utopie": "Durch die totale gesellschaftliche Vermittlung stellte gleichsam von außen nach innen zweite Unmittelbarkeit, Humanität sich her" (*GS* 10.1, 108). Huxley's dystopian image of the modern world according to Adorno results from a Romantic undervaluation of the humanizing potential of civilization. Huxley "verkennt *das humane Versprechen der Zivilisation*, weil er vergißt, daß Humanität wie den Gegensatz zur Verdinglichung auch diese selber in sich einschloß, nicht bloß als antithetische Bedingung des Ausbruchs, sondern positiv, als die wie immer brüchige und unzulängliche Form, welche die subjektive Regung verwirklicht einzig, indem sie sie objektiviert" (*GS* 10.1, 108; my italics). As for Hegel, so too for Adorno alienation and reification are not just the obstacles for, but also the means of humanity's progress towards self-consciousness and emancipation.

[358] Wolfgang Müller-Funk highlights this difference. While on the one hand he considers *DA* as "ein zutiefst radikales und in dieser Radikalität anfechtbares kulturpessimistisches Werk", on the other hand he rightly notes: "Es unterscheidet sich indes dadurch, dass es sich – das ist in der Auseinandersetzung mit Ludwig Klages, einem der Stichwortgeber der Konservative Revolution gut ablesbar – jedweder Art von Romantisierung vormoderner Zustände widersetzt. Die beiden Autoren werden nicht müde, die heimlichen und auch offenen Befürworter des Mythos an dessen Blutspur in der Geschichte zu erinnern" (Müller-Funk 2006, 134).

allegorical narrative of civilization, and thereby indirectly the legacy of Western Enlightenment and modernity at large from their Neo-Romantic critics[359]. Adorno's work is therefore far from getting stuck in an aporetic dilemma or 'performative contradiction' ("performativen Widerspruch", Habermas 1985, 154) between pro- and counter-Enlightenment stances. It rather seeks to expose the 'timeless' nexus of myth and enlightenment, which in his view still calamitously haunts modern civilization. This exposition avails itself of an evolutionary narrative from myth/prehistory to enlightenment/civilization – and back, thus offering a catastrophic vision of civilization's regression into prehistory. Such narrative, however, merely serves Adorno to develop his dialectical philosophy of history, which fundamentally remains a progressive one, and should not be seen as an ultimate verdict on modern civilization on the whole[360].

Stephen Helmling has shown in his recent study on Adorno's 'poetics of critique' how the exposition of the dialectical relation between myth and enlightenment in *DA* is "enacted as textual effect in the quasi- (or *faux*-)narrative of a story the West has been telling itself so obsessively in terms of progress and revolution as to have blinded itself to the miserable realities – regress and devolution – of our actual historical condition" (Helmling 2009, 12). The "paradoxically narrative or pseudo-narrative form" of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter "enacts ... the failure of narrative" (ibid. 16), particularly of the German tradition of historico-philosophical narratives from Hegel onwards. Adorno's pseudo-history of civilization in *DA* challenges the very idea of grand philosophies of history, such as those that were still written in Adorno's time, not only by irrationalist philosophers such as Klages or Spengler, but also by Marxist philosophers (one need only think of Lukács *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, which had exerted a major influence on the young Adorno). As Helmling contends, Adorno's ambivalent (non-transparent and non-linear) philosophy of history in *DA* "means to indict narrative itself as an ideology sustaining modernity's 'master narratives' whether left (revolution), liberal (progress), or right (the fascist apocalyptic of the 'final solution')" (ibid. 12). In this sense, Adorno's "apostasy from narrative" – or rather from a straightforward narrative of history – should not be regarded as an abandonment of progressive stances, but

[359] As I have shown in the previous chapters of this study, Adorno's defense of civilization against Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages takes the forms of a literary and philosophical interpretation of the *Odyssey* as an allegorical narrative of civilization *and* a civilizing narrative at the same time. Conversely, Adorno exposes his philosophy of civilization through an original reading of the Homeric epic as a proto-modern 'novel'. This reading culminates in a 'progressive' theory of narration, which Adorno articulates in between the lines of his *Odyssey* chapter.

[360] As Wolfgang Buschlinger for example does, who brands *DA* as a "pessimisthsches Buch der Vergangenheit", "ein einziger Ausdriuck der Fassungslosigkeit und des Ekels über diese Menschheit" (Buschlinger 2007, 31 and 30).

rather as a (more or less intentional) strategy of self-immunization against the "devolution of narrative itself into an ideology", the more insidious, the more it works "at the level of *form* rather than *content*" (ibid. 16, italics in original). It is significant in this respect that Adorno's anti-Romantic depiction of Odysseus and plea for modern civilization are based on the essential minimum requirement of bourgeois liberalism: individual freedom from unjustified forms of external (authoritarian and communitarian) coercion (in Adorno's *Odyssey* reading, the myths that threaten Odysseus's subjectivity and his goal of homecoming). This aspect of Adorno's work, as I have demonstrated, fundamentally differentiates his philosophy from that of Ernst Bloch, who in *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* calls for a Communist revolution to overthrow the bourgeois order of society (see 3.7.).

Adorno's refusal of a straightforward narration – of either progress or regress – bears on the question "of the place of narrative in a Hegelian-Marxian (i.e., historicizing) critical practice" (Helmling 2009, 11). If dialectical philosophy had been traditionally, from Hegel to Lukács, an "affair of (providential) story-telling" (ibid. 12), in the early 40s Adorno (understandably) no longer seems to share this providential faith in the realization of reason in history[361]. Yet he writes his farewell letter to the encompassing philosophies of histories of his teachers **(**Hegel, Marx and Lukács) by weaving broken fragments, bits and pieces of their works into his *Odyssey* chapter. From this perspective, the latter can be regarded as a *modernist* piece of philosophical writing. As Helmling points out, "experiments in reconceiving history, temporality, and 'story' itself in non- or even anti-narrative ways are ... a salient feature of modernism" (ibid. 11), from Marcel Proust to James Joyce and Robert Musil. Adorno's '*Dialektik im Stillstand*' (to use a phrase coined by Rolf Tiedemann for the late work of Walter Benjamin; cf. Tiedemann 1983), finds its analogue in literary devices characteristic of classic modernism, such as "Pound's 'ideogram', cubist 'collage', and Joyce's 'epiphany'", all of which "tend to displace interest and effect away from narrative continuity to a stilled or stalled, as if a-temporal stasis marked by its very discontinuity from the temporarily from which it finds itself extruded" (Helmling 2009, 11). Thus, while in the *Odyssey* chapter Adorno seems to articulate his philosophy of civilization in a traditional historicist manner, the gist of his argument actually is *not* historico-philosophical. As J. M. Bernstein asserts: "*Dialectics of Enlightenment* ... does not posses a philosophy of history at

[361] Adorno in a way seems to write already in a post-ideological era, or in what Jean-François Lyotard called the 'post-modern condition'. The fragmentary form of *DA* bases on the awareness that all contemporary attempts to write a "world-story" – be it progressive or culturally pessimistic, Marxist-revolutionary or conservative-revolutionary – failed to realize their "general or formal constitutive sin qua non", namely "narrativity itself" (Helmling 2009, 140). In doing so they lent themselves to ideological appropriation and dogmatic fossilization. This is why Adorno does not develop his philosophy of civilization through a historico-philosophical narrative, but rather through an allegorical interpretation of an age-old myth.

all.... If it present a history, it is a *history of the present*" (cited in Helmling 2009, 141; my italics). In this sense, the 'catastrophic' narrative of the *Odyssey* chapter cannot be reduced to a pessimistic verdict on modern civilization. This pseudo-narrative in fact serves Adorno to graphically suggest and warn against what should be regarded as a constant possibility, a permanent latency of modern civilization, namely its fallback into barbaric prehistory.

The interference between the narrative and the theoretical levels of Adorno's argument in the *Odyssey* chapter has brought many readers to take the allegorical narrative of Enlightenment regression into myth as the theoretical core of Adorno's work, while its underlying theory – the progressive philosophy of civilization expounded in *DA* – has surprisingly often remained unnoticed. The philosophical intention of Adorno's chapter, I contend, becomes apparent against the background of his polemical confrontation with the anti-modernists Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages. Sure enough, in *DA* Adorno does not expound his theses on civilization in a propositional manner, but rather proceeds dialectically, by (often tacitly) assuming, negating and overcoming others' tenets and positions. His confrontation with Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages in the *Odyssey* chapter happens in the manner of a *contrapuntal argumentation* to their Neo-Romantic, organicist theories of culture and anti-modernist cultural criticism. Adorno's literary evaluation of the *Odyssey* (in spite of Borchardt's disparagement) and philosophical plea for civilization (against Klages' frontal attack) do not take the form of a manifest opposition, but rather that of a subterranean *appropriation* of Borchardt's and Klages' theses. Such appropriation is aimed at a final confutation of their ideological positions. This does not mean that Adorno does not *actually* subscribe to some of Borchardt's literary and cultural-theoretical arguments, and some of Klages' philosophical arguments. Yet Adorno incorporates these into his allegorical reading of the *Odyssey*, and in this way 'sublates' them through his progressive philosophy of civilization.

