

The Senselessness of Reason

*On The Similitude Between Theodor W. Adorno's Critical Thinking
and The Ethos of Early German Romanticism in Schiller and Novalis*

*Bachelor Thesis Philosophy
Erasmus University Rotterdam
July 15th, 2024*

By Alexander B. T. Legebeke (536814)

*Supervisor: David van Putten, PhD.
Advisor: Prof. Dr. Han van Ruler*

*Words: 10.288
Main study: History*

**Erasmus
University
Rotterdam**

The logo of Erasmus University Rotterdam, featuring a stylized, cursive script of the word "Erasmus" in a dark color.

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Fragment of Hymns to the Night by Novalis</i>	6
I. <i>The Ethos of German Romanticism</i>	7
§1 <i>Dialectical Ideas</i>	7
§2 <i>Symphilosophie</i>	9
§3 <i>Anti-Aufklärung and The Return to Nature</i>	11
II. <i>Friedrich Schiller and Instrumental Reason</i>	14
§1 <i>The French Revolution and Schiller's Concept of Freedom</i>	14
§2 <i>Schiller's Intellectual Parallels With Later Thinkers</i>	15
§3 <i>The Letters</i>	19
III. <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment: An Excavation</i>	23
§1 <i>Theodor W. Adorno and The Frankfurt School</i>	23
§2 <i>A Neo-Romantic Movement</i>	25
<i>Conclusion</i>	33
<i>Bibliography</i>	35
1. <i>Primary Sources</i>	35
2. <i>Secondary Sources</i>	37

Introduction

This paper reassesses Theodor W. Adorno's (1903–1969) critical thinking as presented in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In this book, Adorno's critical thinking is composed in a manner similar to Arnold Schönberg's concept of 'liquidation'. Schönberg explains 'liquidation' as a process which "consists in gradually eliminating characteristic features, until only uncharacteristic ones remain, which no longer demand a continuation. Often only residues remain, which have little in common with the basic motive."¹ This elimination coincides with Adorno's understanding of reality as a profoundly contradictory experience, a constant flow of sublation. In *Negative Dialectics*, published in 1966, he expounds on this understanding of reality. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, these contradictions are also evident but more prominently situated in Adorno's contemporary political situation. The reader might perceive his book as ambiguous without awareness of Adorno's literary style and intellectual attitude. To understand this style and attitude, this research proposes to read his work according to a new set of foundations that take into account Adorno's literary style and philosophical thinking. Through these foundations, Adorno's work can be interpreted in more accurate ways. The foundations hinted at are those of German Romanticism. Like Adorno, the German romantic movement expressed an attitude of ambivalence. Similarities will become apparent after we have made a deeper scrutiny of the similitude between Adorno and the German romantic movement. Hoping to resurrect a positive connotation of Romanticism, this study will claim Adorno's work should be considered in light of German Romanticism – a current of thought emphasising sensibility and critical of Enlightenment thinking. To understand this, Adorno's German romantic foundations must first be recognised, as this study will present.

To understand the German romantic movement, there will be a focus on the thought of Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) and Friedrich von Hardenberg, more commonly known as Novalis (1772–1801). Friedrich Schiller was a philosopher, poet, playwright, and historian. He was a prominent figure within the early German romantic movement. Novalis was a philosopher, poet, and writer. Theodor W. Adorno was a philosopher, sociologist, and theorist of music. Both Schiller and Novalis were born almost 150 years earlier than Adorno. Therefore, one might wonder what these thinkers have in common. This commonality is found in the fact that all of these thinkers, belonging to the German romantic movement and Frankfurt School,

¹Arnold Schönberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 58.

represented a current of thought notable for their criticism of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*). The common denominator for Schiller, Novalis, and Adorno, in other words, is their criticism of the increasing prominence of instrumental rationality, which developed from Enlightenment thinking. This research includes a comparative conceptual analysis of Schiller and Adorno's work. For Schiller, there will be a focus *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters* (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*), a series of letters in which Schiller sets out his philosophical thinking, which were written and published in 1794 and 1795 respectively, i.e., just after the French Revolution. For Adorno, there will be a focus on his eclectic book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (*Dialektik der Aufklärung*), which was co-written with his intellectual companion Max Horkheimer in 1944 and published in 1947, just after the Second World War. Both of these works criticise the implications of Enlightenment thinking. While we consider the philosophical arguments by Schiller and Adorno, Novalis' work will help define the anti-Enlightenment attitude. Novalis' poetry and philosophy imply a sensuous way of experiencing the world. This coincides with the critique of instrumental reason by Schiller and Adorno, who, through art, aim to reconcile our thinking with nature, and reciprocally, nature into our thinking instead of distinguishing it from nature as the Enlightenment thinker proposed.

This paper ultimately aims to answer the question: to what extent does the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Adorno (and Horkheimer) inherit characteristics from German romantic thinkers such as Schiller and Novalis? Concluding with an answer to this question, the chapters leading up to this conclusion will be devoted to answering a series of sub-questions. Chapter I consists of a presentation on the concept of German Romanticism. This chapter aims to answer the question: what constitutes the German romantic *ethos*? The concept of German Romanticism is vast and has led to various interpretations. Prominent scholars like Frederick C. Beiser, Rüdiger Safranski, and Isaiah Berlin attempted to define this current of thought. In what follows, we shall take account of their views, but also argue that German Romanticism is ultimately more appropriately defined on the basis of a poetic fragment by Novalis, who was friends with Friedrich Schiller and inspired by his work.² Novalis' *magnum opus*, Hymns to the Night (*Hymnen an die Nacht*), which was written between 1797 and 1800 and published in 1800, is a defining work in German Romanticism – at least according to the more recent

² Rüdiger Safranski, *Romantiek: Een Duitse Affaire*, trans. Mark Wildschut (Uitgeverij Atlas Contact, 2016), 110.

historical research by Andrea Wulf.³ After German Romanticism is introduced and its *ethos* has been presented, Chapter II will focus on Schiller, in particular his work *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. This chapter will present Schiller's philosophical thought, focusing on its embeddedness in historical conditions. This chapter aims to answer the question: to what extent can the concept of 'instrumental reason' be found in Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*? Chapter III introduces Adorno's thinking, again focusing on the importance of historical conditions. Subsequently, it aims to answer the central question of this paper whilst also further exploring the relation between the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Schiller and Novalis.

³ Andrea Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën: De eerste romantici en de uitvinding van het ik*, trans. Fennie Steenhuis and Nannie de Nijs Bik-Plasman (Uitgeverij Atlas Contact, 2023), 190.

Fragment of Hymns to the Night by Novalis

*Over I pilgrim
Where every pain
Zest only of pleasure
Shall one day remain.
Yet a few moments
Then Free am I,
And intoxicated
In Love's lap lie.
Life everlasting
Lifts, wave-like, at me:
I gaze from its summit
Down after thee
Oh, sun, you must vanish
Yon yon hillock beneath
A shadow will bring thee
Thy cooling wreath.
Oh, draw at my heart, love,
Draw till I'm gone,
That, fallen asleep, I
Still may love on
I feel the flow of
Death's youth-giving flood;
To balsam and æther, it
Changes my blood!
I live in the daytime
In faith and in might:
And in holy rapture
I die every night.⁴*

⁴ Novalis, *Hymns To the Night and Spiritual Songs*, trans. George Macdonald (Crescent Moon Publishing, 2013), 43.

