
Traumatic Metamorphoses:
The Concept of the Animal in
Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*

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One of the fundamental paradoxes underlying Horkheimer and Adorno's philosophical project in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* is their attempt to undertake a critique of Enlightenment thought while still using the very concepts and argumentative strategies they intend to criticize. In their analysis, the authors demonstrate both the dangers and the inherent aporia of Enlightenment rationality, that is, its gradual self-destruction through the instrumentalisation of rational concepts for the purposes of domination over nature and, ultimately, over the human subject (DdA 13).¹ Although Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the failings of rationality is still aimed at its (partial) recuperation from the barbaric practice of Fascism – the historical phenomenon which underlies and motivates their project – this undertaking remains aporetic because the authors' critique is persistently indebted to the basic concepts of Enlightenment thought. This problematic configuration has been described by Jürgen Habermas (1985) as the 'performative contradiction' of Critical Theory:

Diese beschreibt [...] die Selbsterstörung des kritischen Vermögens auf paradoxe Weise, weil sie im Augenblick der Beschreibung noch von der totgesagten Kritik Gebrauch machen muß. Das Totalitärwerden der Aufklärung denunziert sie mit deren eigenen Mitteln. (144)

In this article I shall use Habermas' critique as a point of departure for my reading of one, seemingly marginal, part of Horkheimer and Adorno's argument in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*: the concept of the animal as developed in the essay 'Mensch und

Tier.' I intend to illustrate that, despite their incisive critique of instrumentalising reason, which in the case of the animal manifests itself in the scientific practice of vivisection, the authors' own stance is ultimately informed by the same reductive notion of the animal as the 'Other' of human subjectivity which they set out to criticize. Despite this argumentative impasse by which the authors reiterate the objectifying tendencies of rational discourse, their engagement with the concept of the animal also leads them to consider other, non-philosophical discourses, such as the fairy tale, as sources and discursive models in their argument. While the authors' stance towards the animal thus supports Habermas' notion of the discursive aporia of Critical Theory, their argument also raises questions about the very nature of philosophical discourse and opens up new perspectives on alternative discursive models, such as the use of expressive rather than conceptual language. As I shall argue, the authors' engagement with the role of the animal in Enlightenment rationality also entails a rethinking of the status and function of philosophical discourse. The use of argumentative models taken from aesthetic and literary discourses thus entails a reconception of philosophical critique as it enables rationality to adopt a different, non-dominatory stance towards its Other – a conception which is further developed in Adorno's *Negative Dialektik*.

The animal as Other: 'Mensch und Tier'

Horkheimer and Adorno's own awareness of the potentially problematic implications of their use of philosophical discourse is indicated in the introduction to the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* in which the authors comment on the dangerous similarity, and therefore complicity, between their critique and the instrumentalising tendencies of Enlightenment rationality:

Bei der Selbstbestimmung über seine eigene Schuld sieht sich Denken daher nicht bloß des zustimmenden Gebrauchs der wissenschaftlichen und alltäglichen, sondern ebenso der alltäglichen Begriffssprache beraubt. Kein Ausdruck bietet sich mehr an, der nicht zum Einverständnis mit

herrschenden Denkrichtungen hinstrebt, und was die abgegriffene Sprache nicht selbständig leistet, das wird von den gesellschaftlichen Maschinerien präzise nachgeholt. (DdA 12)

Despite this claim, which indicates their awareness of the problem, the authors' argument in 'Mensch und Tier' serves as a showcase example for the problematic implication of their use of, and 'rootedness' in, the 'angegriffene Sprache' of Western rationality. As Horkheimer and Adorno point out at the beginning of their essay, the exclusion of the animal as the non-rational from the realm of reason and consciousness is a founding principle of Western philosophy: "Die Idee des Menschen in der europäischen Geschichte drückt sich in seiner Unterscheidung vom Tier aus. Mit seiner Unvernunft beweisen sie die Menschenwürde" (DdA 283). However, if rational discourse is defined through its distinction from its Other, then it is also obliged in a second step to incorporate the non-rational into its discursive field, in order to control the threat this Other may pose to the absolute validity of reason. Figured as the embodiment of the Other of rationality, the animal is therefore incorporated and even constituted within an all-inclusive Enlightenment discourse precisely by its exclusion, by its construction as divergent from the system.