This strategy of dialectical appropriation has gone unheeded in most of the critical literature on the *Odyssey* chapter, which at times has attributed to Adorno cultural critical theses and positions that are not actually his own. In this chapter, he in fact to a large extent appropriates others' theses and positions in order to burst them from within, to so speak, and thus dialectically overcome them. It is a matter worth discussing whether this mode of exposition is a weakness or rather a strength of Adorno's philosophy in *DA*. What is certain is that his discourse on myth and enlightenment in the *Odyssey* chapter feeds upon a number of past as well as contemporary works, not only of cultural critical nature (Klages, Spengler, Borchardt), but also in the fields of classical philology, myth and ritual studies, cultural

anthropology and ethnology (Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Gilbert Murray, Johann Jakob Bachofen are important influences on Adorno's work). Adorno's omnivorous appropriation of others' discourses and ideas sets in motion a dialectical procedure that *counterpoints* the appropriated thoughts while exposing them. In keeping with the musical metaphor, the *Odyssey* chapter is characterized by a poetics of allegorical *orchestration*. More that 'speaking' himself, Adorno has others speak for and with him. He thus orchestrates their discourses in order to develop his own arguments[362]. In this manner, theses, notions and topics of others are intentionally 'allegorized', i.e., made to say something else than they say in their original (con)texts. Such allegorizing orchestration of others' voices produces a sort of theoretical *ventriloquism*, which, however, is not manifest, but rather concealed in Adorno's text (or at most dimly suggested through sparse footnote references). His ventriloquism can be described as a subtle parasitical practice, through which he incorporates, absorbs and then 'rejects' the appropriated foreign thought contents and discursive materials. This procedure often makes it hard to distinguish Adorno's voice from the voices of his inspirers and opponents (who often are both at the same time), whence it emerges like the adult insect from the pupal case, as it were.

I argue that this ambiguity of Adorno's discourse has determined, amongst other things, the controversial reception of his *Odyssey* chapter up to today. His philosophical writing in *DA* evinces a syncretistic poetics, which literally dismounts the adversaries' positions while including them in Adorno's own discourse. The latter does not proceed through propositional statements, but rather by way of allegorizing exposition of others' theories and myths – indeed, of others' theories *as* myths. This is the gist of Adorno's confrontation with Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages. Their cultural-historical, philological and philosophical theories are exposed in *DA* as ideological 'myths', functional to their conservative-revolutionary politics. Certainly every interpretation of myths, even when pursued with an anti-mythological intention, turns itself mytho-logical, as it unavoidably ends up 'telling' a myth in its turn (that is to say, its own version of the myth; cf. Honold 2005, 317). Yet Adorno should not be mistaken for an undercover myth-teller, or worse, an anti-modernist Neo-Romantic mythologist[363]. He rather should be regarded as a *mythologizing* '*bricoleur*', as Claude Lévi-Strauss defines the term in *La pensée sauvage*. In *DA*, Adorno does not simply tell the somber myth of enlightenment's self-destruction and

[362] Adorno's procedure in this sense is reminiscent of Mikhail Bachtin's description of novelistic poetics, characterized by stylization of speech and polyphonic arrangement of discourses (cf. Bachtin 1981).
[363] As Sibylle Tönnies for instance did in her quite slanderous work on Adorno. In it, she unexplainably states that Adorno "hat das konservative Neuheidentum in linke Gesellschaftstheorie umgewandet" (Tönnies 1996, 60).

civilization's ultimate regression into barbarism, but rather practices a "réflexion mythique ... comme une forme intellectuelle de bricolage" (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 32), in which "d'anciennes fins ... sont appelées à jouer le rôle de moyens: les signifiés se changent en signifiants, et inversement" (ibid. 31). On account of its 'instrumental' compositional technique, Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter can be considered as an original example of *bricolage as cultural critical practice*. The original '*signifié*' in this sense is represented by the Neo-Romantic theories, or rather *mythologies of culture*, which are used by Adorno as means (or '*signifiants*') for his progressive argument.

Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter is indeed a *mythological* narration (both of the *Odyssey* and of the history of civilization), yet its intellectual *effect* as well as its moral *affect* are absolutely anti-mythical. Gérard Raulet is therefore right when he notes that "en règressant par la forme essaysitique à une rationalité encore indifférenciée, la *Dialektik der Aufklärung* prend délibérément son parti de son propre statut mythique" (Raulet 1998, 150). Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter reads as an "amalgame anachronique", which consciously "assume la régression" (ibid. 151; my italics), not only in terms of content – the Romantic criticism of civilization – but also in terms of material, through the appropriation of scholarly and theoretical sources that were either programmatically 'untimely' (Borchardt's and Klages' works) or scientifically outdated in Adorno's time (the ethnological and anthropological sources of *DA*, see Raulet 1998, 131 ff.)[364]. Precisely this deliberate assumption of myth, both in content/material (the Neo-Romantic cultural theories and cultural critical theorems) and form (the *Weltanschauungs*-essay as an undifferentiated, therefore 'anachronistic' form; see Raulet 1998, 152 and Sloterdijk 1985, 339) essentially differentiates Adorno from the truly 'dark' mythologies and mythical revivals of Weimar Germany. The 'mythical' anachronism – for such does cultural criticism appear to be in the age of disenchantment – characterizes Adorno's *Zivilisationskritik* as much as that of Borchardt and Klages[365]. Yet in Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter, the recuperation of myth – philosophically, the Romantic myth of man's

[364] Adorno's appropriation of them as material for his bricolage practice foregrounds not so much their up-to-datedness, but rather their essayistic 'usability' (see Raulet 1998, 142 ff.). As Claude Lévi-Strauss says: "Le bricoleur est apte à exécuter un grand nombre de tâches diversifiées ; mais, à la différence de l'ingénieur, il ne subordonne pas chacune d'elles à l'obtention de matières premières et d'outils, conçus et procurés à la mesure de son projet : son univers instrumental est clos, et la règle de son jeu est de toujours s'arranger avec les 'moyens du bord', c'est-à-dire un ensemble à chaque instant fini d'outils et de matériaux, hétéroclites au surplus, parce que la composition de l'ensemble n'est pas en rapport avec le projet du moment, ni d'ailleurs avec aucun projet particulier, mais est le résultat contingent de toutes les occasions qui se sont présentées de renouveler ou d'enrichir le stock, ou de l'entretenir avec les résidus des constructions et de destructions antérieures. L'ensemble des moyens du bricoleur n'est donc pas définissable par un projet ... il se définit seulement par son instrumentalité ... parce que les éléments sont recueillis ou conservés en vertu du principe que 'ça peut toujours servir'" (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 27 ; my italics).

[365] Oliver Agard rightly underlines how *DA* "assume la forme essayistique d'un récit mythologique" (Agard 2005, 160).

bond with nature; literarily, the *Odyssey* myth; formally, the essay as a mythical-prophetic form of *Zeitdiagnostik* – is 'contained', as it were, by the *bricolage* mode and syncretistic style of his philosophical writing. The orchestrating arrangement and ventriloquizing allegorization of the appropriated foreign content and materials prevents Adorno's critical discourse on civilization from opting for regressive or neo-mythical solutions. This prevention is inscribed as a sort of immune system in Adorno's syncretistic philosophical poetics, that is to say, in his way of *writing philosophy through inter-text* and *con-text*.

For this reason, Habermas' criticism of Adorno and Horkheimer for letting themselves be inspired by Nietzsche "darin ... dass sie ihre kulturkritische Maßstäbe aus einer verselbständigten Grunderfahrung der ästhetischen Moderne gewinnen" (Habermas 1985, 146) can only be accepted with reservations. It is not so much a regression to aestheticism, as Habermas suggests, but rather a *return to aesthetics* as a specific kind of theorization that can be attributed to *DA* (cf. Raulet 1998, 151 ff.).This return to aesthetics is also a return in spirit and intention to the origins of German Romanticism and the early Idealist critique of the Enlightenment. Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter can be seen as the closing chapter of a long-lasting debate in the history of modern German philosophy on the relation between myth and reason, and on the possibility of a mythology *in* and *for* modernity. As Manfred Frank has shown in *Der kommende Gott. Vorlesungen über die neue Mythologie* (1982), this debate was initiated by the 'father' of Romanticism Johann Gottfried von Herder in his essay *Vom neuern Gebrauch der Mythologie* (1767), and found its culmination in the early phase of German Idealism with *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (1797), the authorship of which has been variously attributed to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (who is probably the real author of the fragment; see Frank 1982, 153)[366].The fundamental question posed and answered in different ways by these two short works is that of the possibility of an ethical foundation and socio-political legitimation of enlightened reason, and of the role that the creation of a new 'mythology' can play in this sense. Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter in *DA* seems to draw conclusions indirectly from these two important texts of early German Romanticism and aesthetic Idealism, as I will now briefly illustrate.

In the fictional dialogue *Vom neuern Gebrauch der Mythologie* of 1767, Herder compares the contemporary enlightened stance towards myth, which is regarded by many as a form of backward superstition, as such useless for modern life, with a more moderate position – which is ultimately his own – according to which ancient myths (Greek as well as Germanic

[366] I quote from the version of the fragment that was published in Hegel's *Werke* (cf. Hegel 1979).

ones) can legitimately be recovered for present purposes, provided they are inflated with a 'new spirit'. This is what Herder calls a "heuristischen Gebrauch der Mythologie", the gist of which is "aus der neuern Zeit und ihren Sitten der alten Mythologie einen neuen Zug so glücklich anzudichten, daß das Neue ehrwürdig und das Alte verjüngt wird" (cited in Frank 1982, 131). Herder was not interested in an erudite revival of old myths in modern literature. The task of the new poets should rather consist in transforming ancient mythological narrations in such a way as to adapt them to the modern, 'enlightened' spirit. Contrary to the clichéd, enlightened view of myth as an irrational, outdated form of world-representation, he thought that all myths contain an allegorical truth – indeed, that some moral truths are best expressed in a mythological way: "Wenn ich Mythologische Ideen und Bilder gebrauche, so fern gewisse *moralische***,** oder *allgemeine Wahrheiten* durch sie sinnlich erkannt werden: so sind mir ja Mythologische Figuren erlaubt" (cited in Frank 1982, 126; my italics). As Manfred Frank has shown, at the time of writing *Vom neuern Gebrauch der Mythologie* Herder did not think that the creation of a new mythology was possible in the Age of Enlightenment. His Romantic stance was in this sense rather moderate (he will later develop a more decidedly Romantic position in his fictional dialogue *Iduna oder Der Apfel der Verjüngung* (1796); cf. Frank 1982, 143 ff.). Moderns for him were no longer prone to believe in myths, words and fictional narrations in general as absolute truths. This is why he could only suggest to his contemporaries an innovative use of the old (above all Greek) mythology as a source of 'moral' examples conveyed through 'fantastic' images. However, already in this early essay, Herder expresses the wish to create a 'new' mythology for enlightened modernity. His 'dream' (he speaks of '*Traum*') is that of a poetry which "sich eine Politische Mythologie schüffe" (cited in Frank 1982, 132), able to sustain and legitimize the socio-political regime of the new era both morally and intellectually.