I. *The Ethos of German Romanticism*

§1 *Dialectical Ideas*

The fragment of Novalis' *Hymns to the Night* is a prime example of German romantic poetry. Without entering into an extended textual and literary analysis, a few concepts can be recognised within this fragment. In the poem, we find an intense usage of antagonistic concepts such as pain and pleasure, remain and moments, free and intoxicated, everlasting and wave-like, live and die, and day and night. These antagonistic concepts are precisely what defines the *ethos* of German Romanticism. It evokes ambivalence, as found in their contradictions, or rather, within the dialectical experience of the world, all of which are clearly present in the small fragment from Novalis' long poem. Many scholars have tried to define Romanticism. In his Mellon Lectures, held in 1965 in Washington, Isaiah Berlin presented an overview of long scholarly disagreement on the exact definition of Romanticism. In the first lecture, *In Search of a Definition*, Berlin sums up some citations by significant philosophers and writers of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries:

For Stendhal: 'the romantic is the modern and the interesting, classicism is the old and the dull; Nietzsche says: 'Romanticism is a cure for a disease'; Heine says: 'Romanticism is the passion flower, sprung from the blood of Christ'; Ruskin says: 'it [Romanticism] is contrast of the beautiful past and frightful of the monotonous present'; Eichendorff says: 'it is protestant nostalgia for the catholic church'; Lukács says: 'no great writers are romantic, least of all Scott, Hugo, and Stendhal'.⁵

These are only a few quotations of the many that Berlin presents. Because of the great disagreement in the formulated definitions and lack of coherence between authorities, this paper will set forth a definition characterised by the dialectical notion of the world as conveyed by Novalis in the fragment of *Hymns to the Night* presented above. To understand this fragment, Novalis' intellectual influence must be understood. Novalis was greatly inspired by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814). He wrote extensively on Fichte's novel philosophy in his *Fichte Studies*, which date from 1795 and 1796.⁶ At the time, Fichte was a professor at the University

⁵ Isaiah Berlin, "Romanticism – In Search of a Definition," filmed 1965 at Mellon Auditorium, Washington D.C., video, 35:15,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIffazJirLo&list=PLhP9EhPAPKE_9uxkmfSIt2JJK6oKbXmd-&index=1.

⁶ Laure Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love and Medicine," *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 1, (2019): 136.

of Jena, where he influenced many students with his authentic philosophy, which impressed Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).⁷ Kant wrote to the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, which was the most important literary journal in Jena at the time, “I did not contribute in any way to this very competently written book”, namely, *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung*, which was published in 1792.⁸ This book caused a stir in the intellectual climate of the German-speaking lands, and many thought it was Kant’s fourth critique – the Critique of Religion.

In Fichte’s philosophy, the concept of *Imagination* plays a key role. One of the characteristics of this philosophy is the synthesis between opposites, opposites as we have seen in the fragment of Novalis’ poem. In his *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge (Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre)*, published in the winter of 1794–1795, Fichte set out a philosophy that focussed on ‘creative imagination’. This ‘creative imagination’ “is the power of our I that allows us to integrate and synthesise two opposing elements into our knowledge and cognition.”⁹ For Fichte, these opposing components are the I and the Not-I, the ideal and the real. The principle defining the ‘creative imagination’s’ core process is what Fichte calls reciprocal action (*Wechselwirkung*). The following quote from the *Grundlage*, as cited by contemporary scholar Laure Cahen-Maurel, characterises the romantic project which Novalis was to embark on later:

This power [imagination] is almost always misunderstood, but it is the power that combines into a unity, things constantly posited in opposition to each other, the power that intervenes between moments that would have to mutually annul each other and retains both. ... The task was to unite two terms posited in opposition to each other, the I and the Not-I. They can be completely united by the power of imagination, which unites items posited in opposition to each other.¹⁰

The project Novalis embarked on was largely formed with his intellectual companion Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829). Schlegel was an essential figure within the German romantic movement. With his older brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), who was the first translator of Shakespeare into German, he was responsible for founding the literary magazine *Athenaeum*.¹¹ In *Athenaeum*, the intellectuals of the ‘Jena circle’, named after the city where

⁷ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 67.

⁸ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 67.

⁹ Cahen-Maurel, “Novalis’s Magical Idealism,” 142.

¹⁰ Cahen-Maurel, “Novalis’s Magical Idealism,” 142

¹¹ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 197.

they resided and where Fichte unfolded his new philosophy, published their essays on topics such as philosophy, poetry, history, and literature. The Jena circle, among others, consisted of Caroline Schlegel (1763–1809), Dorothea Veit (1764–1839), the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, Fichte, F. W. J. Schelling (1775–1854), F. D. Schleiermacher (1768–1834), and Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853).¹²

§2 *Symphilosophie*

In *Athenaeum*, the group attempted to work together. F. Schlegel founded a specific term for their collective efforts: *Symphilosophie*.¹³ *Symphilosophie* “is the true name of our connection” is what F. Schlegel wrote to Novalis in 1797. It was a concept based on the idea that two (or more) minds could achieve their full potential together.¹⁴ The word ‘romantic’ was coined in the first edition of *Athenaeum*.¹⁵ The word was coined by the joint, or rather *Symphilosophical*, production of Novalis and F. Schlegel.¹⁶ For them, romanticising meant approaching the world as a whole in which everything is connected. It connects life and the arts, individuals and society, humanity and nature. Novalis writes: “By giving the commonplace a deeper meaning, making the ordinary seem mysterious, granting the known the dignity of the unknown and giving the finite a touch of infinity, I romanticise.”¹⁷ Novalis wrote this in his *Fragments*, dating from 1798, which is the same year that William Wordsworth (1770–1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) published their famous work *Lyrical Ballads*, which set off the English romantic period. In the quote from his *Fragments*, the dialectical attitude of experiencing the world is noticeable – a vital characteristic of the romantic way of seeing things. For Novalis and F. Schlegel, Fichte’s use of the word ‘creative imagination’ was not radical enough because it did not succeed in synthesising poetry and philosophy.¹⁸ In 1800, F. Schlegel published a crucial essay in the journal *Athenaeum*, which elaborated on the notion of Romanticism. In *Gespräch über die Poesie*, he explicitly stated that ‘*das romantische*’ cannot be expressed in terms of some genre. Alternatively, he affirms that the romantic “is not a ‘kind’ (*Gattung*), but: an ‘element’ (*ein Element*) of literature”.¹⁹ The foundations of their circle were built on the Greek conception of poetry (*poiētikós*), meaning ‘creative’ or ‘productive’, which the Jena

¹² Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 9.

¹³ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 208.

¹⁴ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 208.

¹⁵ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 203.

¹⁶ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 57.

¹⁷ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 204.

¹⁸ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 206.

¹⁹ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 15.

Circle transformed into an attitude to possess.²⁰ This attitude is an important element within the Jena Circle. For the romantics, possessing the Greek conception of poetry does not merely mean a literal creative production but rather a permanent holistic approach to life and the world. It implicates a different approach to the subject-object ‘problem’ of the Enlightenment thinker; however, the romantics do not conceive such a problem as they aimed to integrate nature into their being. Through *poiētikós*, they approached nature as something ‘creative’ while they were ‘producing’ this certain nature, thus nullifying the subject-object dichotomy. In *Athenaeum* fragment 116, F. Schlegel conveys what this form of poetry means, he writes:

Only she [poetry], like the epic, can become a mirror of the entire surrounding world, an image of the era. Nonetheless, more than other forms, and freed from all real idealistic interests, it too can hover halfway between the represented and the one representing, on the wings of poetic reflection, and it can revive this reflection again and again and multiply it into an endless series of mirrors.²¹

In this citation, it is clear that for Schlegel, poetry lies outside the realm of the idealistic, but at the same time, it is a direct representation of the world. For Schlegel, the poetic attitude is a never-ending unresolved process. Its ambivalence is found in the fact that it floats between the object (the represented) and the subject (the one representing). Another strong affiliate of the Jena Circle and Schiller, “who became his hero and patron for a number of years”, was Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), who also uses this ambivalence in his work.²² In his essay *On the Operations of the Poetic Spirit*, somewhere dating from the first half of the 19th century, Hölderlin explains the importance of ambivalence in poetry and art.²³ Hölderlin’s ‘poetic’ is the same as the ‘creative’ (*poiētikós*) attitude that one can possess and is rooted in the dialectic idea of the world as formulated by F. Schlegel and Novalis. Hölderlin writes:

The significance of the poem can have a twofold meaning, just as the spirit (*Geist*), the ideal, as well as the subject matter, the presentation, have a twofold meaning, namely, insofar as it is understood as applied or unapplied.²⁴

²⁰ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 16.

