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“Determinate Negation”:

The prospect of radical enlightenment in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

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1: Dialectic Enlightenment: a Radical Prospect From Hegel and Marx

By their remarkable work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno both earned their reputation and, at the same time, numerous imputations. For many readers, specially Anglo-American ones, who are simply confident about Enlightenment and modern democracy, they are regarded at best as opinionated pessimists who have not cast off the nightmare of fascism, and, at worst, as spiteful enemies of the “Free World.” Many just repeat the cliché of “myth become enlightenment and enlightenment become myth” from the book as their doctrine and consider their critique of enlightenment as “unchanging categories rather than critical judgments about historical tendencies,” as Zuidervarrt Lambert points out in his account of Adorno. This sober assessment indicates that “the authors are not saying that myth is ‘by nature’ a force of enlightenment. Nor are they claiming that enlightenment ‘inevitably’ reverts to mythology. In fact, what they find really mythical in both myth and enlightenment is the thought that fundamental change is impossible.”¹ This review reminds us that interaction and change which can be consid-

1. Zuidervarrt, Lambert, “Theodor W. Adorno,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/adorno/>

ered as the essence of dialectic Marxism and which obviously derive from young Hegel, especially the author of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, should be paid more attention for understanding *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. I consider it a fundamental principle to distinguish *Dialectical of Enlightenment* from any positivist theory as well as any relativist or irrationalist theory, and argue that beneath the surface of pessimism, there lies the active and radical elements of the work.

In the words of Horkheimer and Adorno themselves, the crucial concern of this work is to “gain greater understanding of the intertwinement of rationality and social reality, as well as of the intertwinement, inseparable from the former, of nature and the mastery of nature.”² Here, as Hegel points out, “understanding” is a much harder job than judgment because it faces reality. The very reality in front of these two dialectic thinkers are the myths of enlightenment: myth of fascism and myth of utopia of mass revolution and myth of mass culture in America as a freedom world. In reality, myth has already conspired with reason, and theoretical thinking is an attempt to reflect that reality, to analyze the impasse, and finally to help the enlightened get rid of domination. It is thus never a pure judgment according to theory nor an immediately intuition due to a personal attitude.

However, in Habermas’ harsh criticism of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he problematically reduces their dialectical understanding of enlightenment to a simple judgment of enlightenment. Although, at the first glance, his description about the dialectics of myth and enlightenment is accurate and even epigrammatic: “It would amount to successful enlightenment if distantiation from origins meant liberation. But mythic power proves to be a retarding moment that checks the emancipation striven for and keeps on prolonging ties to one’s origins that are also experienced as imprisonment... And this process of gaining mastery over mythic forces is supposed to call forth, in fateful fashion, the return of myth.”³ In other words, at the time when men achieve mastery over nature, they themselves immediately fall under the domination of human beings. Does the conflation of myth and enlightenment happen in the same group of people and

2. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, 1977, Preface, XVIII.

3. Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Polity Press, 1987, 109.

in the same historical moment? In this short paragraph, Habermas swiftly leaps from primitive times to the story of Odysseus, whose self-preservation is pointedly to demonstrate the formation of subjectivity as Man in the heydays of bourgeois society and although irresistible and predictive of the return of mythical power and the reification of an internal nature, at least in this period, his self-imposed renunciation is still necessary. But this healthy renunciation and domination of the early bourgeois individual is again quickly linked to the misgivings about late capitalism, where even self-preservation is impossible:

“Man’s domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost always the destruction of subject in whose service it is undertaken; for the substance where [check the text] is dominated, suppressed and dissolved through self-preservation is none other than that very life as a function of which the achievements of self-preservation are defined; it is, in fact, what is to be preserved.”⁴

Surely, Horkheimer and Adorno discuss the dialectics of self-preservation and self-renunciation in the story of Odysseus and in the whole book as well, but they discuss it historically. However, in Habermas’ narrative it is an invariable principle that man’s domination over nature is at the cost of repressing internal nature. And thus the whole fate of human beings today seems to be doomed by the remote curse of the primeval sacrifice: “The identically persistent self which arises in the abrogation of sacrifice immediately becomes an unyielding, rigidified ritual that man celebrates upon himself by opposing his consciousness to the natural context.”⁵

