

ADORNO ON NIHILISM AND MODERN SCIENCE, ANIMALS, AND JEWS

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Adorno, no less than Heidegger or Nietzsche, had his own critical notions of truth/untruth. But Adorno's readers are unsettled by the barest hint of anything that might be taken to be anti-science. To protest scientism, yes and to be sure, but to protest "scientific thought," decidedly not, and the distinction is to be maintained even if Adorno himself challenged it. For Adorno, so-called "scientistic" tendencies are the very "conditions of society and of scientific thought." And again, Adorno's readers tend to refuse criticism of this kind. Scientific rationality cannot itself be problematic and E. B. Ashton, Adorno's translator in the mid-1960s, sought to underscore this with the word "scientivistic." Rather than science, it is scientism that is to be avoided. So we ask: is Adorno speaking here of scientific rationality or scientistic rationality? How, in general, are we to read Adorno?

Writing obliquely in his *Negative Dialectics* with reference to the modern world's "self-hatred of the mind, the protestant rage at the harlot Reason,"¹ Theodor Adorno articulates the central core of nihilism. In what follows, I revisit the question of nihilism not as a metaphysical but as an all-too physical question in connection with animals in Adorno's thinking.

For Adorno, who, no less than Heidegger or Nietzsche, had his own critical notions of truth/untruth, "What is true in the concept of existence is the protest against a condition of society and scientific thought that expels unregimented experience." (ND, 123) But Adorno's readers are unsettled by the barest hint of anything that might be taken to be anti-science. To protest scientism, yes and to be sure, but to protest "scien-

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, (tr.) E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1997/1973 [1966]), 383. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as ND.

tific thought,” decidedly not, and the distinction is to be maintained even if Adorno himself challenged it. For Adorno, so-called “scientivistic”² tendencies dominate “a philosophy garbed as science” (ND, 29), including “so-called ‘analytical philosophy,’ which robots can learn and copy.” (ND, 30)

And again, Adorno’s readers tend to refuse criticism of this kind. Scientific rationality cannot itself be problematic and E. B. Ashton, Adorno’s translator in the mid-1960s, sought to underscore this with the word “scientivistic.” (*Ibid.*) Rather than science, it is *scientism* that is to be avoided. So we ask: is Adorno speaking here of scientific rationality or *scientistic* rationality? How, in general, are we to read Adorno?

Between the Elitist and the Obtuse

I chose to describe Adorno’s writing as *oblique* rather than, as it can otherwise be described, ‘convoluted’ or ‘opaque.’ But in the context of today’s professional and analytic philosophy, to speak of an author as “difficult to read” is to locate the source of all confusion in the text. When an analytic philosopher says that he (it tends to be a “he”) does not understand x or y, this does not mean that he is attesting to the limitations of his own intellect, as might be thought plausible for an announced lack of understanding, but criticising the cogency of x or y. Analytic philosophy is today the latest instance of what Adorno called a “common sense proud of its own obtuseness.” (ND, 383)³

By naming a text opaque or obscure, the scholar is empowered to take “revenge,” as Nietzsche has taught us the very technical achievement that is *ressentiment*, on what he does not understand. Thus we are told that Adorno’s thought is difficult or, to use a rhetorical trope that comes to the same thing, “naïve,”⁴ or “simply does not make sense.”⁵

² ND, 30, 44, 45; see, *contra* Popper, ND, 284.

³ Indeed, Hannah Arendt likewise offers a similar diagnosis, observing that “within the totalitarian ideologies of Western science ‘the purely negative coercion of logic, the prohibition of contradictions’ became ‘productive’ so that a whole line of thought could be initiated, and forced upon the mind, by drawing conclusions in the manner of mere argumentation.” Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966), 470.

⁴ Paolo A. Bolaños, “The Critical Role of Art: Adorno between Utopia and Dystopia,” *KRITIKÉ*, vol. 1, n. 1 (2007), 25.