²¹ F. Schlegel, *Athenaeum. Fragmenten, essays, kritieken*, trans. Jan Sietsma (Amsterdam: Octavo publicaties, 2014), 25.

²² Safranski, *Romantiek*, 45.

²³ Michael Hamburger, “Introduction,” in *Friedrich Hölderlin: Selected Poems and Fragments*, ed. Jeremy Adler (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), xx–xxi.

²⁴ Friedrich Hölderlin, “On the Operations of the Poetic Spirit,” in *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. and ed. by Thomas Pfau (State University of New York Press, 1987), 62.

§3 *Anti-Aufklärung and The Return to Nature*

The romantic movement was a self-conscious antithesis to the Enlightenment ideals of the 18th century. Novalis' transcendental philosophy was an attempt to break away from the mechanical understanding of the world, which had been a core aspect of Enlightenment thought. Novalis called his philosophy 'magical idealism' (*Magischer Idealismus*).²⁵ He writes: "It is a mixture of poetry and philosophy, a poetry of philosophy and a philosophy of poetry."²⁶ In 1798, Novalis wrote to A. W. Schlegel: "All sciences must be poeticised."²⁷ Poetry was the true absolute reality. Absolute, as in Spinoza's substance monism or Schelling's absolute idealism. Like Schelling, Novalis formulated a *Naturphilosophie* through his magical idealism.

According to Cahen-Maurel, Novalis' magical idealism "is a serious reflection on the interweaving and positive intersection of the empirical and the rational, the sensible and the supersensible, sensibility and real. In other words, [...] magical idealism sees itself as a continuation of a program within the tradition of transcendental philosophy that attempts to reconcile or synthesise apparent opposites."²⁸ Within this program, Novalis tried to overcome the strong classifications and dichotomies that the Enlightenment had set forth. Due to the Enlightenment, the conception of nature had become explicitly disentangled from what was human. The intense division between subject and object had first been delineated in the early Enlightenment and was subsequently firmly adhered to. It also inspired the work of Kant, which was seen as the latest paradigm-shifting theory concerning subject and object dichotomies for the fact that Kant's *Ding an Sich* had caused an even further gap between humankind and nature. Kant's followers were not cheerful about the romantic conception of nature set forth by Jena Circle members such as Novalis and Schelling. *Naturphilosophie* rested on the premises that the logical disjunctions of Kant's system were problematic. The opposition between Kant and the Jena circle was felt on both sides of the divide. As Romantic scholar Frederick C. Beiser writes: "Probably no other aspect of romantic *Naturphilosophie* has aroused the wrath of its neo-Kantian critics more than its organic concept of nature."²⁹

According to the romantics, Kant had been unable to produce a theory of the interaction between the noumenal and the phenomenal. On the other hand, authors like Schelling wanted to "show that the constitutive status of the idea of an organism is the necessary condition of the

²⁵ Novalis, *Hymns To the Night and Spiritual Songs*, 130.

²⁶ Novalis, *Hymns To the Night and Spiritual Songs*, 130.

²⁷ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 187.

²⁸ Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism," 146.

²⁹ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 153.

possibility of experience.”³⁰ In other words, Schelling and other *Naturphilosophen* tried to prove that the nature of our mind is already integrated into the nature of Nature (as in the ‘objective’ world).³¹ They claimed that Nature and mind are one and the same. In 1800, Schelling presented his organic idea of nature in his *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Schelling explains that Nature should be encountered as an organism. As a consequence, there is no difference between a particular kind in this organic whole, only between certain stages such as subject and object.³² For Schelling, the subject and object are only one part of a big unity. This unity expresses itself in different modes. Its concrete expression is in the form of equilibriums in which antagonistic forces, just like the subject and the object, are realised. However, the romantic attempt to overcome the dualisms was, of course, not without problems.

Nonetheless, the romantics tried to emphasise the importance of the relationship between humankind and nature. In order to emphasise this, the Jena Circle aspired to give art a central role in German culture. The Enlightenment had neglected art and had focused instead on the more practical or instrumental use of things. Everything had to serve a purpose. It was especially the romantic movement’s growing social and political consciousness in the wake of the French Revolution that led them to form a way of integrating art into social and political reform. F. Schlegel echoes this goal in *Athenaeum*: “[The French Revolution] prepared the German people for the high ideals of a republic by giving them moral, political and aesthetic education.”³³ Aesthetic education, in other words, was a necessary condition for societal reform. Schiller had written about this form of education a couple of years earlier, in 1794, during the Reign of Terror, in his letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. As Beiser comments: “In assigning such importance to art, the young romantics proved themselves to be the disciples of Schiller.”³⁴

The fact that the romantic movement and Adorno’s intellectual influences bore fruit from Schiller’s philosophy will be the subject of our study in the next chapters. Here, we may conclude that the first sub-question, i.e., ‘What constitutes the German romantic ethos?’, is answered by indicating four key elements we have discerned. As presented in Novalis’ fragment from *Hymns to the Night* and his ‘magical idealist’ philosophy, the first element is Romanticism’s dialectical take on the notions that are constitutive of our experience. The

³⁰ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 154.

³¹ Frans Ruiter & Paul Ziche, “Inleiding,” in *F. W. J. Schelling: Over het wezen van de menselijke vrijheid*, ed. Frans Ruiter & Paul Ziche (Amsterdam: Boom uitgevers, 2022), 15–16.

³² Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 168.

³³ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 49.

³⁴ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 50.

second is the mutual integration of different perspectives of philosophical thought as formulated in the concept of *Symphilosophie*. The third is the strong detestation of Enlightenment ideals and the attitude that the Enlightenment initiated. Finally, the aversion to the human attempt to master nature and to understand it as an object that stands opposite to our reason; instead of, as the romantics would advocate, integrating ourselves into the concept of nature.

II. *Friedrich Schiller and Instrumental Reason*

§1 *The French Revolution and Schiller's Concept of Freedom*

On the 14th of July 1789, an important historical event occurred: the Storming of the Bastille. This event subsequently led to one of the most important developments in modern European history: the French Revolution. This revolution led to a change in concrete historical material conditions. The motto *liberté, égalité, et fraternité* were words which transformed into material changes in society. Especially the conception of freedom (*liberté*) would become a fundamental pillar for newly emerging forms of philosophical thought and political programs. Many thinkers, especially in the German-speaking lands, thought humankind had never seen such individual freedoms as those that the event of the French Revolution brought forth. Even deep into the Napoleonic Wars, the notion of 'free will' became particularly important within the Jena romantic-idealist-philosophical movement, especially in such authors as Fichte and Schelling. For Fichte, the all-capable 'I' became the centre of his philosophy, an idea ignited by the French Revolution.³⁵ In the introduction of the *Grundlage*, Fichte writes:

Now the object of idealism is precisely this self-in-itself. The object of this system, therefore, actually occurs as something real in consciousness, not as a *thing-in-itself*, whereby idealism would cease to be what it is and would transform itself into dogmatism, but as a *self-in-itself*; not as an object of experience, for it is not determined but will only be determined by me, and without this determination is nothing, and does not even exist; but as something that is raised above all experience.³⁶

In 1809, amid the War of the Fifth Coalition, part of the Napoleonic Wars, Schelling writes, in his *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom (Über das Wesen der Menschlichen Freiheit)*, otherwise known as the *Freiheitsschrift*:

Idealism, on the one hand, only provides the most general concept of freedom, and on the other hand a purely formal concept of freedom. But the real and vital understanding is that freedom is a capacity for good and evil.³⁷

³⁵ Wulf, *Rebelse Genieën*, 29.

³⁶ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Science of Knowledge: first introduction," in *German Idealist Philosophy*, ed. Rüdiger Bubner (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 86.

³⁷ F. W. J. Schelling, *Over het wezen van de menselijke vrijheid*, trans. Frans Ruiter & Paul Ziche (Amsterdam: Boom uitgevers, 2022), 57.