This misconstruction of the dialectic of enlightenment echoes plenty of accusations from the “rational world.” Habermas himself, as a defender of communicative rationality, also attempts to connect their thinking to the irrationalism of Nietzsche in this same lecture, although in a very vigilant way. In the narrative of Habermas, the interaction between reason and myth in different times of the primeval period, of early capitalist society embodied in Odysseus’s self-preservation, and of the madness of late cap-

4. *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 109, Habermas cites it from English translation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1972, New York, 54.

5. *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 110, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1972, 54.

italism, are just the same repetitions of domination and self-repression. They are cited again and again merely to report the simple judgment on reason. While for Horkheimer and Adorno, although this interaction remains constantly in historical stages, the social reality in which they are intertwined and which need to be penetrated are radically different and always changing. For example, although domination perpetuates in the dialectic process of myth and enlightenment, this domination is understood at least in a threefold sense: the domination of nature by human beings; the domination of nature within human beings; and the domination of some human beings by others.⁶ At early stages of primitive society, enlightenment happens when the undivided world disintegrates in the ritual of sacrifice where the subject separates itself from object and human being escapes from the domination of nature. But obviously influenced by Hegel and Marx, the two writers emphasize that a crucial change of domination takes place at the second stage of human history when primitive communism disintegrates and is accompanied by the division of labor, the groups of ruler and ruled also take shape. For the ruler, they dominate their internal nature as a necessary sacrifice in order to dominate outside nature and other humans; while for the rest, they suffer a thorough domination by the ruler—a remote power in which they can not even compromise and participate through sacrifice.

In this sense, Adorno and Horkheimer conflate Marx' critique of class society with their own critique on self-repression: distance of subject from object, the presupposition of abstraction, is founded on the distance from things which the ruler attains by means of the ruled.⁷ The two writers articulate explicitly this crucial difference in sacrificial ritual between class society and original society "the self's hostility to sacrifice included a sacrifice of the self, since it was paid for by a denial of nature in the human being for the sake of mastery over extrahuman nature and other human beings."⁸ But as long as masters like Odysseus can conduct cunning and sacrifice; and as long as the ruled can be considered as subjects or slaves who are pure objects without human nature, the renunciation of self and subjection to the sacrificial ritual are still not so horrible. In this sense,

6. See Zuidervaart, Lambert, "Theodor W. Adorno."

7. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 2002, 9.

8. *Ibid.*, 42.

without surprise we find that in retelling Odysseus’ story the two authors retain a typically Hegelian optimism: for “his lordly renunciation, as a struggle with myth, is representative of a society which no longer needs renunciation and domination—which masters itself not in order to do violence to itself and others but for the sake of reconciliation.”⁹

However, the social reality confronting the two writers is a seemingly irreconcilable crisis of Occidental civilization which definitely differs from Odysseus or Robinson’s adventure one or two hundred years before. On one side, the proletariat, who should be the new masters, and who should experience the world themselves, unfortunately have their ears plugged with wax and cannot acquire an appropriate class consciousness; on the other side, the old masters, the bourgeois individuals, have already removed themselves from the world of experience, and have been, like Odysseus, tightly bound to the mast called abstraction, aesthetic pleasure, or instrumental rationality. They are “cut off from the consciousness of themselves as nature, that is the celebrated self in the natural context, the living entity.”¹⁰

Roughly concurrent with Lukacs’ *Destruction of Reason, Dialectic of Enlightenment* appeared in the immediate post-WWII years to face the self-destruction of bourgeois ideas and the murky prospect of proletarian revolution. The authors undeniably reject Hegel’s optimism on “identity”: a belief that absolute Spirit can penetrate the impasse of reality and can move on along its own totality. But this historical and dialectical thinking can never be reduced to its accusation of pessimism in the terms of a total criticism such as Habermas provides. “*Dialectic of Enlightenment* holds out scarcely any prospect for an escape from the myth of purposive rationality that has turned into objective violence.”¹¹ I would argue that beneath the ostentatious pessimism is a radical enlightenment of total emancipation which is surely an ambition of Hegel and, more directly, Marx. To stop short before the impasse of dark reality is to negate it, penetrate it, “cancel its power and hand it over to truth”. For the authors, a more radical critique of reason in late capitalist society is a necessary negation and part of a search for a new reason. While for Habermas it is impossible to use rea-

9. *Ibid.*, 43.