Similarly, in *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (1797), the authors (Schelling, Hegel, Hölderlin) sketch out a philosophical program of critical enlightenment that carries clear political implications. This short piece – which Manfred Frank describes as "Gründungsakte des deutschen Idealismus in seiner romantisch-ästhetischen Spielart" (Frank 1982, 153) – does not simply invoke a new mythology against simplistically enlightened reason, but rather a mythology *of* reason, one that would be in the service of the new, post-Revolutionary political ideas: "Wir müssen eine neue Mythologie haben, diese Mythologie aber muss im Dienste der Ideen stehen, sie muß eine Mythologie der *Vernunft* werden" (Hegel 1979, 236; italics in original). Since "[n]ur was Gegenstand der *Freiheit* ist, heißt *Idee*", and "[d]ie erste Idee ist ... die Vorstellung *von mir selbst* als einem

absolut freien Wesen" (ibid. 234; italics in original), this new mythology would have to be one of individual freedom, not only from the loosening bonds of the *Ancien Régime*, but also (and above all) from the coercions of the 'modern' state: "Wir müssen also auch über den Staat hinaus!" (ibid.). As Frank contends, *Das älteste Systemprogramm* is not just a romantic-revolutionary statement, but rather the result of the authors' philosophical engagement with the far-reaching political question, raised by the Revolutionary events in France, "ob es eine Möglichkeit zur (Wieder-)Herstellung kollektiver Identität**,** d.h. zur Rettung einer Beglaubigungsfunktion für politische Herrschaft diesseits des Glaubens an Werte geben kann, wie die es sind, für die früher die Religion einstand" (Frank 1982, 167). The authors of the 'systematic program' responded to this question with a neo-mythological project that was based on the absolute claims of self-grounded reason. In this sense, the new mythology invoked by *Das älteste Systemprogramm* was not romantically regressive, but rather radically modern, and post-Revolutionary in spirit. Its aim was to figure the basic moral tenets and political beliefs of the emerging bourgeoisie, in order to prepare the way for a truly democratic society[367]. The 'utopian' character of *Das älteste Systemprogramm* resides in the authors' wish to translate the new libertarian ideas of Idealistic philosophy into a concrete 'mythological' figuration, in order for them to be accessible to the majority of the people[368].

It would be overstating the case to assert that Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter intentionally carries out what his Idealist predecessors programmatically formulated over 140 years before him. However, I believe that the gist of Adorno's work can be described in terms of a 'new' mythology of modern reason, as anticipated by Schelling, Hegel and Hölderlin in *Das älteste Systemprogramm*. Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter of *DA* represents a progressive 'myth' of civilization, one that is clearly in the service of a democratic utopia. The procedure followed by Adorno in creating this old-new mythology (historically old, yet in urgent need of renovation in Adorno's time), is that indicated by Herder in *Vom neuern Gebrauch der*

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[367] "Auch darin ist die Neue Mythologie der ersten Stunde radikal *neu*, daß sie vom alten Mythos nur die Funktion transzendenter Legitimation retten will, nicht aber die superstitiösen Inhalte: gerechtfertigt soll alles nur werden aus der Idee der Freiheit, und trotz oder gerade wegen der kritischen Wendung gegen den nachrevolutionär-bürgerlichen Staat bleibt die Utopie der Neuen Mythologie eine radikal volksdemokratische" (Frank 1982, 189).

[368] "Ehe wir die Ideen ästhetisch, d. h. mythologisch machen, haben sie für das *Volk* kein Interesse; und umgekehrt, ehe die Mythologie vernünftig ist, muß sich der Philosoph ihrer schämen. So müssen endlich Aufgeklärte und Unaufgeklärte sich die Hand reichen, die Mythologie muß philosophisch werden und das Volk vernünftig, und die Philosophie muß mythologisch werden, um die Philosophen sinnlich zu machen. Dann herrscht ewige Einheit unter uns. Nimmer der verachtende Blick, nimmer das blinde Zittern des Volks vor seinen Weisen und Priestern. Dann erst erwartet uns *gleiche* Ausbildung *aller* Kräfte, des Einzelnen sowohl als aller Individuen. Keine Kraft wird mehr unterdrückt werden. Dann herrscht allgemeine Freiheit und Gleichheit der Geister! – Ein höherer Geist, vom Himmel gesandt, muß diese neue Religion unter uns stiften, sie wird das letzte, größte Werk der Menschheit sein" (Hegel 1979, 236; italics in original).

Mythologie. Adorno tells his myth of civilization through an allegorical interpretation of an old myth, the *Odyssey*, which he injects with a new spirit, by reading it as a meaningful parable of modern civilization. Significantly, Adorno's renovation of the Homeric myth results from a polemical confrontation with the mythical revivals of German Neo-Romanticism. One of Adorno's achievements with the *Odyssey* chapter consists in a thorough rebuke of the extremes that the German Romantic tradition had attained to with Borchardt and Klages, both of whom (but especially the former) can be seen as epigonic descendants of the late Herder and his wide conception of myth in *Iduna.*

Given the vast literature on *DA*, it is quite astonishing that Adorno's achievement with the *Odyssey* chapter has not been given much attention so far, and that consequentially this work has often been read as the expression of that Romantic discontent with and criticism of civilization that it actually intends to counter. On the other hand, this interpretation is not merely the result of a misreading of Adorno's text, but also of the abridgements made by Adorno-Horkheimer themselves in the process of textual editing. The parts of the *Odyssey* chapter that were abridged by the authors are not only quantitatively (about 15 pages out of 50) but also qualitatively substantial, and certainly play a decisive role in the development of Adorno's argument. One could speculate on the reasons for this massive deletion, which resulted in a fundamental de-contextualization of the text. In his brief editor's introduction to "Geschichtsphilosophischer Exkurs zur *Odyssee*", Rolf Tiedemann asserts that "ein großer Teil der Änderungen, vor allem der Kürzungen, die die veröffentliche Fassung gegenüber der älteren aufweist, wohl von Horkheimer veranlaßt wurde" (*GEO* 37). Tiedemann does not give any additional information, nor does he say anything about the possible reasons of this erasure. My speculation is that through the obliteration of the anti-modernist *Kulturkritik* of Rudolf Borchardt and Ludwig Klages, Horkheimer intended to avoid a potentially compromising association with these Neo-Romantic thinkers, to whom, despite his criticism, Adorno unquestionably pays tribute in the original version of the *Odyssey* chapter. In the final version, neither this tribute nor Adorno's polemical intent towards the above-mentioned authors can be detected.

The authors' abridgements have determined a mystification of their own work, which has lead to remarkable misunderstandings at the level of its *Wirkungs-* and *Rezeptionsgeschichte*[369]. Ironically, Adorno-Horkheimer's editorial intervention does not seem to have produced the effects wished for by the authors, as the book still continues to be

[369] Just an example: it is questionable whether *DA* would have become *so* popular amongst leftist students in the 60s, had the extensive references to Borchardt in the first pages of the text been preserved.

read by some as a document of conservative *bildungsbürgerlicher Kulturpessimismus*. This probably would not have happened – or, at least, not to the same extent – had the *Odyssey* chapter been published in its earlier version. Be that as it may – for it *may* also be that the textual abridgements were motivated by practical concerns of coherency and concision – a consideration of Adorno's earlier *Odyssey* chapter is in my opinion essential for an exhaustive assessment of this work. Adorno's confrontation with reactionary anti-modernism clearly demonstrates the progressive nature of his philosophy of civilization, and its peculiar position in the German tradition of cultural criticism from Nietzsche onwards. The theoretical import of Adorno's *Odyssey* chapter cannot be evaluated except in connection with the polemical, politically fraught opposition of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in intellectual discourses in the interwar period. In the concluding section of this work, I will cast a glance over Adorno's continuing confrontation with this widespread and far-reaching cultural critical topos of early 20th-century German intellectual history.

4.2. Adorno's Continuing Confrontation with Conservative Cultural Criticism in Post-War Germany: "Kultur und Zivilisation" (1956) and "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" (1951)

A telling instance of Adorno's continuing preoccupation with conservative *Kulturkritik* after *DA* is his post-war essay "Kultur und Zivilisation" (1956; here cited as *KZ*). This short essay is contained in the 4th volume of the *Frankfurter Beiträge zur Soziologie* (entitled *Soziologische Exkurse. Nach Vorträgen und Diskussionen*), edited by Adorno himself together with Walter Dirks. Although the text is unauthored, there are good reasons to assume that it was written to a large extent (if not entirely) by Adorno himself[370]. In this illuminating, so far little considered essay, Adorno attempts a dialectical theorization of the concepts *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, which had pervaded cultural critical discourses in Germany from the late 19th century on (see 1.1.). As is to be expected from the nature of the volume in which it is contained, the essay proposes a sociological approach to the notions of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, opposing their polemical use in traditional cultural criticism: "Die polemische Tendenz gegen die Masse ... gehört in einen allgemeineren soziologischen Zusammenhang" (ibid. 83). Though fraught with references and quotes from literary, philosophical and sociological authors from classic antiquity to the present (Poseidonios, Cicero, Juvenal, Dante, Herder, Rousseau, Kant, Schiller, Wagner, Freud, Ortega y Gasset, Spengler, Tönnies), the work has a rather didactic character (cf. *Soziologische Exkurse*, 7) and clearly spells out the position of Adorno and the other members of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* towards the German tradition of conservative *Kulturkritik*.