Like Fichte and Schelling, Friedrich Schiller at first welcomed the French Revolution. He changed his opinion, however, after the Reign of Terror and the September Massacres. Schiller felt that, because of the atrocities committed during the Reign of Terror and the September Massacres, he had to form a novel aesthetic theory which would educate individuals and humankind in such a way as to be able to cope with their newly found individual freedom (*Bildung*). This was the position he would present in his letters *On The Aesthetic Education of Man*.³⁸ With these letters, Schiller became the instigator of the romantic project which the Jena Circle would later set out. After the September Massacres of 1792, Schiller concluded that humankind was not prepared to organise itself if it had every liberty it could practice; the very excesses of the Revolution had shown this. Schiller called these exuberances: “barbaric lawless drifts”. These drifts were unchained by humanity’s “most animalistic satisfactions”.³⁹ In reaction, Schiller tried to turn the material revolution into a revolution of the mind. Only by the play of art could humankind become truly free. His enormous emphasis on aestheticism had a great influence on the Jena Circle at large.

§2 Schiller’s Intellectual Parallels With Later Thinkers

Contrary to what Kant had said, Schiller argues that the Enlightenment had not awoken humanity from its dogmatic slumber. Instead, the Enlightenment had only proven itself to be a “theoretical culture” – an aesthetic component for “the actual barbarians”.⁴⁰ The task of the philosopher was to transform this “theoretical culture” into a culture in which humanity is truly free. Schiller argued that the aesthetic world is not only a playground for the refinement of sense perception (*aísthēsis*), but that the aesthetic realm brings humanity to its essence. Schiller calls this essence the *homo ludens* (playing human[kind]).⁴¹ If the *homo ludens* does not fulfil its essential potential, society might be at stake (*Auf dem Spiel stehen*). Long before Sigmund Freud’s (1856–1939) psychoanalytical theories on sublimation, sex, and death drives, Schiller would argue that because of our play drive (*Spieltrieb*), our ‘animalistic satisfactions’ will become subject to sublimation, helping our animalistic side to dignify and become human, but at the same time allowing our drives to constitute us as humans – just as Freud’s ‘pleasure principle’ (*Lustprinzip*) would. With respect to violence and aggression, Schiller makes an argumentative parallel with what Freud would argue 127 years later. According to Schiller, if

³⁸ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 40.

³⁹ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 40.

⁴⁰ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 41.

⁴¹ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 41.

humanity wants to understand its nature, which art will unveil, we can better direct our ‘barbaric lawless drifts’, or those aspects of ourselves that Schiller calls ‘drives’ (*Triebe*) and what Freud would later call our ‘death drive’ (*Todestrieb*). As Freud writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1921):

A drive would, therefore, be an urge, inherent in the living organism, to restore a previous state. [...] The postulate of the drives for self-preservation, which we attribute to every living being, stands in striking contrast to the premise that the entire instinct of life serves to bring about death. [...] The eccentric postulate of ‘death drives’.⁴²

For Schiller, the drives dehumanise our society. Although, like in Freud, the drives are inherent to ‘the living organism’, we can overcome them if we educate ourselves and society through the arts. Later for Adorno, Freud’s analysis of the drifts, as preceded by Schiller, would become vital for his understanding of the socio-behavioural patterns of the masses as influenced by the culture industry, which, according to Adorno, numbed and mechanised human behaviour. Nonetheless, with his presented aesthetic theory, Schiller indicated that through play, humanity would eventually acquire its humanness: you feel the feeling, enjoy the enjoyment, and love the loving.⁴³ These duplications are exactly what later, in 1798, with the founding of *Athenaeum*, inspired the Jena romantics. Through these duplications, Schiller implies criticism of the increasing instrumentality found within reason. Post-French Revolution society and *Aufklärung*-driven systems of thought are both subjugated to the laws of utility and justification. For Schiller, this instrumental type of reason becomes a social machine, what he calls a ‘steel cage’.⁴⁴ Schiller writes:

Utility is the great idol of the age, to which all powers are in thrall and all talent must pay homage. [...] The spirit of philosophical inquiry strips the power of imagination one province after another; the borders of art shrink as science extends its bounds.⁴⁵

No systematic explanatory justifications are needed for being, feeling, loving, and caring. These aspects of life have no goals in themselves; they are not meaningful because they are a

⁴² Sigmund Freud, *Aan gene zijde van het lustprincipe*, trans. Thomas Graftdijk (Amsterdam: Boom, 2022), 45 and 56–57.

⁴³ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 43.

⁴⁴ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 43.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 5–6.

means to another end; they are meaningful because they are genuine for what they are. Schiller also describes art in this sense. Art, just like religion, only serves society; if it wants to serve society, in a certain sense, it has to come naturally and without intentions.⁴⁶ For Schiller, art is, therefore, first and foremost a kind of drive for play, second, a means in *itself*, and lastly, the compensation for a new type of social deformation.

It is noteworthy that Schiller's analysis would later reflect not just in the works of his Jena followers but long after in the works of authors addressing social and political themes from a similarly romantic viewpoint. Schiller's attention to social deformation, for instance, mirrors the deformation Karl Marx (1818–1883) would criticise half a century later in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844). If Schiller argues that art and the other aspects of life that are meaningful on account of themselves may become subjugated due to social deformations inspired by utility, it would be Karl Marx who identified the sophisticated system of the division of labour as one such system of utility.⁴⁷ As Marx writes:

Thus, only for the workers is the separation of capital, landed property and labour an inevitable, essential, and detrimental separation. Capital and landed property need not remain fixed in this abstraction, as must the labour of the workers. The separation of capital, ground-rent, and labour is thus fatal for the workers.⁴⁸

Accordingly, the topic of the division of labour that had fragmented everything was also a key issue for Schiller; politics, science, technology, skills, and more were becoming obscure in the concrete 'totality'.⁴⁹ Georg Lukács (1885–1971) used this concept almost 130 years later in the profoundly influential text, especially for the Frankfurt School, namely, *History and Class Consciousness*. Also, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) used the concept of 'totality' to make a similar argument for his ontological theory as presented in *Being and Time*, published in 1927. This was compared by Marxist philosopher Lucien Goldmann (1913–1970), who writes: "The two [Lukács and Heidegger] thinkers reject, as false ontology, any philosophy which presents a theory of totality or Being, based on the opposition between subject and object."⁵⁰ Lukács and Heidegger were yielding the same notions on the subject-object dichotomy relating to

⁴⁶ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 45.

⁴⁷ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 45.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Wilder Publications, 2011), 12.

⁴⁹ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 45.

⁵⁰ Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*, trans. William Q. Boelhower (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 40.

humanity's ontological status. This coincides with the romantic *Naturphilosophie*, which also tried to overcome this dichotomy, as Beiser emphasised that "Schelling, Hegel, Schlegel, and Novalis did not wish to retain or revive the old metaphysical notion of providence, according to which everything in nature follows a divine plan. Rather, they believed that their teleology is completely intrinsic, limited to the ends of nature itself."⁵¹ Before *Naturphilosophie* gained its merits through Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature (Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur)* from 1797 and later his *First Plan of a System of the Philosophy of Nature (Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie)* from 1799, Schiller wrote an early kind of *Naturphilosophie* stating an ontological alteration is taking place due to the division of labour:

Pleasure was separated from labour, the means from the end, the effort from the reward. Eternally chained to a single small fragment of the whole, man himself develops only fragmentarily; with nothing but the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns in his ears, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of expressing humanity in his nature, he becomes a mere imprint of activities.⁵²

The division of labour fragmented humankind's ontological status, which Marx later called 'alienation' (*Entfremdung*). Although Schiller was already critical of this ontological status, he knew this was a necessary condition for the unfolding of history and, thus, society. A year before G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) published his first book in 1807, namely, *Phenomenology of Spirit (Phänomenologie des Geistes)*, he had seen Napoleon march into Jena after the French Army won the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt. By this time, Schiller had already written: "The antagonism of the powers is the great *instrument* of culture."⁵³ With this, Schiller means that opposing forces are necessary conditions for the unfolding of society. In 1820, years after his confrontation with the 'world soul' (i.e. Napoleon), Hegel made a similar claim that dialectics teleologically unfolds world history (*Weltgeist*).⁵⁴ In paragraph 347 of the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel writes:

To the people to whom such a moment falls as a natural principle, its fulfilment is transferred in the progress of the developing self-consciousness of the world spirit (*Weltgeist*). That nation is the dominant one in world history during this epoch - and it can only make an epoch its own

⁵¹ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 161.