10. *Ibid.*, 43.

11. *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 114.

son to negate reason, for those more loyal to Hegel, the reflective power of thought and determinate negation are both reliable and trustworthy. As the very ability of logic thinking not only remains tied to domination but also to its reflection and its instrumentality, no master can always control thought as an autonomous tool, independent of the will of the rulers.

2: Odysseus or Seaman: the Crux of Domination in Mass Society

We will assume that the crucial core of the Odysseus' story may not be the formation of the subjectivity of bourgeois individual but rather, the new crux of domination in mass society. The focus of dialectic of enlightenment now transforms from sacrifice to domination. Every sacrifice has the element of domination and every domination needs victims to be sacrificed. But what distinguishes sacrifice from domination in Dialectic of Enlightenment is its notion of self-preservation: although in primitive sacrifice man exercise self-domination, it is a voluntary action of man to wrest himself from dissolution into blind nature. On the other hand, pure domination is self's involuntary submission to outside power rather than its outwitting power. There is no mediation, participation and negation between the self and the absolute Other which exerts a pure violence against the ruled will. I argue that the most incisive insight of the authors is on the dialectic relationship between sacrifice and domination in mass society, rather than on the abstract notion bourgeois individual. They point out that self-sacrifice can turn out to be self-domination and that within self-preservation in sacrifice lurks a self-renunciation of internal human nature. But soon we will find it is nothing new if we reexamine Hegel's philosophy, especially his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he clearly claims two necessary steps in the development of Spirit: first, the negation of self into a living entity and second, the negation of a living entity for the development of self. To this point, the difference between them is that for Hegel there is a Telos which guarantees Spirit's development while for the two writers it is uncertain whether Odysseus can go home.

The reasons which lead to this difference are not only philosophical but also historical. Philosophically, who will enlighten the opaque Telos if God can not lighten to the world any longer? I am not sure whether

Horkheimer and Adorno go so far as Nietzsche to claim the death of God. At least they hesitate to claim that Odysseus is a sacrificial victim and insist that the sacrifice will be necessary as long as he still confronts irresistible natural violence while sincerely longing to return home.¹² Here obviously they retain a faint belief in Enlightenment. However the condition with which they are more concerned is what happens in late capitalist society, where mythical irrationality has proliferated out of control and after surmounting natural violence the more abstract tool of instrumental reason has dominated the self and deprived it of the possibility of seizing the sacrificial ritual. Things become even worse, however, when self-domination now is interweaved with class oppression without the revolutionary Telos as Marx had predicted: No “god” can lighten the living condition of proletariat and drive them to form a class consciousness.

In the last part of the Odysseus chapter, the authors present a vivid picture about this crux of domination in mass society. When Odysseus’ ship sails past the Sirens, self-sacrifice transforms into total domination. Unlike other episodes of the long adventure where Odysseus always performs as a lonely hero and struggles resolutely with irresistible mythical powers, it is the only time when Odysseus involves himself in a thorough self-abandonment and cannot survive his adventure without his seamen who help him fight off the fatal attraction of the Sirens’ songs. The retirement of Odysseus as a bourgeois hero from fighting against nature is already an old story. Before his voyage Odysseus has already been warned of the lethal temptation of the Sirens, the real threat, however, comes from the interior structure of society, since now the relationship between slave and master involves the fighting against nature (both outside nature and inside nature). If in the story of Robinson, Friday is a pure thing as a tool of his master, then in this scene before the songs of Sirens, the seamen could be restless workers who are supposed to be real masters in the future as long as they can gain truth from their work. Hegel’s proposition of the dialectics between slave and master is worth mentioning here, for it can help us understand the two writers’ proposition in this picture. In Hegel’s argument, the crucial moment of development of Spirit is his “befalling to the outside”—the real issue which he is preoccupied with and surren-