The text sets out with a clarification of the disparaging meaning that the term *Zivilisation* assumed in the German language – contrary to other European languages – starting in the 19th century:

> im deutschen Sprachgebrauch erhält der Ausdruck seine prägnante Bedeutung im 19. Jahrhundert. Die moderne Zivilisation wird seitdem in Zusammenhang gebracht einmal mit dem außerordentlichen *Anwachsen der Bevölkerung* seit der industriellen

[370] In the preface to Soziologische Exkurse Adorno and Horkheimer state: "Die Autorschaft des Buches gebührt dem Institut für Sozialforschung als Ganzem" (Soziologische Exkurse, 8). Ralph Konersmann, who has included this text in his anthological volume Kulturphilosophie, writes "nach Auskunft des Theodor W. Adorno Archivs in Frankfurt a.M. vom 30. März 1995 ist eine nähere Bestimmung der Verfasserschaft 'nicht möglich und auch nicht gefordert'" (Konsersmann 2001, 369). However, the focus, style and language of the essay suggest that Adorno was, if not the only, certainly the main author of this text.

> Revolution zu Beginn des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts und der damit zusammenhängenden *Verstädterung*, dann mit der *Auflösung der traditionellen Ordnungen* der Gesellschaft durch die ratio. Nun herrsche ein zugleich *überorganisierter* und *chaotischer* ungegliederter Zustand. Große Zahlen von Menschen sollen *atomisiert, des inneren Zusammenhalts bar, oberflächlich, seelenlos,* auf den je eigenen Vorteil bedacht und zugleich der Gewalt ihrer Menge dunkel sich bewußt, existieren, im Sinne von Spenglers 'Typus des modernen Höhlenmenschen'. (*KZ* 84; my italics)

Adorno enumerates the traditional topoi of German conservative *Kulturkritik*. The catalogue culminates in a reference to Spengler's famous depiction of the city-dweller as a modern nomad and semi-barbaric cave-dweller, and of the city as an all-consuming monster, the place of decadent civilization. Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* is considered by Adorno as the foremost example of a pessimistic cultural philosophy that, based on implicit aesthetic assumptions of Romantic and Idealistic descent, pits organic *Kultur* against mechanic *Zivilisation*:

> Dieser negativen Konstruktion des Zivilisatorischen wird die Kultur entgegengehalten, etwa so wie man als Kind den Unterschied zwischen einer von Reklamen entstellten Mietshäuserstraße und einem unverschandelten mittelalterlichen Städtchen einmal erfahren hat. Eilends wird das gegenwärtige Unheil auf jenes mehr oder minder vag vorgestellte Phänomen der Zivilisation gleichsam *ästhetisch zurückgeführt* – mit größter populärer Wirkung vor mehr als dreißig Jahren im Werk Spenglers, wo die zur Auflösung drängende 'Spätzeit großer Kulturen', unter ausgiebiger Benutzung der Analogie zwischen Erscheinungen der römischen Kaiserzeit und solchen des 19. und des 20. Jahrhunderts, als unausweichliche End- und Verfallsperiode ausgemalt ist. (ibid.; my italics)

Significantly, Adorno's perspective in the essay is not merely historical, but also addresses Germany's post-war present. The categories made popular by Spengler – first of all his stark juxtaposition between culture and civilization – are still current in the 50s: "Die Feindschaft gegen die Zivilisation verbindet sich *heute* fast stets mit solchem geschichtlichen Pessimismus. Darin hat das öffentliche Bewußtsein sich nicht unbeträchtlich gewandelt" (*KZ* 84; my italics). The polemical reference to Spengler's pessimistic cultural philosophy at the outset of the essay is aimed at indicting the resurfacing of cultural criticism in the 'restorative' cultural climate of post-war Germany (see Hermand 1986, 200 and 209), where such works as José Ortega y Gasset's *Der Aufstand der Massen* (republished in 1947 with a remarkable print run of 50,000 copies) and Hendirk de Man's *Vermassung und Kulturverfall* (1951) still found

resonance amongst the educated class (see Bollenbeck 1994, 303). Adorno critical target is unmistakable in this sense:

> Wohl steht es nicht an, Kultur gegen die Zivilisation zu beschwören. Der beschwörende Gestus selber, die Exaltation der Kultur auf Kosten der Massengesellschaft, die beflissene Konsumtion der Kulturgüter als Bestätigung einer gehobenen seelischen Innenausstattung sind unabtrennbar vom Zerfallscharakter der Zivilisation. Die Beschwörung der Kultur ist ohnmächtig. (*KZ* 87)

Contemporary *Kulturkritik* is certainly the object of Adorno's criticism in *KZ*[371]. However, his intention in the essay is not primarily polemical, but rather philosophical. Through an historical overview of the discourse of cultural criticism, he attempts to assess its theoretical import and continuing relevance for the present. He therefore turns his attention to the 'father' of modern *Kulturkritik*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom he regards as the philosophical propagator of the juxtaposition of culture and civilization: "Seitdem Jean-Jacques Rousseau nicht bloß gegen das Unrecht, sondern gegen die angebliche Verkünstelung des Lebens im französischen Absolutismus, gegen das sinnlose, veräußerlichte Dasein die Natur als kritische Instanz aufrichtete, ist das Bewußtsein von jenem Gegensatz allgemein geworden" (ibid. 85). Adorno's depiction of Rousseau is quite ambivalent. He on the one hand criticizes the Swiss philosopher for having initiated with his first *Discours* (1750) a Romantic tradition of criticism of culture as mere 'ideology', 'polish' and 'appearance'[372]. This tradition in Adorno's view eventually peaked in the anti-intellectualist cultural pessimism of Spengler and other conservative *Kulturkritiker* in Germany (Klages for instance) during the first decades of the 20th century. However, Adorno is far from dismissing Rousseau as a radical irrationalist

[371] At times this criticism seems to unintentionally border on sarcasm: "Wer heute die Kultur auf Kosten der Zivilisation verherrlicht, hat es *mehr mit der Anlage von Kulturschutzparks als mit der Humanität* zu tun. Die zum Ausstellungsobjekt erniedrigten Giebel der alten Städte oder die dem Fremdenverkehr zuliebe wieder aufgebauten Barockhäuser passen nur allzugut in den Betrieb der Gesellschaftsfahrten auf 'romantischen Straßen' und insgesamt in jene Zivilisation hinein, die sie denunzieren wollen" (*KZ* 86; my italics).

[372] Adorno quotes (in translation) a fitting passage from Rousseau's first *Discours*: "Wie der Körper hat auch der Geist seine Bedürfnisse. Jene bilden die Grundlage der Gesellschaft, diese machen ihre Annehmlichkeit aus. Während die Regierungen und die Gesetze für die Sicherheit und das Wohlergehen der zusammenwohnenden Menschen sorgen, breiten die weniger despotischen und vielleicht mächtigeren Wissenschaften, Schriften und Künste Blumengirlanden über die Eisenketten, die sie beschweren. Sie ersticken in ihnen das Gefühl jener ursprünglichen Freiheit, für die sie geboren zu sein scheinen, lassen sie ihre Knechtschaft lieben und machen aus ihnen, was man zivilisierte Völker nennt. Das Bedürfnis errichtete die Throne, die Wissenschaft und Künste haben sie befestigt. Mächte der Erde, liebt die Talente und fördert die, welche sie pflegen. Gebildete Völker, pflegt sie! Glückliche Sklaven, ihr verdankt ihnen den zarten und verfeinerten Geschmack, auf den ihr aus seid: jene Geschmeidigkeit des Charakters und jene Weltgewandtheit der Umgangsformen, die bei euch den Verkehr so verbindlich und gewandt machen – kurzum: den Anschein aller Tugenden, ohne eine davon zu besitzen" (cited in *KZ* 158; my italics).

Kulturkritiker. Unexpectedly, he puts him on par with his rationalist follower Immanuel Kant: "Überraschen mag, daß man der Zivilisationsmüdigkeit auch bei dem alles eher als irrationalistischen Kant, der sich dennoch Rousseau aufs tiefste verpflichtet wußte, begegnet" (ibid.). Adorno refers to Kant's discrimination between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in his 1784 essay *Ideen zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (cf. chapter I):

> 'Wir sind im hohen Grade durch Kunst und Wissenschaft *kultiviert*. Wir sind *zivilisiert* bis zum Überlästigen, zu allerlei gesellschaftlicher Artigkeit und Anständigkeit. Aber, uns für schon *moralisiert* zu halten, daran fehlt noch sehr viel. Denn die Idee der Moralität gehört noch zur Kultur, der Gebrauch dieser Idee aber, welcher nur auf das Sittenähnliche in der Ehrliebe und der äußeren Anständigkeit hinausläuft, macht bloß die Zivilisierung aus'. (cited in *KZ* 85)

Adorno appreciates Kant's critical differentiation of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*. Unlike later critics of culture in Germany, he did not oppose the two notions, but rather conceived of them as two sides of the same coin. The following comment on Kant's phrase reveals Adorno's proximity to the philosopher of German Enlightenment:

> Das klingt rousseauistisch, aber auch harmlos klassifikatorisch genug. Allein die scheinbar nüchternen und pedantischen Formulierungen Kants enthalten, wie oftmals, mehr *gesellschaftlich Wahres* als die später beliebten Ausfälle gegen die Zivilisation, deren Extrem vielleicht das Porta-Nigra-Gedicht aus Georges' 'Siebentem Ring' bringt, wo ein im modernen Trier auferstandener römischer Buhlknabe zum Richter über die Neue Zeit sich aufwirft. Kant setzt allein schon durch die sprachliche Form der Koordination die Begriffe Kultur und Zivilisation weder ins Verhältnis der bloßen zeitlichen Aufeinanderfolge noch in das der einfachen Unvereinbarkeit, sondern charakterisiert beide als *zueinander gehörige, wenn auch einander widersprechen Elemente der fortschreitenden Vergesellschaftung*. Er weiß, daß man das eine nicht ohne das andere haben kann; daß die innere Entfaltung des Menschen und seine Gestaltung der äußeren Welt wechselseitig voneinander abhängen, und daß es illusionär wäre, ein Innenreich aufrichten zu wollen, das nicht zugleich in der Gestaltung des Wirklichen sich bewährt. (*KZ* 85; my italics)