⁵² Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 19.

⁵³ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 22.

⁵⁴ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 45.

once in history. With regard to this absolute right to be the bearer of a given stage of development of the world spirit, the spirits of other peoples are without rights; they do not count in world history, just like the spirits whose time has passed.⁵⁵

Schiller understood that through these antagonisms, society leaned towards the dialectics of the *Aufklärung*, which, through its logic, reasoned everything within a mathematical or mechanistic framework. This made any form of humanness abstruse. Schiller tried to encounter exactly this abstruseness. With his introduction of playing human[kind], one can attain, through art, a better self and society—a truly liberated humankind. For Schiller, with Robespierre as its figurehead, the French Revolution had become a ‘theoretical culture’, identical to his description of the *Aufklärung*. Its terror, atrocities, and aggression are realised by what Schiller calls the “terror of reason”.⁵⁶

§3 *The Letters*

Friedrich Schiller had lived a turbulent life before becoming a professor of History and Philosophy at the University of Jena in 1789, the same year the French Revolution took off.⁵⁷ In 1791, after experiencing significant financial issues, Schiller accepted the patronage of a Danish nobleman. Frederick Christian, Prince of Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg, started to invest in Schiller because of the rumours about his poor conditions.⁵⁸ After the financial impulses given out generously by the prince, Schiller recovered, and the following three years were to be Schiller’s most intellectually active years as he started to delve into a deep study of Kant’s third critique, published in 1790, namely, *Critique of Judgement (Kritik der Urteilskraft)*.⁵⁹ In this critique, Kant synthesised his transcendental epistemology and moral ‘laws’, which he explained in his former two critiques. In the third critique, this would be unified into, partly, a theory of the aesthetic (*aīsthēsis*). Schiller tried to overcome the problems as laid out by Kant in the third critique, “especially Kant’s determination of beauty as a subject, giving it more an objective character, while at the same time preserving key assumptions of Kant’s transcendental epistemology.”⁶⁰ In the course of a series of letters sent to a friend in Dresden, which were posthumously published as *Kallias, or On Beauty* and in a piece called

⁵⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Hoofdlijnen van de Rechtsfilosofie*, trans. Willem Visser (Amsterdam: Boom, 2014), 323.

⁵⁶ Safranski, *Romantiek*, 45.

⁵⁷ Alexander Schmidt, “Introduction,” in *Friedrich Schiller: On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. Keith Tribe (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), x.

⁵⁸ Schmidt, “Introduction,” xi.

⁵⁹ Schmidt, “Introduction,” xi.

⁶⁰ Schmidt, “Introduction,” xi–xii.

On Grace and Dignity, both dating from 1793, Schiller wrote the blueprints of the theory which he later sent in letters to his patron Frederick Christian. After a fire broke out in Prince Christian's castle, Schiller sorted the drafts of the previously sent letters and published them in the first editions of his journal *Die Horen*. Contributors of *Die Horen* were his dear friend Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832), as well as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819), and Fichte.⁶¹ Subsequently, they were published as *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters* in 1795.

Schiller's first letter is an aesthetic theory in a Kantian framework, where he developed a theory aiming at overcoming Kant's complications, which were left untouched in the third critique. However, the letters, already starting at letter 2, took a drastic turn in their content. Schiller turned his mostly Kantian aesthetic theory into a theory of social reform as his sympathies towards the revolution in France disappeared after the news of three violent events reached him in Jena: the execution of King Louis XVI in January 1793, the revolt of the Vendée in March, and seizure of the Convention by activists in June.⁶² In the Second letter, Schiller writes:

The gaze of both philosophers and man of the world is now fixed expectantly on the political domain, where the very fate of humanity is argued out; or so it is thought. Does not any failure to join with this argument betray a culpable indifference to the welfare of society?⁶³

After his claims on *Utility* as “the great idol of the age”, Schiller turns his attention to the political climate of his day. Schiller continues on this note in the Third letter, writing:

This natural state (as any political body derives its original existence from forces and not from laws can be called) does stand in contradiction to moral man, for whom the only law should be to act in conformity with the law; but it is sufficient for physical man, who gives himself laws only so that he might come to terms with forces.⁶⁴

In the Fifth letter, it is evident that Schiller's opinions towards the political and intellectual offspring of the *Aufklärung* are not very optimistic. He writes:

⁶¹ Schmidt, “Introduction,” xi.

⁶² Schmidt, “Introduction,” xiii–xiv.

⁶³ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 6.

⁶⁴ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 8.

The enlightenment of understanding that the finer ranks not unjustly praise has on the whole had so little refining influence on resolve that it has instead tended to reinforce corruption through principle.⁶⁵

In the Sixth letter, he continued criticising the ‘enlightened’ governments of his time, writing:

The collapse of art and learning first brought about within man was made complete and universal by the new spirit of government.⁶⁶

In total, Schiller wrote twenty-seven letters. Schiller scholar Alexander Schmidt summarises Schiller’s project as follows. In the first nine letters, Schiller addresses the question of “to what extent a stable political community can be erected and upheld by selfish individuals.”⁶⁷ In letters eleven to twenty-two, Schiller “develops a transcendental deduction of aesthetic beauty as intermediary force or middle state, which evolves from the interplay between the passivity of the material impulse and the activity of the formal impulse, between our senses and reason.”⁶⁸ In the final letters, Schiller makes an anthropological argument for the need of aesthetic education, i.e., “the emancipation of man from nature in the artwork which preserves us as sensuous beings.”⁶⁹ As Schiller writes in the Twenty-sixth letter:

The emancipating aesthetic mood has to be a gift of nature; only the favour of chance can loosen the fetters of the original physical condition and lead the savage to beauty.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, due to formal restrictions, I cannot present an overview of all the letters. However, through the examined letters and research, I hope to have shown Schiller’s general anti-*Aufklärung* attitude, which was motivated by the novel historical developments of Schiller’s time, i.e., the French Revolution, bureaucratic governments, and the division of labour. Schiller’s historical conditions produced his critique of the increasingly significant instrumental reason within the society and politics of his time. This critique is found within his concepts of ‘utility’ and ‘terror of reason’. Schiller’s aesthetic education aims to overcome these problematic inclinations with which his epoch is plagued. With this in mind, the sub-

⁶⁵ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 15.

⁶⁶ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 19.

⁶⁷ Schmidt, “Introduction,” xxii.

⁶⁸ Schmidt, “Introduction,” xxx.

⁶⁹ Schmidt, “Introduction,” xxix–xxx.

⁷⁰ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 99.

question: ‘To what extent can the concept of ‘instrumental reason’ be found in Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man?*’ is sufficiently answered. Also, the presented research hopes to convey the historical intersections of Schiller’s intellectual tendencies through his usage of concepts. As shown, Schiller’s conceptual framework is found in many forthcoming German-speaking thinkers. These will be further explored in Chapter III.

III. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: An Excavation*

§1 *Theodor W. Adorno and The Frankfurt School*

As presented in Chapter II, many philosophers, after Schiller, built their philosophy around aspects that are also mentioned in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. To recapitulate, these philosophers were German idealist philosophers from the Napoleonic era, specifically Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. A thinker from a time of much social reform during the mid-19th century, namely, Marx. A psychoanalyst from the *fin-de-siècle*, namely, Freud. And Lukács and Heidegger, who wrote their significant works during the Interbellum. One might ask: What do these relatively temporally distant philosophers have in common? How are German idealist philosophy, Marx's critique of the political economy, Freud's psychoanalysis, Lukács's Marxist ontology, and Heidegger's phenomenological ontology related? Their commonality is that they culminate in a fragment of the critical thinking of Theodor W. Adorno.⁷¹

Adorno was part of the Institute for Social Research, founded in Frankfurt, the birthplace of Goethe, who is Schiller's intellectual companion. This Social Research Institute, more commonly known as the Frankfurt School, was founded in 1923 by Carl Grünberg. The Frankfurt School's transition to its new director, Max Horkheimer, in 1930 "turned its attention to the analysis of culture and authority."⁷² The school became increasingly more focused on the "lamented fragmentation of knowledge, the appeal to an often diffuse notion of 'totality' as the lost perspective, the attack on positivism, and the recovering of traditions."⁷³ The Frankfurt School's primary intellectual influence was established by merging "idealism, which arose in opposition to neo-Kantianism, together with the revival of Marxism after the First World War."⁷⁴ Three years after Horkheimer was appointed new director, the Nazi Party seized power in Germany. As the ideology of the Nazi Party strongly opposed Marxism, the Institute for Social Research was swiftly shut down. The closing of the institute and the escalating antisemitism forced Adorno and Horkheimer, who were of Jewish descent, into exile. In 1938, both men reunited in New York, and in early 1940, they started working on their collaborative

⁷¹ Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London: Verso Books, 2014), 11.

⁷² Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 2.

⁷³ Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 2.

⁷⁴ Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 3.

work *Philosophische Fragmente*, which in 1944 got its new title: *Dialektik der Aufklärung*.⁷⁵ Eventually, the book was published in 1947, just after the Second World War.

The book's eclectic character makes the contents enigmatic. The book derives its intellectual foundation from the thinkers mentioned above but also takes its analysis beyond philosophy. Both thinkers employ methods from history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and literary criticism to investigate the concept of Enlightenment and its forthcoming emphasis on positivism and reason (*Vernunft*).⁷⁶ Apart from the interdisciplinary research within the content itself, the contents are also written in an evidently literary style. As Adorno scholar Gillian Rose writes: "It is impossible to understand Adorno's ideas without understanding the ways in which he presents them, that is his style [...]."⁷⁷ The book takes the notion of dialectic as a foundation for its style and philosophy. This can be traced to Novalis' fragment of *Hymns to the Night*, where Novalis conveys the ambivalent nature of our thinking. The book itself does not present any instrumentality as Adorno is not concerned with any persuasion but formally presents the *ethos* in which our thinking has been moulded. Without going too much into a philological analysis of the formation of the respective essays, or rather, fragments, there must be an understanding of the book's structure. The book is divided into three essays, the first of which has two sub-essays. Thus, in total, the book consists of five essays. The essays were later assembled and can be interpreted as chapters. The first chapter, *The Concept of Enlightenment*, is their introductory joint essay, which delves into the very origins of Enlightenment thinking – using the concept of myth to transpose it. This chapter consists of two excursuses (sub-essays): the first, *Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment* (exclusively written by Adorno), which mainly deals with the concept of disenchantment, and the second, *Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality* (written solely by Horkheimer), which primarily deals with the contrasting faults of reason. The second chapter, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, is mainly about the novel ideological traits of culture, music, media, and television in the United States. The third chapter, *Elements of Antisemitism: Limits of Enlightenment*, deals with the atrocities of the Second World War caused by the friction between the degradation and elevation of reason. All of these chapters deal with the instrumentality of reason as came forth, according to Schiller and Adorno, by Enlightenment thinking.

⁷⁵ Michel van Nieuwstadt, "Nawoord," in *Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer: Dialectiek van de Verlichting*, ed. Michel van Nieuwstadt (Amsterdam: Boom, 2021), 275–76.

⁷⁶ Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso Books, 2016), xi–xv.

⁷⁷ Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 14.

This paper will deal with a selective portion of the book because there is not enough scope to scrutinise the other essays. The first sub-essay, *The Concept of Enlightenment*, and the fifth essay, *Elements of Antisemitism: Limits of Enlightenment*, are mainly explored to present the inheritance of German romantic characteristics as found in Schiller and Novalis in Adorno's thought.

§2 *A Neo-Romantic Movement*

The book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* came from a *Symphilosophical* effort of three people. The conversations of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Adorno's wife, Gretel Adorno, were carefully transcribed into texts and reassessed between the three.⁷⁸ The process of thinking, writing, and working was motivated by, as Novalis and Schlegel described, that two (or more) minds could reach more potential. In 1941, Adorno asked Horkheimer: "When will we be sitting in the garden while dictating, erasing, and carrion-eating (*lämmergeiern*)?"⁷⁹ *Lämmergeiern* means to strip off a text just like a vulture would strip off a carcass. Their *lämmergeiern*, in particular, shows the extreme procedure of their *Symphilosophie*. Gretel's contribution here was of much importance; Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia*: "It [Gretel's dictations] enables the writer to manoeuvre himself into the position of a critic at the earliest stage of the production process."⁸⁰ In this production process, the three were occupied with specific themes and concepts that were to be implemented into their work, such as the notion of dialectics, the subject-object dichotomy, science as an apparatus to power, and the human surge to dominate nature. These were concepts which Kant revolutionised in his first critique.

In the first critique, *Critique of Pure Reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft)*, published in 1781, Kant begins his subversive book with a particular motto. This motto is a quote by the founder of empiricism, Francis Bacon (1561–1626). The quote is from the preface of Bacon's renowned *Magna Instauratio*, published in 1620:

We are silent about ourselves. However, as to the matter in question, we want people to regard it not as an opinion, but as something necessary; and that they are sure that we are not laying the foundations for some school or accidental belief, but for the salvation and dignity of men. May they furthermore, in accordance with their own benefit, [...] meet in consultation for the common good [...] and contribute to it themselves. Let them then keep good hope and not

⁷⁸ Michel van Nieuwstadt, "Nawoord," 277.

⁷⁹ Michel van Nieuwstadt, "Nawoord," 277.

⁸⁰ Michel van Nieuwstadt, "Nawoord," 278.

*imagine that our Renewal is something infinite and superhuman, for it is truly the end and legal conclusion of endless error.*⁸¹

This quote has an imposing tone, appeals to moral superiority, and calls for the complete nullification of human imagination. It is not a coincidence that in the first sentences of *The Concept of Enlightenment*, we can find a fierce critique of Bacon's philosophy: "The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy. Bacon, the 'father of experimental philosophy,' had defined its motives."⁸² Bacon's philosophical writings would mark the start of an epoch during which scientists would utilise nature for their own good. Before, nature would be mythical and inexplicable; the scientists since Bacon converted nature into something they *use*. A page later, they write: "What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men."⁸³ This dominion is notably present in Adorno and Horkheimer's epoch. Adorno and Horkheimer fled Germany as they were Jewish. At the end of the Second World War, news of the atrocities that happened during the war reached the corners of the world. One of which was the most bureaucratic, organised, systematic, ultra-rationalised, bizarre event in human history, namely, the Holocaust. In this research, there will be no in-depth presentation of how the Holocaust could have happened. However, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it is claimed that our reason, which became the overarching theme of the Enlightenment, can rationalise any form of instrumentality, thus also the systematic killing of a group of people. This made Adorno echo that "Enlightenment is totalitarian."⁸⁴ Apart from political instrumentality, the ever-evolving sciences are also guilty of utilising humans and nature. Positivists, the heirs of the mechanistic philosopher of the Enlightenment, were the 19th and 20th-century vanguards of using mathematical calculations to justify scrutiny of nature. Adorno and Horkheimer's critical attitude towards this contemporary current of thought is very prominent. With their critique of Positivism, they, just like Schiller, call on a resurrection of artistic endeavour, which in their day has been neglected. For Adorno and Horkheimer, art "still has something in common with enchantment: it posits its own" and to "which special laws

⁸¹ Immanuel Kant, *Kritiek van de zuivere rede*, trans. Jabik Veenbaas & Willem Visser (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 57.

⁸² Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 3.

⁸³ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 4.