12. *Ibid.*, 262, note 12.

ders to—and then overcome. Here the Other is where the Self emerges. In the first struggle between two individuals the master-to-be becomes master merely because of his total renunciation of his life to death through which he thoroughly abandons himself to his outside (the Other). Here, he acquires his independence by the recognition of the Other and thus overcomes the Other. But the dialectics of Master and Slave is that since the master becomes the master and his Other becomes slave or purely a thing, he can no longer abandon himself to the slave (as his Other), for the slave is no longer an independent self which can subjugate the master. What's more, since the "lord" interposes the "bondsman" between the outside nature and himself, he loses his chance to encounter his real outside nature directly. Neither the dependent aspect of thing as the objective of desire nor the dependent status of slave as thing can allow him gain a real recognition of his own reality (the thing and the relationship with Other) by a thorough negation of his will in this second stage. In this case, it is his victory in the first stage that stops the movement of Spirit in the future. But it does not mean for Hegel that the Spirit stops to move forward, for now it is the slave's turn. Since the slave loses his independent consciousness in the first struggle with a absolute fear of the master, he thus can lay bare to and thoroughly involve himself in his real issues—his social relationship to the lord and objectives of labor as a form of natural existence. Labor here is a crucial moment—by labor his formative activity to the natural existence makes it possible for him to get rid of them. "His consciousness is not this dissolution of everything stable merely in principle; in his service he actually brings this about. Through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail; and gets rid of it by working on it."¹³ In Marx's more passionate words: the proletariat loses only his chains but acquires the whole world.

This Hegelian vision is never available to the seaman on Odysseus' boat. More exactly, the slave here refers in particular to the new-born bourgeoisie while the master corresponds to the declining nobility. In the history of the development of the bourgeoisie, the transformation from slave to master needs two preconditions: 1) they can control the work

13. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, 111–119.

place autonomously—including the means of production and labor force; 2) world history must ensure a progressive history in general and the rise of the bourgeoisie in particular. Actually, it is Hegel’s belief in historical identity that ensures the development of world history no matter how contradictory it would be in its course. Can Hegel’s optimistic picture about the bourgeoisie be transplanted to the proletariat revolution? Can the seaman in board become the new hero in mass society just as Odysseus or Robinson do? Obviously for Horkheimer and Adorno, the picture taken on Odysseus’ boat is rather gloomy: “humanity, whose skills and knowledge become differentiated with the division of labor, is thereby forced back to more primitive anthropological stages, since, with the technical facilitation of existence, the continuance of domination demands the fixation of instincts by greater repression.”¹⁴ (DE, Pp 27-28) On one side, the old master (Odysseus) is bound to the mast helplessly. This binding not only prevents the threat from Sirens (natural power) in the distance but also leads to Odysseus’ exclusion from his work and his real world—which means an irretrievable mutilation. Following Marx, the two writers claim the regression of the old master bluntly: “those at the top experience the existence with which they no longer need to concern themselves as a mere substrate, and are wholly ossified as the self which issue commands.” He (Odysseus) loses the world in the sense that he can not steer the ship by himself, although he still grasps his world tightly by the system he has built and by manipulating his seamen. On the other side, the slaves (seamen on the boat) have their ears plugged with wax and are thus rendered deaf. Rather than build a new world, they reproduce the relations of production between themselves and their master and help to sustain the system as their own. Labor, the place Marx considers the birthplace of the rising class-consciousness of bondsman, is uncultivated for these workers since they cannot control the work place and cannot get anything back from their impoverished experiences. “Despite their closeness to things, (they) cannot enjoy their work because it is performed under compulsion, in despair, with their senses forcibly stopped.” Finally, “the servant is subjugated in body and soul, the master regresses.”¹⁵ The picture cannot be

14. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; 27.

15. *Ibid.*, 27.

more desperate and hopeless.