Adorno's praise of Kant's 'sociological' understanding of the concepts *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* in fact reflects his own view on the subject. Kant defines them as complementary terms, as two moments or aspects of the same dialectical process. His definition therefore proves

superior for Adorno to those of Spengler, George[373] and the late-Romantic critics of civilization, who saw the two concepts in a starkly oppositional, mutually exclusive relation. As I have shown in the previous chapters of this study, in his works on George and Spengler as well as in *DA* (though in a more indirect manner), Adorno takes issue with the dogmatic anti-modernist juxtaposition of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, which in his opinion reflects the 'reactionary' turn of vast parts of the educated bourgeoisie in turn-of-the-century and particularly Weimar Germany. This reactionary disposition towards modernity ultimately converged with the *Weltanschauung* propagated by the *Konservative Revolution*. In *KZ* Adorno resumes his polemic against the cultural philosophy of Spengler and the conservative-revolutionary intellectuals:

> Erst ein Bewußtsein, das daran verzweifelt, die menschliche Welt aus *Freiheit und Bewußtsein* zu gestalten, und sie darum wie Spengler nach Analogie des pflanzenhaften Werdens und Vergehens beschreibt, kommt dazu, Kultur als Seelengebilde messerscharf von der Äußerlichkeit der Zivilisation zu trennen, gegen diese auszuspielen und zu verabsolutieren – oft genug um damit dem wahren Feind das Tor zu öffnen, der *Barbarei*. (ibid. 86; my italics)

As I have shown in the first chapter, Spengler contrasts *Kultur*, understood as the manifestation of a cultural 'soul' ('*Kulturseele*'), to *Zivilisation*, seen as a complex of merely 'extensional' processes (cf. Spengler 1963, 51). For Adorno, Spengler's organic philosophy of culture, and the fatalist historical narrative that results from it – *Kultur* as birth and ripeness, *Zivilisation* as inevitable aging and death of culture – precludes the idea of freedom in history, and negates a priori the force of consciousness in shaping human destiny. Adorno's Odysseus is not by chance a hero of individual consciousness, struggling for self-emancipation against the unchangeable law of myth. His struggle stands for modern man's striving towards self-determination and the construction of a truly civilized society, free from violence and coercion. Significantly, Odysseus is also a 'technical' hero, someone who manages to assert

[373] Here an excerpt from George's poem that Adorno refers to, entitled "PORTA NIGRA": "Dass ich zu eurer zeit erwachen musste/ Der ich die pracht der Treverstadt gekannt/ Da sie den ruhm der schwester Roma teilte ·/..../// Hier zog die Mosel zwischen heitren villen ../ O welch ein taumel klang beim fest des weines!/ Die mädchen trugen urnen lebenschwellend –/ Kaum kenn ich diese trümmer · an den resten/ Der kaiserlichen mauern leckt der nebel ·/ Entweiht in särgen liegen heilige bilder ·/Daneben hingewühlt barbarenhöhlen ../ Nur aufrecht steht noch mein geliebtes tor!// Im schwarzen flor der zeiten doch voll stolz/ Wirft es aus hundert fenstern die verachtung/ Auf eure schlechten hütten (reisst es ein/ Was euch so dauernd höhnt!) auf eure menschen/ Die fürsten priester knechte gleicher art/ Gedunsne larven mit erloschnen blicken/ Und frauen die ein sklav zu feil befände –/ Was gelten alle dinge die ihr rühmet:// Das edelste ging euch verloren: blut ../ Wir schatten atmen kräftiger! lebendige/ Gespenster! lacht der knabe Manlius .." (George-*GAW* Vol. 6/7, 16-17).

his will by means of his developed instrumental faculty. Thus, social and technological intelligence meet in his character, which in this respect is wholly antagonistic to the *Gemeinschaft* and *Kultur* imagery of German cultural conservatism in the interwar period[374].

In the second chapter of this work, I have attempted to demonstrate how Adorno's philosophy of civilization draws on Freud's philosophical writings, particularly *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*. In *KZ* Adorno returns to Freud, whom he eloquently praises as "ein Denker unserer Tage, dem man weder bequemen Fortschrittsoptimismus noch Oberflächlichkeit nachsagen kann" (*KZ* 86). In *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (1927) Freud had openly pronounced against the polemical juxtaposition of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* that was common in his time. Adorno quotes extensively from this work:

> 'Die menschliche Kultur — ich meine all das, worin sich das menschliche Leben über seine animalischen Bedingungen erhoben hat und worin es sich vom Leben der Tiere unterscheidet — und *ich verschmähe es, Kultur und Zivilisation zu trennen* — zeigt dem Beobachter bekanntlich *zwei Seiten*. Sie umfaßt einerseits all das Wissen und Können, das die Menschen erworben haben, um die Kräfte der Natur zu beherrschen und ihr Güter zur Befriedigung der menschlichen Bedürfnisse abzugewinnen, anderseits alle die Einrichtungen, die notwendig sind, um die Beziehungen der Menschen zueinander, und besonders die Verteilung der erreichbaren Güter zu regeln. *Die beiden Richtungen der Kultur sind nicht unabhängig voneinander*, erstens, weil die gegenseitigen Beziehungen der Menschen durch das Maß der Triebbefriedigung, das die vorhandenen Güter ermöglichen, tiefgreifend beeinflußt werden, zweitens, weil der einzelne Mensch selbst zu einem anderen in die Beziehung eines Gutes treten kann, insofern dieser seine Arbeitskraft benützt oder ihn zum Sexualobjekt nimmt, drittens aber, weil jeder Einzelne virtuell ein Feind der Kultur ist, die doch ein allgemeinmenschliches Interesse sein soll.' (cited in *KZ* 86-7)

Freud's forceful argument illustrates the gist of Adorno's philosophy of civilization. The social and technical, spiritual and material sides of *Kultur* must be thought together. According to Adorno, a worthy theory of culture – and consequently a feasible cultural criticism – should always operate within the framework set up by Freud. Such a tenet also informs Adorno's theorization of cultural criticism in another important post-war essay,

[374] As Adorno's later colleague and friend Helmut Plessner writes in Grenzen der Gemeinschaft: eine Kritik des sozialen Radikalismus (1924): "Gesellschaft ohne Technik und Zivilisation ist nicht möglich, Technik im weitesten Sinne genommen. Jeder Verkehr zwischen Menschen, welcher des Werkzeugs, des künstlichen Mittels bedarf, hebt sich aus der Gemeinschaftssphäre heraus und wirkt gesellschaftlich. Er wirkt so freilich noch nicht durch dieses äußere Merkmal, sondern erst in dem geistigen Moment, da die Künstlichkeit als solche Wertschätzung genießt" (Plessner 2001, 40).

entitled "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" (published in 1951, but written in 1949; here cited as *KG*), which introduces Adorno's homonymous essay collection. This work is a further instance of Adorno's continuing confrontation with conservative *Kulturkritik* after *DA*. As is also the case with the later essay "Kultur und Zivilisation", in this essay Adorno not only targets traditional cultural criticism – as represented by Spengler – but also "[d]ie neuere bürgerliche Kulturkritik", which "insgeheim bei der Scheidung von hoher und populärer Kultur, von Kunst und Unterhaltung, von Erkenntnis und unverbindlicher Weltanschauung sich beruhigt" (*KG* 20).

Adorno operates with two notions of *Kultur*, a traditional (normative and conservative) notion and a more comprehensive, 'sociological' one, which is that suggested by Freud in *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*. Adorno attributes the first understanding of *Kultur* to the conservative cultural critic: "Der Kulturkritiker kann kaum die Unterstellung vermeiden, *er hätte die Kultur*, welche dieser abgeht. Seine Eitelkeit kommt der ihren zu Hilfe: noch in der anklagenden Gebärde hält er die *Idee von Kultur isoliert, unbefragt, dogmatisch fest*" (*KG* 11; my italics). Adorno rebukes the inadequacy ("Unangemessenheit") of this intellectual ethos, which manifests a "Mangel an Respekt vor dem Kritisierten" and, at the same time, "dessen verblendet-hochmütige Anerkennung" (ibid.). The traditionalist cultural critic behaves as though he did not belong to the 'culture' which he fiercely criticizes: "Dem Kulturkritiker paßt die Kultur nicht, der einzig er das Unbehagen an ihr verdankt" (ibid. 11). Adorno question such conservative 'discontent' ("Unbehagen") with modern culture, resulting in an arrogant pretense of superiority, by tracing back the origin of cultural criticism to 19th-century bourgeois society. At that time, Adorno argues, the role of the (literary and art) critic consisted in both evaluating *and* promoting the new products of the cultural market (book, art works, cultural events): "Die berufsmäßigen Kritiker ... orientierten über den Markt geistiger Erzeugnisse. Dabei erlangten sie zuweilen Einsicht in die Sache, blieben stets jedoch auch *Agenten* des Verkehrs, im Einverständnis wo nicht mit dessen einzelnen Produkten so doch mit der Sphäre als solcher" (ibid. 12; my italics). Adorno remarks how the critic's function within the market is essentially ambivalent. He works simultaneously as its judge and agent, and is therefore both external and internal to it. The reference to the 'market' is significant in this context, since the sphere of exchange and circulation was a preferred object of criticism of traditional *Kulturkritik* from the turn of the 20th century onwards. According to Adorno, instead of refusing the market, the cultural critic should acknowledge his position within it.