According to the authors, Man's reductive and instrumentalising attitude towards the animal is not limited to the use of the *concept* 'animal' in theoretical arguments attempting to define Man's own identity; it is also manifested in Man's practical engagement with individual, literal animals, in, for instance, the cruel exploitation which takes place in the experiments of medicine and behavioural psychology:

Daß [die Behaviouristen] auf die Menschen dieselben Formeln und Resultate anwenden, die sie, entfesselt, in ihren scheußlichen physiologischen Laboratorien wehrlosen Tieren abzwängen, bekundet den Unterschied [zwischen Mensch und Tier] auf besonders abgefeimte Art. Der Schluß, den sie aus den verstümmelten Tierleibern ziehen,

paßt nicht auf das Tier in Freiheit, sondern auf den Menschen heute. Er bekundet, indem er sich am Tier vergeht, daß er, und nur er in der ganzen Schöpfung, freiwillig so mechanisch, blind und automatisch funktioniert, wie die Zuckungen der gefesselten Opfer, die der Fachmann sich zunutze macht. [...] Dem Menschen gehört die Vernunft, die unbarmherzig abläuft; das Tier, aus dem er den blutigen Schluß zieht, hat nur das unvernünftige Entsetzen, den Trieb zur Flucht, die ihm abgeschnitten ist. (DdA 283)

The applicability of results gained from these experiments to the human subject does not undermine the notion of the animal as Man's Other; rather, this scientific practice is symptomatic of a more general tendency of instrumental reason whose domination over nature is established by means of the objectification and exploitation of nature. In this respect, the use of animals in the research into the human condition does not undermine the dichotomy between Man and the animal in its natural state; instead, the applicability of results gained from the conditioning and experimental exploitation of the animal in vivisection is symptomatic not of the belief in an inherent similarity between Man and animal but rather of the existence of the human subject who can recognize him- or herself in nature only after it has been objectified and changed beyond recognition.

In contrast to this experimental exploitation of the animal's body in vivisection, the authors propose an alternative perspective on the animal, based on some more 'intangible' aspect of its existence, that is,

das Dasein ohne Licht der Vernunft, die Existenz der Tiere selbst. Sie wäre das echte Thema der Psychologie, denn nur das Leben der Tiere verläuft nach seelischen Regungen; wo Psychologie die Menschen erklären muß, sind sie regrediert und zerstört. (DdA 283f)

The authors' critique of the exploitative stance towards the animal

in the field of science does not prevent them from pursuing an argument that reaffirms the same objectifying tendencies of the rationalist dichotomy between nature and culture. Already their conception of an alternative, psychological approach towards the animal's existence is founded on an almost stereotypical Enlightenment ideal, the 'light of reason' from which the animal is excluded as its inferior and deprived Other. From the start, the authors' programme of a non-instrumentalising stance towards the animal is thus informed by an inherent contradiction between their explicit critique of rational, scientific practice and their use of vocabulary that indicates their indebtedness to the very conceptions and oppositions that they attempt to undermine. In this respect, the authors' notion that the applicability of psychology to Man is symptomatic of his (or her) regression and destruction is itself indicative of a rather uneasy stance towards the non-rational in the human subject. The authors' notion of the animal as the true object of psychology is thus in line with the aforementioned tendency in Enlightenment discourse to use the animal as a plane of projection for such characteristics as the non-rational (such as, in Freudian thought, the unconscious) which conflict with the conception of the rational, civilized and self-centred human subject.

This tendency becomes even more apparent when the authors develop their notion of the animal's existence in more detail. To start with, Horkheimer and Adorno stress the animal's inability to perceive time as a threefold scheme of past, present and future; they characterize it as essentially lacking in speech or any capacity to conceptualise its own existence. The animal is hence condemned to a state of oblivion:

Das Tier hört auf den Namen und hat kein Selbst, es ist in sich eingeschlossen und doch preisgegeben, immer kommt ein neuer Zwang, keine neue Idee reicht über ihn hinaus. Für den Entzug des Trostes tauscht das Tier nicht Milderung der Angst ein, für das fehlende Bewußtsein von Glück nicht die Abwesenheit von Trauer und Schmerz. (DdA 284)

In its general thrust, Horkheimer and Adorno's account

of what they refer to as “[d]ie Welt des Tieres” (DdA 284) does not fundamentally differ from their description of the animal’s predicament in scientific experiments. The animal’s inner, ‘natural’ existence independent of any human interference is informed by the same notions of fear, pain, and passive, oblivious suffering which characterize its reaction to the abusive practices of vivisection. Horkheimer and Adorno’s account of the animal’s ‘natural,’ existential predicament thus relativises their own critique of instrumental reason and its instrumentalising stance towards nature. Consequently, the conclusions which the authors draw from the animal’s existential predicament show that they do not succeed in promoting an alternative, non-reductive understanding of the animal; instead, these conclusions serve to legitimise the authors’ own philosophical project:

Damit Glück substantiell werde, dem Dasein den Tod verleihe, bedarf es identifizierender Erinnerung, beschwichtigender Erkenntnis, der religiösen und philosophischen Idee, kurz des Begriffs. Es gibt glückliche Tiere, aber welch kurzen Atem hat dieses Glück! Die Dauer des Tiers, vom befreienden Gedanken nicht unterbrochen, ist trübe und depressiv. Um dem bohrend leeren Dasein zu entkommen, ist ein Widerstand nötig, dessen Rückgrat die Sprache ist. (DdA 284)

Language, figured as the precondition for memory and substantial, permanent happiness, is here identified with concepts and the discourse of philosophy. This turn of the argument illustrates Habermas’ thesis of the performative contradiction of Critical Theory, which, in the authors’ own words, manifests itself in the “Metamorphosen von Kritik in Affirmation” (DdA 12). The authors’ inability to relativise the value of their own, rational position counters their attempt to enter into an alternative, non-dominatory relationship with the animal which is not informed by the notion of the animal as inferior and deprived Other. As a consequence, the animal’s fate in modern scientific practice figures as an empty rhetorical device by which the authors establish their critique of

a system whose values and presuppositions they do not call into question. Despite this argumentative impasse, however, the passage cited above opens up one possible avenue of enquiry – the relation between language and memory, which, as I shall argue, furnishes a new perspective on the nature of philosophical discourse and its relation to its non-rational Other. Although the authors here associate memory with conceptual language, this relationship between discourse and remembrance can also be figured in alternative, non-conceptual terms. As I shall argue, Horkheimer and Adorno’s reading of the *Odyssey* develops such a model as a narrative which enables an alternative, non-identificatory form of remembrance and recognition and which can in turn be applied to the concept of the animal in Western rationality.

The animal as self: traumatic metamorphoses

The concept of an inherent relation between language and memory is developed in the first part of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in the chapter ‘Begriff der Aufklärung,’ in which the authors explore the historical development of language. In its early stages, language is not yet a means of conceptual abstraction from reality, but forms part of a pre-rational, ‘magical’ conception of the world in which language is believed to maintain a mimetic relation to the reality it describes, thus establishing a bridge between nature and the speaking subject:

Auf der magischen Stufe galten Traum und Bild nicht als bloßes Zeichen der Sache, sondern als mit dieser durch Ähnlichkeit oder durch den Namen verbunden. Die Beziehung ist nicht die der Intention sondern der Verwandtschaft. Die Zauberei ist wie die Wissenschaft auf Zwecke aus, aber sie verfolgt sie durch Mimesis, nicht in fortschreitender Distanz zum Objekt. (DdA 27)

Although the speaking subject’s mimetic identification with nature through language avoids the objectifying stance which characterizes the later abstraction from reality through concepts, this early

conception of language entails rather problematic implications for the position of the subject in this configuration. Whereas conceptual language entails the distance and alienation of Man from nature, the early, mimetic conception of language threatens the subject's supposedly self-contained status, which is constantly under threat in the early stages of the formation of the self (DdA 50).

In this respect, language contributes to what Horkheimer and Adorno, from the Enlightenment perspective, perceive as the threat inherent in the notion of the primeval subject's mimetic identification with the surrounding nature. Rather than providing a clear-cut division between speaking subject and outside reality, language in this early stage is still informed by the experience of Man's precarious and constantly threatened individuation and his incomplete dissociation from the nature around him. In this respect, the magical conception of language is symptomatic of the incomplete separation of Man from nature. The mimetic conception of language mirrors Man's lack of actual and rational distance from nature while it at the same time figures as a mode of expression for the subject's experience of this threatening nature which has yet to be identified, described and ordered in language. Language in this early stage thus refers both to the unknown, mysterious and threatening elements in nature and to the pre-rational subject's irrational response to this unknown and unexplored part of reality:

Der Ruf des Schreckens, mit dem das Ungewohnte erfahren wird, wird zu seinem Namen. Er fixiert die Transzendenz des Unbekannten gegenüber dem Bekannten und damit den Schauer als Heiligkeit. Die Verdoppelung der Natur in Schein und Wesen, Wirkung und Kraft, die Mythos sowohl wie die Wissenschaft erst möglich macht, stammt aus der Angst des Menschen, deren Ausdruck zur Erklärung wird. [...] Das war die Urform objektivierender Bestimmung, in der Begriff und Sache auseinandertraten [...]. Aber diese Dialektik bleibt ohnmächtig, solange sie aus dem Ruf des Schreckens sich entfaltet, der die Verdoppelung, die Tautologie des Schreckens selbst ist. [...]