I have argued that the main thrust of the authors in the book is their rejection of idealist identity—the absolute Spirit as all-determining *Telos*. If we go a little back to the dialectic of master and slave in Hegel's discussion, we find the basic premise is that the self must be lost in the Other then can it achieve the reconciled truth. The arbitrary self-consciousness of both sides must be negated in order to follow the pace of reason or Spirit. However, it may be that only God can guarantee such a reconciliation between two opposite groups. Nietzsche considers whatever absolute Spirit for Hegel or "public will" for Rousseau or moral imperative for Kant as a pure non-existent psychological fate of nature. Kant claims that "reason as the transcendental, supra-individual self contains the idea of a free coexistence in which human beings organize themselves to form the universal subject and resolve the conflict between pure and empirical reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole"¹⁶ Nietzsche denounces this reason as pure lie. It is because, according to Nietzsche's principle of self-preservation, the only truth is the material existence of a solitary self in a society as a jungle. If two original men struggle for survival directly, the only thing they can do is a life-and-death struggle—a struggle which forces the psychically weaker into death or full submission.

Indeed, in Hegel's story of slave and master, the newborn bourgeois individual, the psychical weaker, uses his cunning to outwit the master, the stronger. In Hegel's philosophical analysis, the bourgeois individual makes his "I" as mediation or a sacrificial ritual to transform the direct violence into an abstract form as a contract between slave and master and then manages to escape from it. It is this cunning which Nietzsche loathes most and denounces as slave philosophy. On the contrary, Nietzsche maliciously celebrates the mighty and violence and tries to relieve people from the burden of moral feeling. "Take away its god from the people you wish to subjugate and you will demoralize it. As long as it has no other god than yours, you will always be its master... Grant it in return the widest, most criminal license. Never punish it, except when it turns against you."¹⁷ They agree with most of Nietzsche's observations because of their advan-

16. *Ibid.*, 65.

17. *Ibid.*, 70.

tages of actuality: they precisely disclose the power of violence in reality. “For those at the top, shrewd self-preservation means the fascist struggle for power, and for individuals it means adaptation to injustice at any price.”¹⁸ Thus, it is a good antidote to Hegel’s idealist identity weather in the form of Odysseus’ sacrifice or as Marx’s expectations for the working class. For Nietzsche it is to enforce the power as undeniable: “while he repudiated the Law he pledged himself to the ‘higher self,’ a self no longer natural but more-than-natural.”¹⁹ For Horkeimer and Adorno, however, to disclose the power in the name of universal reason is to negate this power at hand. Now in the philosophy of Nietzsche and in the practice of Fascism, this self becomes a more blood-bathed violence the same as the return of original mythical power, or, in other variant, “just as the deposed god reappears in the violence of the fascist collective.”²⁰ The crucial divergence is that Horkeimer and Adorno stand up for the ruled, for the powerless and for the mass no matter how much they mistrust them. This difference can also be grasped in their different criticisms of “pity”. For Nietzsche, “pity” should be cursed because it tries to make a false identity of the general and the particular, to interfere with inequality, and then to pervert the general law that the stronger dominates the weaker. Finally this softness impairs the ruler and the power. While for Horkeimer and Adorno, “it is not the softness but the restrictive nature of pity which makes it questionable”, for it actually “confirms the rule of inhumanity by the exception it makes.”²¹ Thus, in educating the ruled there is no pity—no identity between general and particular, an absence which is to evoke them to revolution. If the people want to be the new master, they should rebel against existing order according to their own particularities and to expose the lie of universal rule. That is why the two authors praise highly such reactionaries as Nietzsche and Sade: “in proclaiming the identity of power and reason, their pitiless doctrines are more compassionate than those of the moral lackeys of the bourgeoisie.”²²

This triad, formed by Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche is the key point for

18. *Ibid.*, 71.

19. *Ibid.*, 90.

20. *Ibid.*, 92.

21. *Ibid.*, 80.