Otherwise, he risks taking a dishonest attitude, the more ideological, the more it entrenches itself in an aristocratic pretense of self-exclusion and moral integrity[375].

Adorno's subtle anamnesis of the critic's role and function in bourgeois society is clearly aimed at undermining the legitimacy of elitist *Kulturkritik*. He spells out what is in his view the consequence of such a critical attitude: "Weil die Kulturkritik gegen die fortschreitende Integration allen Bewußtseins im materiellen Produktionsapparat sich auflehnt, ohne diesen zu durchschauen, wendet sie sich nach *rückwärts*, verlockt vom Versprechen der Unmittelbarkeit" (ibid. 17; my italics). As I have shown in the previous chapters of this work, such uncompromising rejection of the process of cultural modernization characterizes the works of Rudolf Borchardt, Ludwig Klages and Stefan George. Instead of seeking to understand the material conditions for the advancing 'integration' ("fortschreitende Integration") of consciousness into the productive apparatus of society (as Adorno argues with Marxist vocabulary), they imaginatively sought refuge and consolation in what they deemed to be 'better' cultural epochs (classical antiquity, primitive times, etc.).

Furthermore, this lack of insight led them to consider cultural developments in sheer spiritual terms, and thus to ignore the social, technical and economic dynamics that determine cultural change. Reiterating a critical argument that he had already used in his 1941 essay on Spengler (cf. chapter I, 1.3.), in *KG* Adorno affirms that the conservative *Kulturkritiker* basically misses his target: "Er verschiebt den Angriff. Wo Verzweiflung und unmäßiges Leiden ist, soll darin bloß Geistiges, der Bewußtseinszustand der Menschheit, der Verfall der Norm sich anzeigen" (*KG* 11). This is why traditional cultural criticism finally condemns the culture of modernity on the whole: "Die Isolierung des Geistes von der materiellen Produktion steigert zwar seine Schätzung, macht ihn aber auch im allgemeinen Bewußtsein zum *Sündenbock* für das, was die Praxis verübt. *Aufklärung als solche*, nicht als Instrument realer Herrschaft *soll schuld sein*: daher der Irrationalismus der Kulturkritik" (ibid. 17; my italics). The process of rationalization and the advancement of Enlightenment ideas in society are mistakenly identified by cultural conservatives with the cause of present decay. This is

[375] Thus Adorno on the pretense to exclusiveness of the conservative critics: "Es gehört zu deren Prätention auf Vornehmheit, durch welche sie von der Prüfung an den materiellen Lebensverhältnissen sich dispensiert, nie sich vornehm genug zu sein. ... Solche Vornehmheit macht der Kulturkritiker zu seinem Privileg und verwirkt seine Legitimation, indem er als bezahlter und geehrter Plagegeist der Kultur an dieser mitwirkt. Das jedoch affiziert den Gehalt der Kritik. Noch die unerbittliche Strenge, mit der sie die Wahrheit übers unwahre Bewußtsein ausspricht, bleibt festgehalten im Bannkreis des Bekämpften, auf dessen Manifestationen sie starrt. Wer auf Überlegenheit pocht, fühlt allemal zugleich sich als einer vom Bau" (*KG* 12).

why Adorno and Horkheimer attempt in *DA* to 'rescue' Enlightenment from its traditionalist critics and Neo-Romantic detractors[376].

In Adorno's view, Nietzsche, the anti-sociological philosopher par excellence, had also disregarded the objective conditions for the 'progressive' homologation of culture in modernity. He could thus be seen as the foremost propagator in Germany of a quasi-aristocratic current of cultural criticism (hostile to mass mentality, *Philisterbildung* and positivist science). This is why Adorno-Horkheimer put him on a par with his late 'irrationalist' followers: "Nietzsche, Gauguin, George, Klages erkannten die namenlose Dummheit, die das Resultat des Fortschritts ist. Aber sie zogen den falschen Schluß. Sie denunzierten nicht das Unrecht, wie es ist, sondern *verklärten das Unrecht, wie es war*" (*DA* 267; my italics). The anti-modernist idealization of bygone cultural epochs amounts for Adorno-Horkheimer to a transfiguration of past injustice (see 2.6., 3.3. and 3.4.). However, according to them Nietzsche had not taken recourse to past cultural models in order to support his criticism of present culture (see 2.6.). In spite of all aristocratic affect, his *Kulturkritik* remained truly critical, as it dispensed with unquestionable and normative, moral or metaphysical values. This was not the case with his 'reactionary' epigones Borchardt, Klages, Spengler and George[377]. Their backward attitude brought them to fetishize the (German) cultural heritage as such ("Ihr oberster Fetisch ... ist der Begriff der Kultur als socher", *KG* 16), which they opposed with censorious attitude to whatever did not fit their late-Romantic understanding of *Kultur* as organic form, and of true *Bildung* as spiritual formation of the 'lonely' individual.

As I have anticipated, Adorno's polemic in *KG* is not only against the German tradition of cultural conservatism, but also against contemporary *Kulturkritik*. The unquestioned "Glauben an Kultur als solche" (ibid. 14) was still a widespread attitude amongst the German educated class in the late 40s[378]. Cultural criticism in post-war Germany

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[376] As they clearly state in the foreword to this book: "Es geht nicht um die Kultur als Wert, wie die Kritiker der Zivilisation, Huxley, Jaspers, Ortega y Gasset und andere, im Sinn haben, sondern die Aufklärung muß sich auf sich selbst besinnen, wenn die Menschen nicht vollends verraten werden sollen. Nicht um die Konservierung der Vergangenheit, sondern um die Einlösung der vergangenen Hoffnung ist es zu tun" (*DA* 15).

[377] George for instance, whom Adorno regards as the exemplary figure of the reactionary 'turn' of German cultural criticism (see 1.3.), was no longer able to sustain the tension between the 'progressive' tendencies towards cultural standardization and the 'conservative' need to preserve specific qualities and traditions (cf. Mannheim 1984): "Einer dialektischen Spannung, die Nietzsche noch austrug, zeigte dessen lyrischer Erbe schon nicht mehr sich gewachsen" (*GS* 11, 528). Thus, even though George's symptomatic diagnosis of present culture is often correct, he is unwilling to reach to a deeper level of analysis. As a result his cultural criticism remains superficial: "George stand ... naiv zur Gesellschaft. So handelt er dem Markt als Phänomen entgegen, ohne an dessen Voraussetzungen zu rühren" (*GS* 10.1, 220).

[378] Adorno notices in his 1949 essay "Die auferstandene Kultur": "Es hat noch nicht sich herumgesprochen, daß Kultur in traditionellem Sinn tot ist – daß sie in der Welt zu einer Ansammlung von katalogisiertem, an Verbraucher geliefertem, dem Verschleiß preisgegebenem Bildungsgut ward, dem man eben jenen Ernst

for Adorno continues to feed on a backward-looking disposition, resulting in a hypostatization of past *Kultur*. This tendency, Adorno argues, results from an awareness of the incongruity between the claims of 'high' culture and the dynamics of mass society: "Kraft der gesellschaftlichen Dynamik *geht Kultur in Kulturkritik über*, welche den Begriff Kultur festhält, deren gegenwärtige Erscheinungen aber als bloße Waren und Verdummungsmittel demoliert" (ibid.; my italics). Adorno further suggests that elitist criticism of culture results from disillusionment with a disharmonic reality: "Gerade weil Kultur das Prinzip von Harmonie in der antagonistischen Gesellschaft ... behauptet, kann sie die Konfrontation der Gesellschaft mit ihrem eigenen Harmoniebegriff nicht vermeiden und stößt dabei auf Disharmonie" (ibid. 21-22). After realizing the discrepancy between cultural ideals and social reality, the cultural critic is faced with a decisive choice: "Entweder er verdammt nach dem wie immer fragwürdigen Maß seines reinen Prinzips, die materielle Basis, oder er wird an seiner Unvereinbarkeit mit jener der *eigenen Fragwürdigkeit* inne" (ibid. 22; my italics). In other words, the criticism of culture either becomes conservative *Kulturkritik*, based on a 'spiritual' approach to cultural phenomena, or it turns into a critical theory of culture *and* society. The first approach inevitably has recourse to a regressive idealization of past cultures, and therefore turns into an anachronistic practice: "Die Haltung des Kulturkritikers erlaubt ihm, kraft der Differenz vom herrschenden Unwesen theoretisch darüber hinauszugehen, obwohl er oft genug bloß dahinter *zurückfällt*" (ibid. 11; my italics). The second approach on the contrary is socially reflected, and therefore able to produce a criticism of culture that is 'immanent' to the changing dynamics of society ("immanente Kritik der Kultur", ibid. 23). According to Adorno, however, such cultural criticism should not be merely reduced to a social critical practice, but rather – this is the twist in Adorno's argument – *integrated with* traditional *Kulturkritik*:

> Das kulturkritische Verfahren steht selber zur permanenten Kritik sowohl in seinen allgemeinen Voraussetzungen, seiner Immanenz in der bestehenden Gesellschaft, wie in den konkreten Urteilen, die es vollzieht. ... *Zugleich aber* hat die dialektische

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verweigert, der ihr in Deutschland heute wie stets gezollt wird. Das Glück des sich selbst genießenden Geistes ... läßt sich dem im Gewinkel altertümlicher Städtchen vergleichen. Es zehrt von dem, was noch übrig, was dem Gang des Fortschritts noch nicht geopfert ist. Der Umgang mit Kultur im Nachkriegsdeutschland hat etwas von dem gefährlichen und zweideutigen Trost der Geborgenheit im Provinziellen. Und wie im Angesicht der zerstörten Städte das Gerade-noch-übrig- sein, das Ausnahmehafte und Anachronistische dessen, was an alter Kulturlandschaft erhalten blieb, ins grelle Licht tritt, so ist es vielleicht mit Kultur insgesamt bestellt" (*GS* 20.2, 455-456; my italics). In the same essay Adorno refers to Max Frisch's phrase 'Kultur als Alibi' (the title of an article published in the same year as Adorno's essay) to describe the present situation in Germany, and warns against "Die Neutralisierung der Kultur, die befördert wird, indem man sie blind bewahrt" (*GS* 20.2, 460).