Aufklärung ist die radikal gewordene, mythische Angst. (DdA 31f)

The instinctual expression of fear, rather than the distancing, detached description, is thus at the heart of conceptual language and as such underpins even the entire Enlightenment movement. Although the source of Man's fear, the feeling of an incomplete separation and insufficient distance from the surrounding nature is later overcome through the abstraction from reality in language; this first, instinctual expression of fear is still preserved in the resulting concepts. In order to use language as a tool of objective description, Enlightenment rationality must therefore be oblivious to the foundation of language in the expression of fear, that is, the subject's lack of control and distance towards the surrounding, unknown reality. In this respect, the transition from a mimetic to a conceptual notion of language also entails that the language loses its capacity to serve as a mode of expression for the speaking subject. The exertion of control and domination over outside reality through conceptual language thus results in the subject's increased alienation from the surrounding reality.

The impact of these instrumentalising tendencies of Enlightenment rationality on the subject is exemplified in Horkheimer and Adorno's account of another, somewhat different conception of the animal which complements the instrumentalising stance of behavioural psychology and vivisection. Alongside the scientific conceptions of the animal, the authors also draw on literary sources such as mythology and folktales to introduce the conception of the animal as Man's bewitched, estranged Self. This notion is central to one particular motif: the metamorphosis from Man into animal, which, as the authors claim, is commonly regarded as a punishment.² This problematic configuration is exemplified by Horkheimer and Adorno's ambiguous relationship towards the animal. While their account is on the one hand informed by their inability to overcome the objectifying stance inherent in rational discourse, their stance towards the animal is also characterized by a sense of uneasy recognition and identification:

In den Tierleib gebannt zu sein, gilt als Verdammnis.

[...] Die stumme Wildheit im Blick des Tiers zeugt von demselben Grauen, das die Menschen in solcher Verwandlung fürchteten. Jedes Tier erinnert an ein abgründiges Unglück, das in der Urzeit sich ereignet hat. (DdA 285)

This passage illustrates how the conceptions of the animal in the discourses of science, philosophy and literature are ultimately related to the underlying question of Man's own identity in relation or contradistinction to that of the animal. In this respect, the 'metamorphosis' motif, originally derived from mythology, preserves the memory of Man's origin – the formation of his subjectivity in a process of separation from a state of undifferentiated 'oneness' with nature and undermines the clear-cut distinction between Man and animal which is maintained through the emphasis on the animal's Otherness. Indeed, the motif of metamorphosis undermines the opposition of subject and object, self and other, culture and nature when it casts the animal as Man's bewitched double. This turn of the argument emphasizes a notion which was latently present throughout Horkheimer and Adorno's account: the sense that the notion of the animal reflects as much on the Enlightenment concept of nature as the Other of reason as it does on the implications of these objectifying tendency on Man's own identity.

The animal's gaze as encountered by the human subject, "die stumme Wildheit im Blick des Tieres" (DdA 285) therefore figures as a reminder of the threat to human individuation symbolized by the animal's 'Otherness.' The dread (*Grauen*), which the protagonist in the fairy tale discerns in the animal's eyes, corresponds to Horkheimer and Adorno's account of the animal's predicament. Rather than referring to actual suffering on the part of the animal, the 'Grauen' perceived in the animal's gaze is a projection by the human subject who is reminded by the animal's gaze of his own origin in a state of undifferentiated oneness with nature. This fear, however, is as much the effect of the common origin of Man and animal as a reflection of the alienating effect of instrumental reason over nature both external and internal to Man.

The threat which the idea of being transformed into an animal harbours for the human subject is only in part symptomatic of the

Enlightenment's reductive notion of the animal's Otherness and its inferior, unhappy existence. The terror which Man discerns in the animal's eyes mirrors his own position in a world in which the impact of instrumentalising reason entails Man's alienation not only from nature but also from himself. Horkheimer and Adorno's misconception with regard to the motif of Man's transformation into an animal derives from their misconception of the dread in the bewitched subject's gaze which reflects not on the existence of the animal but on that of the human subject in the age of instrumental reason. In a comment which can be seen as a paraphrase of the 'spell' exercised over the bewitched subject, Jessica Benjamin summarizes this complex interplay of projection and alienation in Horkheimer and Adorno's argument, claiming that "the subject fears becoming like the object he controls, which no longer has the capacity to recognize him" (Benjamin 185).