22. *Ibid.*, 93.

understanding Horkheimer and Adorno's thinking about the crux of mass society. Indeed, the topic develops in the second half of the book has gone far beyond the preliminary analysis on instrumental reason and self-preservation of the bourgeois individual. Although the two authors will never agree with Hegel's idealist identity and are suspicious about the reconciled picture of slave and master, they uncompromisingly insist on Hegel's dialectical thinking between particular and universal in the development of reason: any arbitrary consciousness of self must sublimate itself in its living reality before it can penetrate its outside and be sublimated to the reason of the universal. Using this philosophical weapon, they ruthlessly denounce Nietzsche's philosophy of power as well as his voluntarism. While Nietzsche attempts to teach the ruler "how to rule," these two authors' misgivings are given to the ruled and the position is obviously owed to Marx. Maybe they do not have so much hostility to a healthier bourgeois society, but they are far more concerned about the fate of the seamen rather than that of Odysseus.

All of these contribute to their finally understanding of domination in mass society. As my analyses show, the darkest picture of this book is not about Odysseus, the bourgeois hero who is bound on the mast and restrained by his instrumental reason which has already gone wild, but rather that about the seamen, the helpless proletariat, who have their ears plugged by wax, or by its more modern upgrades such as the walkman or the i-phone, and thus are dominated both in body and soul, forfeiting their class consciousness and true individuality. Specifically, the two writers find the lethal point for the seamen's fate in the wax plugged in their ears. It is not only because padding makes them unable to listen and touch the world directly, but also because it instills a universal rhythm which baffles their own intentionality and spontaneity. To be precise, this rhythm is the false identity of universal and particular. This rhythm, repeated by the walkman or i-phone in their ears, is the rulers' ruse which makes the workers concentrate on their master's world even in their leisure time. In this sense, they develop Marx's typical ideological criticism of modernity. For them, there is no freedom of reason if it means a freedom with which the proletariat uses to choose between "yes" and "no," or between "conform" and "rebel"—it is this naïve prospect of enlightenment that they reject. The masses today are not the uneducated fools who accept the

given ideology without reflection. Rather, it is just the reason of self-preservation that makes them yield to injustice and power, for they know that anyone who does not conform to it is condemned to impotence. For many, the real fool is the one who dares to rebel.

The two authors point out that nowadays the path of “per aspera ad astra” does not work any longer since very few people today can be contented with others’ success. Most of the masses know that success can only be achieved by chance, by being happily chosen by those in control, who “can raise one of them up to their heaven and cast him or her out again.”²³ Of course, this sober consciousness does not itself lead to resistance. The tragedy in mass culture the two authors attack is now used by the ruler to display “the threat to destroy anyone who does not conform, whereas its paradoxical meaning once lay in hopeless resistance to mythical threat.”²⁴ For the small, the only way to self-preservation is self-abandonment and it is not like the sacrifice of Odysseus who uses his cunning to outwit power—it is pure subjugation to domination. It is this for very reason that so many people are addicted to entertainment and distraction: laugh means agreement, self-abandonment and swearing off resisting. However, even in such a total abandonment in pleasure there exist the seeds of rebellion, as in the primeval festival collective pleasure means suspension of order. Adorno and Horkheimer find incisively that the unbridled and naïve amusement among the people always glimpses into the moment when the people try to rebel against the existing social order. In this case, they do not refuse mass culture and amusement entirely. What enrages them is the fact that the “business-minded attachment to the ideological clichés of the culture,” the universal rhythm, will soon suppress the unbridled and liquidate itself.²⁵

Since such a rhythm of false identity does not overcome the contradiction between particular subject and universal standard and thus there is no mediation and reconciliation between self and its Others, the fear—the real terror of losing himself— of the ruled who is subjugated voluntarily remains unconscious. The two writers use a psychoanalytical term—idiosyncrasy—to describe this unspeakable terror which always embodies

23. *Ibid.*, 117–118.

24. *Ibid.*, 112.