⁸⁴ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 6.

apply”.⁸⁵ The reverse is presented in the following quote, where Adorno and Horkheimer attack their current-day culture, which increasingly tries to integrate art into science:

With the progress of Enlightenment, only authentic works of art were able to avoid the mere imitation of that which already is. The practicable antithesis of art and science, which tears them apart as separate areas of culture in order to make them both manageable as areas of culture, ultimately allows them, by dint of their own tendencies, to blend with one another even as exact contraries. In its neo-positivist version, science becomes aestheticism, a system detached from signs devoid of any intention that would transcend the system it becomes the game which mathematicians have long proudly asserted its concern.⁸⁶

The systemising of the world has led to strong dichotomies whereby nothing is connected as a whole. These dichotomies were also strongly detested by the romantic movement and their *Naturphilosophie*. A page later, Adorno and Horkheimer formulate a rare praise to none other than Schelling and his notions on art and nature, writing:

According to Schelling, art comes into play where knowledge forsakes humankind. For him, it is ‘the prototype of science, and only where there is art may science enter in’. In his theory, the separation of image and sign is ‘wholly cancelled by every single artistic representation’. The bourgeois world was but rarely open to such confidence in art.⁸⁷

This confidence in art is significant in the romantic period. Schiller and Novalis already emphasised the importance of artistic expressions to regain a sense-dominated attitude towards nature instead of a senseless attitude. As Schiller, and later Marx and Freud, emphasised this became obvious in society, where humans are abstracted from their nature and subject to their self-preserving drifts, without any prospect of overcoming them. Adorno and Horkheimer repeat this, writing:

But the more the process of self-preservation is affected by the bourgeois division of labour, the more it requires the self-alienation of the individuals who must model their body and soul according to the technical apparatus. [...] in the end the transcendental subject of cognition is apparently abandoned as the last reminiscence of subjectivity.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 18.

⁸⁶ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 18.

⁸⁷ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 19.

⁸⁸ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 30.

This division of labour has made humankind follow the mechanical laws that the Enlightenment formulated. Everything becomes a web of construction, thereby nullifying art and feeling, which departed the romantics on their formulations of humanity's subjective relation to the world and nature. Adorno and Horkheimer were very well aware of this romantic *ethos*, writing: "As the organ of this kind of adaptation, as a mere construction of means, the Enlightenment is as destructive as its romantic enemies accuse it of being."⁸⁹ This destruction became apparent with the historical conditions which embedded both currents of thought. During the reign of the brutal revolutionaries and of the Nazis, the terror with which they handled society was rationalised as a sacrifice for the greater good, followed by 'blind' citizens. In both epochs, this greater good is different. Adorno and Horkheimer present the notion of sacrifice as a dialectical idea. They write:

Though its irrationality makes the principle of sacrifice transient it persists by virtue of its rationality, which has been transformed, but has not disappeared. The self, rescues itself from dissolution into blind nature, whose claim is constantly proclaimed in sacrifice.⁹⁰

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, ideology pollutes our reason and alienates humankind from nature. For the National Socialists, their German 'home' (*Heimat*) with its heritage was the opposite of a nomadic culture like Jews, who are not at home anywhere. The Nazi propagandist utilised many forms of mythification for the cause for which young men should sacrifice their life. In the late-capitalist society, humans became alienated from nature and themselves, and essentially, humankind became homeless and thus 'sacrificed' their nature for the good of capitalism; for Adorno and Horkheimer, home is nature itself. To emphasise this very notion of homelessness, Adorno and Horkheimer quote Novalis, writing: "Novalis' definition, according to which 'all philosophy is homesickness', holds true only if this longing is not dissolved into phantasm of a lost remote antiquity, but represents the homeland, nature itself, as wrested from myth."⁹¹ For Adorno and Horkheimer, the myth that needs to be wrested is the instrumentality with which the Nazi's justify their atrocities. For Novalis, it is the philosopher who, due to his own arrogant thinking, became too far from his home, that is, nature.

⁸⁹ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 42.

⁹⁰ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 53–4.

⁹¹ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 78.

As for Adorno and Horkheimer, myth is interchangeable with Enlightenment, as their famous quote, which, according to them, summarises the first essay, echoes: “Myth is already Enlightenment and Enlightenment reverts to mythology.”⁹² This quote explains their dialectics; they convey a longing for nature, which traces us back to the apologies of the romantics. In the famous but obscure manifesto, namely, *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism* (*Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*), written in either 1796 or 1797, dating from around the same time the Jena circle defined Romanticism in *Athenaeum*, mythology is an important theme. However, they conceive of mythology as a necessary dialectical concept. Authorship of the *Oldest Systematic Program* is fiercely debated. Although the handwriting is by G. W. F. Hegel, other possible authors include members or close affiliates of the Jena circle, such as F. W. J. Schelling and Hölderlin. In the text, these romantics criticise the significantly increasing demystifying nature of rational thought. Rationality, as in the practice of their current day prestigious philosophers, i.e. the Enlightened philosopher, has made ‘thought’ something which can acquire absolute knowledge. For the romantics, knowledge is, of course, ambivalent and dialectical, something which constantly changes. This coincides with Adorno’s conception of knowledge; however, he understands it by negating dialectical thought. However, mythology should not become something which retracts society’s interest in philosophical thought, i.e. dialectical thought. The dialectics of mythology, as the romantics write in the manifesto, should instigate the ever-fluid romantic attitude as found in their conception of *poiētikós*:

Before we make ideas aesthetic, i.e. mythological, they will have no interest for the people. Conversely, before mythology is rational, the philosopher must be ashamed of it. Hence, finally the enlightened and unenlightened must shake hands: mythology must become philosophical to make people rational, and philosophy must become mythological to make philosophers sensuous.⁹³

Adorno and the romantics reconcile in their argument that the Enlightenment has led to a disorienting shift in humankind’s perception of its place in nature. After the Enlightenment, humanity’s understanding of home became diametrically opposed to what is found in nature. This, they argue, has resulted in a sense of ‘homelessness’, a feeling of being disconnected

⁹² Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xvi.

⁹³ Anon, “The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism,” in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, trans. and ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.

from nature. In other words, the concept of ‘home’ (*Heimat*) and nature must be as they are. They need to be united. They should be freed from the utilitarian lens through which they are often viewed, whether by the Enlightenment philosophers or the Fascists. Nature and the nation should exist without being burdened by an Enlightened or National Socialistic character. Thus, nature or the nation should not become something determined by a will generated by instrumental rationality, a concept driven by what Nietzsche referred to as the will to power.

As Schiller formulated, aesthetic education would be the saviour of this desire for utility and power. For Schiller, things should be as they are, i.e., art as art. Adorno and Horkheimer were aware of this, but they concluded that the romantic project was reversed in bourgeois society due to drastic societal changes and the structures of late capitalism. They write:

The principle of idealistic aesthetics – purposefulness without a purpose – reverses the scheme of things to which bourgeois art conforms socially: purposelessness for the purposes declared by the market.⁹⁴

The romantic project was novel and initiated the first critique of the Enlightenment. After its emergence, many other thinkers, such as Marx and Freud, started criticising the existing conditions of society and science in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Eventually, due to the *Weltgeist*, dialectically informed by world history, as formulated by Hegel, these critical philosophies culminated in the thought of Adorno. Adorno’s (and Horkheimer’s) project is somewhat obscure. Still, without any utility, Adorno merely describes the phenomena as they happen and does not instrumentally use the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a means to exploit power. Adorno and his critical thinking, formed by the dialectical culmination of his influences, cannot formulate an identical critique similar to his predecessors because it is already included in his thinking. Therefore, his novel and ground-breaking analysis in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is formed by a certain ambivalence towards his own reasoning, just as presented in Novalis. Adorno’s dialectics seeks mediation, the perfect equilibrium of sense and reason, in the hope it integrates itself into nature. This equilibrium is at best formulated in the last essay, which marks the entire book, quoting at length:

Between the true object and the undisputed data of the senses, between within and without, there is a gulf which the subject must bridge at his own risk. In order to reflect the thing as it

⁹⁴ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 158.