In order to escape this aporetic configuration of fear, domination and (self-) alienation, a critique of instrumentalising reason such as the one undertaken in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* would thus have to be formulated in a discourse that recuperates the mimetic, expressive side of language rather than repressing this dimension. While in its conceptual dimension, language has, over the course of history, become a tool for Man's rational understanding of and, ultimately, domination over nature, its original, mimetic conception and expressive dimension is also preserved in the literary, or 'aesthetic' discourse in which the mimetic association with nature is not repressed but forms part of the communicative act (Honneth 79):

Gerade der Verzicht auf Einwirkung, durch welche Kunst von der magischen Sympathie sich scheidet, hält das magische Erbe um so tiefer fest. Es rückt das reine Bild in Gegensatz zur leibhaftigen Existenz, deren Elemente es in sich aufhebt. Es liegt im Sinn des Kunstwerks, dem ästhetischen Schein, das zu sein, wozu in jenem Zauber des Primitiven das neue, schreckliche Geheimnis wurde: Erscheinung des Ganzen im Besonderen. [...] Als Ausdruck der Totalität beansprucht Kunst

die Würde des Absoluten. Die Philosophie ist dadurch zuweilen bewogen, ihr den Vorrang vor der begrifflichen Erkenntnis zu geben. (DdA 35)

Through its similarity to the mimetic, magical conception of language, the aesthetic discourse is figured by Adorno in his *Negative Dialektik* as an alternative to the conceptual language used in philosophy. This argument is criticized by Habermas who sees in it a step towards philosophical self-delegitimation, “die Abtretung der Erkenntnis-Kompetenz an die Kunst” (Habermas, *Theorie* 514). Habermas’ critique is itself based on a rather monolithic conception of two entities called Art and Philosophy which, in their style and function, are mutually exclusive.³ While Habermas’ argument could itself be read as yet another attempt at philosophical self-legitimation, he fails to recognize that the expressive or figurative dimension of language is itself vital for the production of meaning in any context and thus cannot be separated from its conceptual or argumentative function in philosophical discourse. This is exemplified in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, where the opposition between aesthetic, that is, literary, and philosophical discourse is already undermined by the intertextual structure of the argument, in particular by the authors’ account of Homer’s *Odyssey* as a philosophical allegory for the formation of the modern subject.

The *Odyssey*: remembrance and expression

In their reading of the *Odyssey*, Horkheimer and Adorno explore the ways in which the instrumentalising effect of conceptual language is inextricably linked with its expressive and mimetic side. In their discussion of Book 22, the authors analyse the way in which the cruelty of an execution is conveyed in a detached, precise but cold narrative:

Die kalte Distanz der Erzählung, die noch das Grauenhafte vorträgt, als wäre es zur Unterhaltung bestimmt, läßt zugleich das Grauen erst hervortreten, das im Liede zum Schicksal feierlich sich verwirrt. [...] Die Genauigkeit des Beschreibers,

die schon die Kälte von Anatomie und Vivisektion ausstrahlt, führt romanmäßig Protokoll über die Zuckungen der Unterworfenen... (DdA 98)

This characterisation is reminiscent of the authors’ account of medical experiments in ‘Mensch und Tier,’ where the “Zuckungen der gefesselten Opfer...am Seziertisch” exemplify the merciless execution of instrumental reason (DdA 284). Encoded in this double association of vivisection with both narrative style and scientific practice – the animal’s exposure to the instrumentalising reason of the medical experiment and Homer’s detached protocol of suffering – is the reference to the concrete historical manifestation of instrumental reason in Nazism, the pretext and focal point of the authors’ critique of rationality.

Against this background, the authors’ notion of the animal’s speechless ‘Grauen’ refers not only to the abusive practice of instrumental reason but also more specifically to the historical context of Nazism. In particular, the concept of vivisection as an example of the barbaric scientific practice associates the medical experiments carried out in the context of the Holocaust, which are also justified by their function as research applicable to Mankind in general, although this contrasts with the notion of the Jewish subject’s Otherness and ‘deviant’ nature.