> Theorie, will sie nicht dem Ökonomismus verfallen und einer Gesinnung, welche glaubt, die Veränderung der Welt erschöpfe sich in der Steigerung der Produktion, die Verpflichtung, *die Kulturkritik in sich aufzunehmen*, die wahr ist, indem sie die Unwahrheit zum Bewußtsein ihrer selbst bringt. Zeigt die dialektische Theorie an der Kultur als bloßem Epiphänomen sich desinteressiert, so trägt sie dazu bei, daß das kulturelle Unwesen fortwuchert, und wirkt mit an der Reproduktion des Schlechten. Der kulturelle Traditionalismus und der Terror der neuen russischen Gewaltherrscher sind eines Sinnes. Daß sie Kultur als ganze unbesehen bejahen und zugleich alle nicht eingeschliffenen Bewußtseinsformen verfemen, ist nicht weniger ideologisch, als wenn die Kritik sich dabei bescheidet, die losgelöste Kultur vor ihr Forum zu rufen, oder gar deren vorgebliche Negativität für das Unheil verantwortlich macht. Wird Kultur einmal als ganze akzeptiert, so ist ihr bereits das Ferment der eigenen Wahrheit entzogen, die Verneinung. (*KG* 22-23; my italics)

This passage sums up the gist of Adorno's understanding and practice of cultural criticism in the post-war period. He rejects both elitist (or 'transcendental', as he calls it elsewhere; cf. *KG* 25) cultural criticism, which claims for itself a position outside of society, and Marxist dogmatism, which regards culture as mere 'ideology' (or 'superstructure'), as such subordinated to politics and economy: "Die Alternative, Kultur insgesamt von außen, unter dem Oberbegriff der Ideologie in Frage zu stellen, oder sie mit den Normen zu konfrontieren, die sie selbst auskristallisierte, kann die kritische Theorie nicht anerkennen" (ibid. 25). Both approaches treat what they think of as 'culture' as a hypostasized entity, either normatively separated, or functionally dependent on its social and material context. This is why conservative cultural criticism as well as Marxist social criticism either condemn or idealize cultural products, but fail to understand their relative specificity, which is to say their determinate relationship with the world that produces and is reflected in them simultaneously[379]. Culture according to Adorno can neither be seen as a spiritual totality, nor as an ideological appendix or mere luxury. True culture is always in the making, and should therefore be understood as an ongoing critical practice ("Wahr ist Kultur bloß als implizit-kritische", ibid. 14), which is bound to constantly question the received cultural notions: "Die Schwelle der dialektischen gegenüber der Kulturkritik aber ist, daß sie diese bis zur Aufhebung des Begriffs der Kultur selber steigert" (ibid. 22). This 'sublation' ("Aufhebung") can take place if cultural criticism abandons preformed patterns of evaluation and ready-made criteria, and becomes a perceptive "gesellschaftliche[...] Physiognomik. Je mehr das Ganze der naturwüchsigen Elemente entäußert, gesellschaftlich vermittelt, filtriert, 'Bewußtsein' ist,

[379] For Adorno this approach is also reflected in an uncritical use of the word *Kultur*, which in either case is deprived of the "Stachel der Kritik" (*KG* 14). 'Culture' on the contrary rhymes with 'criticism': "Kritik und Kultur [sind] zum Guten und Schlechten verflochten" (*KG* 14-15).

um so mehr wird das Ganze 'Kultur'" (ibid. 25). 'Physiognomy' here does not mean that culture should be regarded as a mere epiphenomenon, but rather as the meaningful surface on which the 'structural' tendencies of society become readable. For this reason cultural works, whether 'high' or 'low', should be attentively analyzed as manifestations of subjective (i.e., partial or 'false') consciousness; they tell the truth – indirect and differentiated truth – about the reality that they emerge from (the 'material' as well as the 'ideological' one, since for Adorno they are both equally part of the 'structure'[380]). A critical theory of society therefore has to pass through cultural analysis and eventually flow into *Kulturkritik*. The latter is not merely an accessory of Critical Theory – as the members of the Frankfurter *Institut für Sozialforschung* conceived of it – but rather one of its primary tasks. From this perspective, even some insights of traditional cultural criticism – for instance those of Spengler – can be recovered[381].

Adorno's relative revaluation of conservative *Kulturkritik* in the post-war period is also testified by his later essay "Kultur und Zivilisation". As I have demonstrated, in this essay Adorno resumes his polemic against the blunt juxtaposition of these two terms, which

[380] "Der *materielle Produktionsprozeß* als solcher offenbart sich am Ende als das, was er in seinem Ursprung im Tauschverhältnis, als einem falschen Bewußtsein der Kontrahenten voneinander, neben dem Mittel zur Erhaltung des Lebens zugleich immer schon war: *Ideologie*. Umgekehrt aber wird zugleich das Bewußtsein mehr stets zu einem bloßen Durchgangsmoment in der Schaltung des Ganzen. Ideologie heißt heute: die Gesellschaft als Erscheinung. Sie ist vermittelt durch die Totalität, hinter der die Herrschaft des Partialen steht, *nicht jedoch umstandslos reduktibel auf ein Partialinteresse*, und darum gewissermaßen in all ihren Stücken gleich nah dem Mittelpunkt" (*KG* 25; my italics). Based on this reflection, Adorno rejects the orthodox Marxist distinction between 'structure' (material base) and 'superstructure' (ideology), which in his opinion has itself become 'ideological' in his time: "Gleich manchen anderen Elementen des dialektischen Materialismus ist auch die Ideologienlehre aus einem Mittel der Erkenntnis zu einem von deren Gängelung geworden" (ibid. 24); "Kein Satz mehr wird zu denken gewagt, dem nicht explizit, in allen Lagern, eben der Hinweis, für wen er gut sei, fröhlich beigegeben wäre. ... Unideologisch ist aber der Gedanke, der sich nicht auf operational terms bringen läßt, sondern versucht, *rein der Sache selbst* zu jener Sprache zu verhelfen, welche ihr die herrschende sonst abschneidet" (ibid. 23-24; my italics). The task of dialectical cultural criticism for Adorno is to let the cultural 'object' articulate its (partial and broken) truth about the world that determines it (both as context and referent), with which however it never entirely corresponds: "das immanente Verfahren ... nimmt das Prinzip ernst, *nicht die Ideologie an sich* sei unwahr, sondern ihre Prätention, mit der Wirklichkeit übereinzustimmen. Immanente Kritik geistiger Gebilde heißt, in der Analyse ihrer Gestalt und ihres Sinnes den Widerspruch zwischen ihrer objektiven Idee und jener Prätention zu begreifen, und zu benennen, was die Konsistenz und Inkonsistenz der Gebilde an sich von der Verfassung des Daseins ausdrückt" (ibid. 27; my italics).

[381] In his 1941 essay "Spengler Today" Adorno had praised the conservative philosopher for his keen insights into the "expropriation of human consciousness through the centralized means of public communication" (Adorno 1941, 308) and the entertainment industry (see 1.3.). This insight made Spengler's cultural criticism in some respects superior – so Adorno in his American essay – to the *Gesellschaftskritik* coming from the left. In "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft", written about 8 years later, Adorno still regards a Spenglerian approach to this issue as appropriate: "Gerechtfertigt ist der Verdacht früherer Kulturkritiker, daß es in einer Welt, in der Bildungsprivileg und *Fesselung des Bewußtseins* die eigentliche Erfahrung geistiger Gebilde sowieso den Massen vorenthält, nicht mehr so sehr auf die spezifischen ideologischen Inhalte ankomme wie darauf, daß überhaupt irgend etwas da sei, was das Vakuum des expropriierten Bewußtseins ausfüllt und vom offenbaren Geheimnis ablenkt. Für den gesellschaftlichen Wirkungszusammenhang ist es vermutlich weit weniger wichtig, welche besonderen ideologischen Lehren ein Film seinen Betrachtern einflößt, als daß die nach Hause Gehenden an den Namen der Schauspieler und ihren Ehehändeln interessiert sind. Vulgäre Begriffe wie der der *Zerstreuung* sind angemessener als hochtrabende Erklärungen darüber, daß der eine Schriftsteller Vertreter des Klein- und der andere des Großbürgertums sei" (*KG* 24-25).

informed cultural criticism in Germany from Nietzsche to Spengler. Adorno tries to understand the two concepts dialectically, relying on the philosophy of German Enlightenment from Kant to Freud ("Aufklärung von Kant bis Freud", *KZ* 87). However, towards the end of the essay Adorno unexpectedly returns to Spengler, so to speak, by affirming that *Kultur* and *Zivilisation* are still separated by a gap in the present:

> Nun ist nicht zu verschweigen, daß die beiden Begriffe ... mittlerweile in der Tat der Sache nach stets weiter auseinanderweisen. Wohl steht es nicht an, Kultur gegen die Zivilisation zu beschwören. ... *Ebensowenig aber* ist zu leugnen, daß der zivilisatorische Betrieb, als Kultur bloßer und vielfach überflüssiger Mittel, selber heute bis zum Unerträglichen sich *verselbständigt* hat und daß die Menschen kaum mehr ihrer mächtig, sondern nur noch Funktionäre des Apparats oder Zwangskonsumenten dessen geworden sind, was er ausspeit. (ibid.; my italics)

Adorno avails himself of a traditional cultural critical argument. The 'culture' of modern civilization implies a subordination of human ends to technical means ("Mittel"), which take on a life of their own ("verselbständigt") and thus make men utterly dependent on their own apparatuses, both as workers ("Funktionäre des Apparats") and coercive consumers ("Zwangskonsumenten")[382]. Significant in this respect is also Adorno's reference, in the final lines of *KZ*, to the classic topic of the 'cultural value' of technology (cf. Maldonado 1991), accompanied by a criticism of its one-sided, productivist use in capitalist economy:

> Freilich werden mittlerweile die Menschen in einem solchen Maß vom Prozeß der Güterproduktion umklammert und geformt, daß es einigermaßen schwer fällt, den technischen Fortschritt – nun nicht zwar von der Zivilisation, aber von der Verdummung zu trennen. Die Technik besitzt die Menschen nicht nur leiblich, sondern auch geistig; es gibt einen technologischen Schleier, so wie man in der Wirtschaftstheorie gelegentlich vom 'Geldschleier' spricht. Der Traum der Zivilisierten heute ist so wenig die erlöste Welt wie das Schlaraffenland, wo jedem die gebratenen Tauben in den Mund fliegen, sondern die nächstbessere Wagenmarke, das nächstbessere 'gadget'. (*KZ* 88)

Adorno's criticism of the capitalist mode of production and consumer culture in this passage reflects a common position of the members of the *Frankfurter Schule*. This critical argument,

[382] This argument belongs to the traditional array of *Kulturkritik*, both progressive and conservative (cf. Grebing1971, 37 and Merlio/Raulet 2005). Not by chance Adorno refers in a footnote to this passage to the work of the conservative sociologist and philosopher Max Scheler, *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (1921).

however, does not imply a return to traditional *Kulturkritik*, which Adorno sets out to counter at the beginning of the *KZ* essay. The technological 'veil' that hangs over society is not a product of the immanent development of technology, which is in itself neutral. The problem is its mystifying effect as a mere economic function:

> Das Chaotische und Schreckhafte der gegenwärtigen technischen Zivilisation hat seinen Ursprung weder in deren Begriff noch etwa in der Technik an sich selbst, sondern die Technik hat in der modernen Gesellschaft eine spezifische Struktur und Stellung gewonnen, die zu den Bedürfnissen der Menschen in *höchst gebrochenem Verhältnis* steht. Nicht die Rationalisierung der Welt trägt Schuld an dem Unheil, sondern die Irrationalität dieser Rationalisierung. ... Der ökonomische Irrsinn, in den die Technik verflochten ist, keineswegs der technische Fortschritt selber bedroht den Geist und heute sogar die materielle Fortexistenz der Menschheit. (ibid. 87; my italics)

Adorno's cultural criticism unmistakably becomes a Marxist criticism of society. The latter is not straightforward, but rather enveloped in a "culturalist wrapping" (Söllner 2005, 193), as is typical of Adorno's post-war "political culturalism" (ibid. 195). This strategy, as Söllner describes it, consists in "using cultural means for political ends" (ibid. 186). Indeed, Adorno's argument in the above passage is Marxist, to the extent that it pleads for modern civilization and technological advancement, provided that they cater to the real needs of men. However, the point for Adorno is *neither* a restoration of old socio-political models, economic structures and cultural forms, *nor* a revolutionary reformation of society (which in the Eastern Block had already proved illusory), but rather an overcoming of the predicament of modern civilization through the technical-material means and forms of social organization thereby made available. Against the 'irrationality' of economic rationalization and the mystifying use of technology in the present,

> hilft ... nicht die Rückkehr zur Kultur, die doch schimärisch bliebe, sondern einzig die *Anstrengung, die Zivilisation positiv über sich hinauszutreiben*. Hat einmal die Zivilisation so sich ausgebreitet und befreit, daß es keinen Hunger mehr auf der Erde gibt, dann wird sie das erfüllen, was alle Kultur bis heute vergebens nur versprach. (ibid. 88; my italics)

The final words of the *KZ* reiterate the gist of Adorno's philosophy of civilization in *DA*. The idea of a return to the past is a chimera. Civilization, understood as the realm of instrumental

means and functional organization (i.e., of technology, politics and the market), should not to be demonized, but rather appropriated and driven towards the 'concrete' utopia (to use Bloch's term) of an equal society, free from material necessity and the yoke of economic domination. This simple proposition sums up the cultural politics of Adorno and the other members of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in post-war Germany, and reflects their fundamental contribution to the intellectual life of the newborn Federal Republic in the context of West-German 'westernization' (cf. Albrecht et al. 1999).

In conclusion, in his post-war essays "Kultur und Zivilisation" and "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft", Adorno attempts to bridge traditional cultural criticism and progressive social criticism. The result is, as Georg Bollenbeck notes, a "Gesellschaftstheorie, die von der 'Hinfälligkeit' der 'neueren bürgerlichen Kulturkritik' überzeugt ist, die sich gegen die Kulturkritik wendet und sie zugleich als Ressource für die eigene Kritik nutzt" (Bollenbeck 2007, 264). The title of Adorno's essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" is programmatic in this sense, and it precisely defines the nature of his work as a cultural critic in post-war Germany[383]. Adorno's merit, and the reason for his success in the 50s and 60s, lies in his ability to mediate between the *bildungsbürgerliche* cultural tradition, of which he was a foremost exponent (and probably one of the last at that; cf. Claussen 2003), and the new reality of the Federal Republic of Germany, consisting "of a certain amalgam of contradictory elements, the spectrum of which stretched from inherited cultural conservative inclinations to decisive intention towards political modernization" (Söllner 2005, 186). As Georg Bollenbeck poignantly remarks:

> Das Lebensgefühl der bundesrepublikanischen Gesellschaft ist geprägt von dem Streben nach Besitz und Wohlstand, nach Freizeit und Konsum. Ein Bildungsbürgertum mit ausgeprägter Identität ... beginnt sich aufzulösen.
>
> Der Erfolg von Adornos kulturkritischen Schriften widerspricht dem nicht. Vielmehr gründet er in diesem Trend. Seine Kulturkritik passt in den Erwartungshorizont der Gebildeten, die sich mit der kulturellen Moderne anzufreunden beginnen und deren 'Unbehagen an der Kultur' zu einem tendenzielle gesellschaftskritischen 'Unbehagen in der Kultur' gerät. Der Philosoph und Nazigegner gilt als einflussreicher Kulturkritiker und moralisch-politische Größe zugleich. Er camoufliert in einer Art diskursiver Diplomatie seine marxistisch beeinflusste Gesellschaftstheorie kulturkritisch und er fundiert seinen Kulturkritik gesellschaftstheoretisch. Adorno hat Erfolg, weil sein Denken einer allgemeinen

[383] Here Adorno "developed into a no less multifaceted than inventive impresario of a new way of writing, even of a regular rhetoric. ... Its by no means obvious goal was the build-up and stabilization of democratic culture in the postwar society; its moral core was a demand for truthfulness in dealing with the most recent past; but its means were willful, in part oversubtle, in part enigmatic, and yet always comprehensive and penetrating cultural interpretations" (Söllner 2005, 195).

> kulturpessimistischen Gestimmtheit entgegenkommt und weil es zugleich für die internationale kulturelle Moderne eintritt. So passt seine Verbindung von 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' zur 'kulturellen Westbindung', auch wenn sie voller Vorbehalte gegenüber der Kulturindustrie des Westens bleibt. (Bollenbeck 2007, 272)

Adorno's sensible strategy of public intervention in periodicals, radio and academic institutions, however, did not entail compliance with prevalent cultural and ideological trends. This explains, amongst other things, why in the late 60s he could resume his interest in Stefan George and Rudolf Borchardt, both of whom had fallen into oblivion by that time (cf. *GS* 11, 523 and 536). Significantly, Adorno's 'rehabilitation' of their poetry – which by no means entails a justification of their politics – occurred at the time as the escalation of his confrontation with the members of the student movement at Frankfurt University. As is known, the philosopher came into conflict with the leftist activists over the proper forms of political action. With the benefit of hindsight this occurrence, which weighed heavily on Adorno in the last period of his life, seems to have exposed the contradictions of his intellectual temperament. In a way, his aesthetic inclinations and interests productively conflicted throughout his life with his sociological formation and ideological orientation. The extraordinary results produced by this tension are generally recognized up to today.

Indeed, it is through such "explosive mixture" that Adorno "not only conquered the hearts of his audience, but also stimulated it to political responses ... that were able to further the development of the youthful Federal Republic" (Söllner 2005, 186). Beyond the political sphere, through his activity as a cultural critic and public intellectual Adorno managed to refamiliarize his German audience with the "reaktionär verseuchten Tradition der deutschen Kultur" (Albrecht Wellmer, cited in Müller-Doohm 2003, 523). Adorno felt committed to a cultural heritage that he subjected to criticism and attempted to rescue at the same time[384]. His confrontation with German *Kulturkritik* both before and after the war testifies to this critical obligation, which he fulfilled throughout with a civilizing intention, in the spirit of the Enlightenment tradition of which he saw himself as a descendant. As he once wrote in *Minima Moralia*: "Nicht die letzte der Aufgaben, vor welche Denken sich gestellt sieht, ist es, alle reaktionären Argumente gegen die abendländische Kultur in den Dienst der fortschreitenden Aufklärung zu stellen" (*GS* 4, 218). The advancement of enlightenment was

[384] His essays on Eichendorff, Heine and Goethe in *Noten zur Literatur* (cf. *GS* 11, 69, 95 and 495) for instance testify to his will to cast a new, refreshing glance on these classics of German literature, whose reception had been strongly affected by the prevalent cultural conservatism of the pre-war period (see Plass, 2006). Particularly impressive in this sense is his essay on Goethe's *Iphigenie in Tauris* ("Zum Klassizismus von Goethes Iphigenie", *GS* 11, 495), which he reads as a drama that displays the dark sides as well as the humanizing potentials of civilization.

not a straightforward matter for Adorno, but rather inextricably bound to a keen awareness of the paradoxes and a vigilant criticism of the downsides of progress: this I hope to have demonstrated in my work.

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