is, the subject must return to it more than he receives from it. The subject creates the world outside himself from the traces which it leaves in his senses: the unity of the thin in its manifold characteristics and states; and therefore, constitutes the “I” retrospectively by learning to grant a synthetic unity not only to the external impressions but to the internal impressions which gradually separate off from them. The real ego is the most recent constant product of projection. In a process which could only be completed historically with the developed powers of the human physiological constitution, it developed as a unified and, at the same time, eccentric function. Even as an independently objectified ego, it is only equivalent to the significance of the world of object for it. The inner depth of the subject consists in nothing other than delicacy and wealth of the external world of perceptions.⁹⁵

Now, how do we overcome these dichotomies? The internal and external, the within and without. Humankind needs to bridge this gaping pit with which it is confronted. The constitution of the self and its realisation as a worthy human being is at the core of this commitment. The constant dynamics between the realisation of the self and the world will liberate our nature. In the consecutive passage, Adorno and Horkheimer explain its workings through mediation. Adorno’s (and Horkheimer’s) Romanticism is evident after he formulates the mediation between the dichotomies:

If it proceeds positivistically, merely recording given facts without giving any in return, it shrinks to a point; and if idealistically creates the world from its own groundless basis, it plays itself out in dull repetition. In both cases it gives up the spirit. Only in that mediation by which meaningless sensations brings a thought to the full productivity of which it is capable, while on the other hand thought abandons itself without reservation to the predominant impression, is that pathological loneliness which characterises the whole of nature overcome. The possibilities of reconciliation appears not in certainty unaffected by thought, in the preconceptual unity of perception and object but in their considered opposition. The distinction is made in the subject, which has the external world in its own consciousness and yet recognises it as something other. Therefore, the life of reason, takes place as conscious projection.⁹⁶

Adorno and Horkheimer summarise their relationship to reason and nature in this extended quote. Humankind must not merely positivistically conceive the world, as this neglects the human subject. The same holds true for the idealistic approach, as it puts humanity into a

⁹⁵ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 188–89.

⁹⁶ Adorno & Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 188–89.

circularity of their own sense impressions. Only in its mediation, that is, the mediation between the dichotomies, might our sense and reason be reconciled. If humankind actively tries to reconcile its sense and reason, we might overcome the rationalisation of our senses and the, perhaps much more potent, senselessness of our reason.

Conclusion

The presented research has shown that Adorno's critical thinking culminated from a long lineage of German intellectual culture. Through the presented excavation, considering its embeddedness within the historical conditions, Adorno's critical thinking can be understood more coherently. His fragmentary structure and ambivalent argumentation often create a stumbling block. By understanding his intellectual tendencies, we can come closer to reconstructing Adorno's thinking. This research reconstructed his thinking through two essential exponents of the German romantic movement: Schiller and Novalis.

On the other hand, Adorno's critical thinking certainly operates through the rational frameworks of German Idealists, Marx, Freud, Lukács and Heidegger. However, Adorno's romantic nature is often neglected. By understanding German Romanticism, the research presented that Adorno's critical thinking is aligned with the romantic *ethos* without eliminating his rational qualities. Therefore, his own thinking is indeed constituted by dialectical ideas.

Novalis' climactic poem *Hymns to the Night* was the pinnacle of the late eighteenth-century movement, i.e., the Jena Circle. This movement built upon Schiller's slightly earlier philosophy, formulated in his epistolary collection, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. The romantic qualities presented by Novalis's poetic fragment are assigned to Adorno as they are distinguishably found in the form and content of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. First, the fragment from *Hymns to the Night* conveyed a strong ambivalent attitude through its paradoxical notions. The notions can be found in the dialectical attitude Adorno holds regarding his paradoxical thinking. Second, like F. Schlegel and Novalis, Adorno operates through *Symphilosophical* methods. This is illustrated in what Adorno calls *lämmergeiern*. Third, within the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno fiercely criticises Enlightenment thinking, which is also part of the theoretical foundations of German romanticism. And, at last, like the *Naturphilosophen*, Adorno shows the reflection of our thinking, where he proposes an integration of our thinking into nature, and vice versa, nature into our thinking.

As mentioned, this way of thinking was first proposed by Schiller's aesthetic *Bildung*. Schiller's thinking was embedded in a critique of barbaric acts motivated by the French Revolution, just as Adorno's thinking was embedded in a critique of Fascism. Schiller is one of the first to recognise the increasing dominance of instrumental reason. Schiller called this the 'terror of reason'. Through his analysis of drives, division of labour, totality, and antagonisms, he conceived a society where utility is the 'idol of his age'; in Adorno's time, the

uncontrolled drives and division of labour rationalised by a totality would lead to a systematic genocide. The presented research will help us better understand Adorno's critical thinking. Suppose humanity does not want to succumb to monstrosities led by senseless thinking. In that case, we must, like Schiller, Novalis, and Adorno, integrate a more ambivalent and humble attitude toward the nature of reason.

Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

Adorno, Theodor W. & Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. London: Verso Books, 2016.

Anon. "The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism." In *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, translated and edited by Frederick C. Beiser, 1–6. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Berlin, Isaiah. "Romanticism – In Search of a Definition." Filmed in 1965 at Mellon Auditorium, Washington D.C. Video, 35:15.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIffazJlrLo&list=PLhP9EhPApKE_9uxkmfSI2JJK6oKbXmd-&index=1.

Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. "Science of Knowledge: First Introduction." In *German Idealist Philosophy*, edited by Rüdiger Bubner. 80 – 105. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.

Freud, Sigmund. *Aan gene zijde van het lustprincipe*. Translated by Thomas Graftdijk. Amsterdam: Boom, 2022.

Goldmann, Lucien. *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*. Translated by William Q. Boelhower. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Hoofdlijnen van de Rechtsfilosofie*. Translated by Willem Visser. Amsterdam: Boom, 2014.

Hölderlin, Friedrich. "On the Operations of the Poetic Spirit." In *Essays and Letters on Theory*, translated and edited by Thomas Pfau, 62–82. State University of New York Press, 1987.

Kant, Immanuel. *Kritiek van de zuivere rede*. Translated by Jabik Veenbaas & Willem Visser. Amsterdam: Boom, 2010.

Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Translated by Martin Milligan. Wilder Publications, 2011.

Novalis. *Hymns To the Night and Spiritual Songs*. Translated by George Macdonald. Crescent Moon Publishing, 2013.

Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph. *Over het wezen van de menselijke vrijheid*. Translated by Frans Ruiter & Paul Ziche. Amsterdam: Boom uitgevers, 2022.

Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Translated by Keith Tribe. New York: Penguin Books, 2016

Schlegel, Friedrich. *Athenaeum. Fragmenten, essays, kritieken*. Translated by Jan Sietsma. Amsterdam: Octavo publicaties, 2014.

Schönberg, Arnold. *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*. London: Faber and Faber, 1970.

2. Secondary Sources

Beiser, Frederick C. *The Romantic Imperative*. Harvard University Press, 2006.

Cahen-Maurel, Laure. “Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love and Medicine.” *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 1, (2019): 129–165.

Hamburger, Michael. “Introduction.” In *Friedrich Hölderlin: Selected Poems and Fragments*, edited by Jeremy Adler, xvii–xliii. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.

Rose, Gillian. *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno*. London: Verso Books, 2014.

Ruiter, Frans. & Paul Ziche. “Inleiding.” In *F. W. J. Schelling: Over het wezen van de menselijke vrijheid*, edited by Frans Ruiter & Paul Ziche, 7–36. Amsterdam: Boom uitgevers, 2022.

Safranski, Rüdiger. *Romantiek: Een Duitse Affaire*. Translated by Mark Wildschut. Uitgeverij Atlas Contact, 2016.

Schmidt, Alexander. “Introduction.” In *Friedrich Schiller: On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, edited by Keith Tribe, vii–xxxiv. New York: Penguin Books, 2016.

Van Nieuwstadt, Michel. “Nawoord.” In *Theodor W. Adorno & Max Horkheimer: Dialectiek van de Verlichting*, edited by Michel van Nieuwstadt, 275–287. Amsterdam: Boom, 2021.

Wulf, Andrea. *Rebelse Genieën: De eerste romantici en de uitvinding van het ik*. Translated by Fennie Steenhuis and Nannie de Nijs Bik-Plasman. Uitgeverij Atlas Contact, 2023.