A similar configuration can be discerned in the discursive, ideological manifestation of anti-Semitism. As Horkheimer and Adorno argue in ‘Mensch und Tier,’ one of the recurring motifs of anti-Semitic discourse is the stereotypical association of the Jew with the animal in caricature and Nazi propaganda: “Das prononcierte Menschengesicht, das beschämend an die eigne Herkunft aus Natur und die Verfallenheit an sie erinnert, fordert unwiderstehlich nur noch zum Totschlag auf” (DdA 290). The anti-Semitic identification of the Jewish subject with the animal can therefore be said to be motivated by the same exclusionary gesture that is performed by Western philosophy against the animal as the Other of reason. In *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Sigmund Freud summarizes this interplay of identification and difference under the term “Narzißmus der kleinen Differenzen” (474) – a phenomenon which, in a radicalised form, also underpins anti-Semitism and other cases where identity is

founded on exclusion and discrimination.

Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of the animal therefore exemplifies the inherent connection between, on the one hand, the objectifying tendencies of modern science and, on the other, the Holocaust in its rationalized efficiency. At the same time, however, the propagandistic association of the Jewish subject with the animal is founded on a mixture of identification and alienation derived from the recognition of an inherent link between Man and animal in general. In this respect, the anti-Semitic discourse displays characteristics that are not completely different from Horkheimer and Adorno's own notion of the animal. Their account of the 'Grauen' in the animal's gaze and the projective notion of its existential, speechless predicament displays the same uneasy mixture of identification and rejection which informs the conception of the animal in Western discourse and which forms the basis of its exclusion, domination and extinction. The concept of the animal in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* therefore illustrates the inherent link between Enlightenment discourse, scientific practice, and absolutist dictatorship; while at the same time providing a prime example of the aporia of the authors' own philosophical project.

In their analysis of the Homeric myth, Horkheimer and Adorno not only explore the detached, rational mode of description employed in the *Odyssey*, but they also discern a moment in the narrative which counters the instrumentalising tendencies of rational discourse. Despite its descriptive character, Homer's narrative also contains an expressive, poetic dimension that refers to the mimetic origin of language. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the rational discourse of the Homeric narrative is achieved through the abandonment of the musical medium of song through which myths had been conveyed in the oral tradition. The rational distance from the described incidents which is established in the narrative marks the precondition for a permanent memory of the recounted disaster and, as a consequence, provides the possibility of an escape from it: "Rede selber, die Sprache in ihrem Gegensatz zum mythischen Gesang, die Möglichkeit, das geschehene Unheil erinnernd festzuhalten, ist das Gesetz des homerischen Entrinnens" (DdA 98). These notions of escape and memory, which counteract the objectifying tendencies of rational discourse, are founded on a

rhetorical element, that of caesura, which disrupts the continuity of the narrator's description:

Das Innehalten der Rede aber ist die Zäsur, die Verwandlung des Berichteten in längst Vergangenes, kraft deren der Schein von Freiheit aufblitzt, den Zivilisation seitdem nicht mehr ganz ausgelöscht hat. (DdA 98)

The break in the narrative, which disrupts its coherence and undermines its realism, marks the moment at which the horror of the recounted execution is suspended. The narrative discourse not only records the content of a culture's history as it is preserved in collective memory but also provides a strategy for coping with the threats of both nature and instrumentalised reason. Homer's narrative therefore provides a means of recording which can preserve the memory of Man's pre-rational origin, as well as a means of expression for the subject's traumatic encounters with both nature and instrumentalised reason. In this respect, the caesura is vital for this mnemonic function of Homer's text, as it does not mark a moment of oblivion, as the authors argue with regard to the animal's speechless existence, but rather opens up a realm of memory and non-verbal identification:

Als Bürger, der der Hinrichtung nachsinnt, tröstet Homer sich und seine Zuhörer, die eigentlich Leser sind, mit der gesicherten Feststellung, daß es nicht lange währte, ein Augenblick und alles ist vorüber. Aber nach dem 'Nicht lange' steht der innere Fluß der Erzählung still. Nicht lange? fragt die Geste des Erzählers und straft seine Gelassenheit Lügen. Indem sie den Bericht aufhält, verwehrt sie es, die Gerichteten zu vergessen, und deckt die unnennbare ewige Qual der einen Sekunde auf, in der die Mägde mit dem Tod kämpfen. (DdA 99)

It is not through the coherence and analytic logic of language, but rather through its inherent, genealogical link to traumatic

experience, that the memory of the victims is both expressed and preserved. The caesura, which interrupts the clinical precision with which the execution is described, suspends the reader's rational distance from the narrative and provides a moment of identification between reader and characters. This identification, however, takes place outside conceptual language; when it refers to death as the indescribable, the impossible speech-act,⁴ language suspends its representational function and becomes a mere gesture towards the unrepresentable. The interplay of silence and narrative in the *Odyssey* mediates the two elements of language, the distancing, rational account of an incident and its gestural expression:

Hoffnung aber knüpft sich im Bericht von der Untat daran, daß es schon lange her ist. Für die Verstrickung von Urzeit, Barbarei und Kultur hat Homer die tröstende Hand im Eingedenken von Es war einmal. Erst als Roman geht das Epos ins Märchen über. (DdA 99)

The development from the epic to the novel, which is concomitant with the general development of Enlightenment reason, is mediated by the fairy tale as the discursive model that combines both description and expression. The fairy tale therefore reintegrates its mimetic origin into language while at the same time providing the means for a representation of the world that can preserve the memory of Man's past. Significantly, the discourse of the fairy tale recurs in 'Mensch und Tier' in the aforementioned example of Man's metamorphosis into an animal. As I shall argue, the fairy tale not only reinforces the notion of the animal's Otherness but it also provides a moment of non-discursive remembrance and identification similar to that in the *Odyssey* which undermines the reified oppositions between the rational subject and the animal as its non-rational Other.

Negative Dialektik and the utopia of the 'versöhnte Zustand'

Horkheimer and Adorno argue that like the *Odyssey*, the fairy tale provides, as a narrative medium which preserves the memory of the

past, a memory which, like that in the case of the execution, refers to a traumatic incident: "Jedes Tier erinnert an ein abgründiges Unglück, das in der Urzeit sich ereignet hat. Das Märchen spricht die Ahnung der Menschen aus" (DdA 285). At this point, it becomes clear that Horkheimer and Adorno's notion of the animal's existential predicament is informed not only by a reductive stance towards the animal as the Other of reason but also by a more deeply rooted fear about the status and existence of the human subject. In this respect, the authors' project to enforce the dividing line between Man and animal is informed by a twofold aporia: while the historical context and political practice of Fascism undermined any clear-cut distinction between rationality and irrationality, Man and animal, culture and barbarism, the attempts made by Horkheimer and Adorno's own attempt to renegotiate this distinction only reinforces the aporetic implications of Enlightenment rationality.

At the same time, however, the non-verbal interaction between Man and animal as it is described in the fairy tale provides a moment of recollection similar to that of the caesura in the *Odyssey*. In the fairy tale, the common origin of Man and animal is preserved but simultaneously transformed into a comforting narrative, "die tröstende Hand im Eingedenken von Es war einmal" (DdA 99). The fairy tale thus marks a form of remembrance of this common origin that has remained unaffected by the instrumentalising conception of the animal as the Other of reason. The fairy tale of Man's metamorphosis into an animal provides a narrative in which Man's pre-cultural oneness with nature is cast into a mythic, pre-historical realm, a phylogenetic myth that subsequently becomes an ontogenetic one when the adult remembers the tales told to him as a child. The fairy tale thus provides an alternative to the conceptual, rational accounts of the relation between Man and animal and opens up new perspectives for a conceptualisation of the animal which exceeds the binarisms of nature and culture, reason and its non-rational Other.

The discursive potential of the fairy tale to enable an alternative, non-dominatory stance towards the animal and to preserve a memory of Man's own origin is illustrated by Horkheimer and Adorno's own stance towards the fairy-tale motif of metamorphosis. Not only do they read the fairy tale as a

document of cultural history (as they do in the case of the *Odyssey*), but their stance towards the fairy tale changes from one of passive reception to one of creative appropriation. In this respect, the authors' development of the motif of metamorphosis subverts the difference between the discourses of philosophy and literature when they rewrite the fairy tale and transform the traumatic memory of the past into a utopian vision of the future:

Wenn aber dem Prinzen dort die Vernunft geblieben war, so daß er zur gegebenen Zeit sein Leiden sagen und die Fee ihn erlösen konnte, so bannt Mangel an Vernunft das Tier auf ewig in seine Gestalt, es sei denn, daß der Mensch, der durch Vergangenes mit ihm eins ist, den erlösenden Spruch findet und durch ihn das steinerne Herz der Unendlichkeit am Ende der Zeiten erweicht. (DdA 285)

The narrative of the fairy tale as it is adopted and rewritten by the authors is still informed by the notion of the animal's speechlessness and lack of reason, which, as I have argued, signifies the authors' lack of critical distance towards the limitations of their own philosophical discourse. At the same time, however, the animal's Otherness, "die stumme Wildheit im Blick des Tiers," preserves the memory of the common origin of Man and animal and, in turn, opens up the possibility of the redeeming formula in which language regains part of its magical potential. The prince's 'erlösender Spruch' therefore indicates a utopian concept of a non-dominating relationship between Man and animal that is related to Habermas' concept of communicative action, understood as "gewaltlose Intersubjektivität" (Habermas, *Theorie* 523).