25. *Ibid.*, 114.

itself in particular gestures. In a weaker case of such a unspeakable terror, Horkheimer and Adorno turn to the figure of Sade's Juliette who tries to rescue pleasure by rejecting love and devotes herself to sexuality or even perversion. Since the private love is absorbed to social order and thus is isolated from subjectivity, only pure pleasure of the body can substitute as a way to give vent to this rage and terror. But "idiosyncrasy" in Horkheimer and Adorno's argument is more arcane and totally irrational. It is like the strident voices of rabble-rousers, which as a painful expression echoes the overwhelming power from the oppressed. However, if this idiosyncrasy can never be evoked as a force for rebellion, it is because this unspeakable idiosyncrasy cannot be raised to the level of concept so as to approach the self's own senselessness. Horkheimer and Adorno's recognize that in Nazi Germany, it is finally converted to the conforming idiosyncrasy and serves the purposes of anti-Semitism.

3: Determinate Negation: Possibilities For Radical Enlightenment

Such an ambition of "the ruled [to] master themselves and hold the madness back" conveys an expectancy of a radical enlightenment. This radical enlightenment has two implications. First, the two authors make explicit their confidence in enlightenment which they believe can emancipate enlightenment from itself. Although enlightenment as a means to distance human being from his outside world can necessary lead to domination of both nature and the nature of man in relation to other men, "enlightenment itself, having mastered itself and assumed its own power, could break through the limits of enlightenment."²⁶ Second, they believe that in modern society, enlightenment should show its respect for the entire human race—it should open to every race, class and sex. In this sense, as far as I am concerned, the difficult problem dealt with in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is not enlightenment as an element of modernity with a potential tendency to self-destruction, but enlightenment as an historical process encountering a new stage where it should emancipate an extended group of human beings from domination—those who have been consid-

26. *Ibid.*, 172.

ered as inhuman over a very long historical period.

These two implications together elicit a crucial question today: can this radical enlightenment achieve reconciliation between self and Other—the ruled and ruler—in class society? The two authors cannot work out a clear method to address the crux of domination in mass society which they analyze and criticize in detail, but they at least suggest a middle way between Kant and Hegel who insists on identity, and Nietzsche and his contemporary successor such as Foucault who emphasize power and struggle for survival: determinate negation. Although they suggest this method throughout the book, only once do they describe it explicitly:

The self-satisfaction of knowing in advance, and the transfiguration of negativity as redemption, are untrue forms of the resistance to deception. The right of the image is rescued in the faithful observance of this prohibition. Such observance, “determinate negation,” is not exempted from the enticements of intuition by the sovereignty of the abstract concept, as is skepticism, for which falsehood and truth are equally void. Unlike rigorism, determinate negation does not simply reject imperfect representation of the absolute, idols, by confronting them with the idea they are unable to match. Rather, dialectic discloses each image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth. Language thereby becomes more than a mere system of signs. With the concept of determinate negation Hegel gave prominence to an element which distinguishes enlightenment from the positivist decay to which he consigned it. However, by postulating the known result of the whole process of negation, totality in the system and in history, as the absolute, he violated the prohibition and himself succumbed to mythology.²⁷

Thus on the one hand we need to admit the determinate power of particular reality which is the standpoint for participating, while on the other hand we should also retain belief in the concept of abstraction which can evoke the negation of power at hand. From this perspective, if Habermas’ communicative reason ignores the fact that the very procedure

27. *Ibid.*, 17–18.

at hand has already colluded with power, then he is still trapped in Kantian false identity rather than accepting young Hegel's "determinate negation." The objective of negation is universality at hand, because any universality is in fact the particular ossified. Thus we need "discloses each image as script," as Foucault tells us to dig out the power relationship before committing ourselves to any universal statement. However, this determinate negation should be distinguished from any relativism or skepticism, for it is a determinate negation which needs a "faithful observance" to *take over* the truth. Here faithful observance means the participation of the observer just as the old lady prays before her own deity. She does not purely project her intention to an abstract concept, but also devotes itself to its reality and to its Others. But for our two writers, there is no absolute idea which can guarantee the truth of a representation. Also, there is no self-satisfaction of knowing in advance. The determinate truth can only be shaped in this reflection between concept and reality and between self and others. Whether such a reflection will real to a reconciliation is still unknown. From this point on, Horkheimer and Adorno abandon Hegel's idealism and identity.