The relationship between Man and animal, in which the magical, expressive component of language is recuperated, thus indicates a state of tolerance towards the non-identical rather than the gesture of its exclusion and simultaneous domination. In his late text *Negative Dialektik*, Adorno returns to this notion of the a philosophical discourse of difference rather than of conceptual identification and develops it further:

Der versöhnte Zustand annektierte nicht mit philosophischem Imperialismus das Fremde, sondern hätte sein Glück daran, daß es in der gewährten Nähe das Ferne und Verschiedene bleibt, jenseits des Heterogenen wie des Eigenen. (Adorno 192)

The authors' reappropriation of the fairy tale narrative for their own argument in 'Mensch und Tier' figures as a model for such a discursive practice which undermines the clear-cut distinction between conceptual and expressive language, and therefore between philosophical and literary discourses. By actively transforming the fairy-tale narrative, the authors exemplify the interdependence of the conceptual side of an argument and its rhetorical figuration. Therefore, Horkheimer and Adorno's rewriting of the fairy tale not only suspends the absolute opposition between Man and nature but also achieves a momentary independence of their argument from the discourse of Enlightenment rationality. At this point, the authors' argument escapes the performative contradiction discerned by Habermas and counters the aporetic metamorphosis of critique into affirmation.

The adoption of narrative strategies therefore enables the philosophical discourse to regain an expressive function that, as Adorno claims in *Negative Dialektik*, becomes the central function of philosophy in the age of instrumentalised reason:

Das Bedürfnis, Leiden beredt werden zu lassen, ist Bedingung aller Wahrheit. Denn Leiden ist Objektivität, die auf dem Subjekt lastet; was es als sein Subjektivstes erfährt, sein Ausdruck, ist objektiv vermittelt.

Das mag erklären helfen, warum der Philosophie ihre Darstellung nicht gleichgültig und äußerlich ist, sondern ihrer Idee immanent. Ihr integrales Ausdrucksmoment, unbegrifflich-mimetisch, wird nur durch Darstellung – die Sprache – objektiviert. Die Freiheit der Philosophie ist nichts anderes als das Vermögen, ihrer Unfreiheit zum Laut zu

verhelfen. (Adorno 29)

Adorno's argument in the *Negative Dialektik* therefore takes the argumentative practice of the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* one step further. Horkheimer and Adorno's argument about the animal's speechless existence illustrates the need for the critique of instrumentalised reason to adopt a discursive strategy that differs from that of its object of critique. Failing to do so, Horkheimer and Adorno's own argument thus reiterates the reductive, exclusionary stance of rational discourse towards nature as its 'Other.' In order to escape this aporetical configuration, philosophical discourse therefore has to abandon this mode of generalising critique that only enforces the existing binarisms and exclusions. In the light of the authors' thesis of the self-destruction of Enlightenment, Critical Theory is required to recuperate the conception of language that precedes its instrumental and rational dimensions. Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the *Odyssey* and their argumentative adoption and transformation of the fairy tale discourse exemplify the possibility of a reintegration of the expressive function of language into philosophical discourse. Despite the utopian potential in Horkheimer and Adorno's rewriting of the fairy tale, however, this discursive strategy does not, as in the case of the bewitched prince, provide a magical formula to redeem critique from its 'metamorphosis' into affirmation. As Adorno demonstrates in the *Negative Dialektik*, the freedom of philosophy in the age of the dialectic, or indeed the aporia, of Enlightenment is restricted to the (mimetic) expression of its own predicament.

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Notes

¹ References to the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* will be given parenthetically in the text using the abbreviation 'DdA.'

² Probably the most famous example of the motif of metamorphosis in (non-mythological) literature is Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*. Here, the common critical interpretation of Gregor Samsa's transformation as punishment reveals the same deeply rooted anxieties regarding such animal existence which underlie Horkheimer and Adorno's account; as in the *Dialektik der*

Aufklärung, however, the adequacy of this interpretation with regard to Samsa's condition remains questionable.

³ Habermas' critique here seems to be informed by the Aristotelian notion of poetic discourse as a secondary form of representation that can at best be a vehicle for the 'pure' idea (*Poetics* 1456a).

⁴ "Versuche der Sprache, den Tod auszudrücken, sind vergebens bis in die Logik hinein; wer wäre das Subjekt, von dem da präzidiert wird, es sei jetzt, hier tot" (Adorno 364).

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