Adorno, the writer, is the problem, not Adorno's readers. As a reader, one thus passes judgement on the writer's petrified theory of society, summarised — as it is on the last page of Lorenz Jäger's "political" biography of Adorno — as "outdated."⁶ Or, echoing the spirit of Edward Said's proscription of even the thought of an "Adorno *films*,"⁷ Detlev Claussen begins his biography of Adorno by attesting to the ongoing⁸ absence of the king: "Instead of an Overture: *No Heirs*."⁹

Because I have been able to find in myself—or, as Benjamin would put it, I elect for myself—a certain affinity for or forbearance toward Adorno, I describe his style as 'oblique'. But if I were unable to find my way to such an affinity, I might denounce Adorno's style, as Ashton denounced Heidegger for putting "the gist of his philosophizing into the form of an argument with language. Being a German, he argues with the German language."¹⁰ Indisputably, the specifically "Germanic"

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Lorenz Jäger, *Adorno: A Political Biography*, (tr.) Stewart Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 208.

⁷ Said's point (in the context of Benjamin's "The Image of Proust") is that Adorno can be neither "paraphrased" nor transmitted. Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 168. Said's reflection is less a rebuke than a description, like Rousseau's desire to avoid "convincing" or like Nietzsche's even more famous horror of disciples.

⁸ Much of this bespeaks, it seems to me, a tacit and perhaps unconscious protest against Habermas and his successors.

⁹ Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius*, (tr.) Rodney W. Livingstone (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). Originally published as *Theodor W. Adorno. Ein letztes Genie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2003).

¹⁰ E. B. Ashton, "Translator's Note," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, xiii The habit of criticizing Heidegger's style has not gone out of fashion and is particularly complex when discussing Adorno's own style. But see for a discussion of Adorno and Heidegger on language — in addition to the still informative and still under received, Hermann Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger. Untersuchung einer philosophischen Kommunikationsverweigerung* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981) — Harro Müller's "Mimetic Rationality: Adorno's Project of a Language of Philosophy," *New German Critique*, Vol. 36, No. 3, Fall (2009): 85-108. Müller's otherwise useful study is marred by a reading of the analytic tradition innocent of the agonistics of current academe, thus Müller assumes that 'analytic' philosophy of language is all about the history of language and bristles

peculiarities of Adorno's texts continue to offend anglophone, particularly North American readers, who suspect Adorno, both in terms of his style and substance, of spurning their self-proclaimed open-minded sensibilities. Robert Hullot-Kentor is unmatched on this "commercially" democratic point, which he stakes out with specific reference to both jazz and de Tocqueville.¹¹

In addition to Adorno's stylistic complexities, are substantive or thematic liabilities. Let us add to that Adorno's lack of heroes, as Adorno seems to have been fond of very few authors,¹² nor did he admire over-

at Adorno's disregard of "the famous H-series of German philosophers of language (Johann Georg Hamann, Johann Gottfried Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt)." (86) Here it should be noted that most analytic philosophers of language would find all three new wine, indeed, unless they happened to be analytic *historians* of philosophy and then they might know one or the other but not all three. Others might dispute Adorno's relationship to "the famous H-series." On the politics of professional philosophy, see Babich, "On the Analytic-Continental Divide in Philosophy: Nietzsche's Lying Truth, Heidegger's Speaking Language, and Philosophy" in *A House Divided: Comparing Analytic and Continental Philosophy*, (ed.) C. G. Prado (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003), 63-103. See further on Adorno and Heidegger in general, the contributions to *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions*, (eds.) Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007)

¹¹ Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Right Listening and a New Type of Human Being," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, (ed.) Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 181. For a discussion of Adorno in a related context, but without Hullot-Kentor's rhetorical subtleties, see David Jennean, *Adorno in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). Jennean, reasonably enough for a professor of English, offers a spirited defense of reading Adorno without worrying about the esoteric peculiarities of German (the language or the culture).

¹² And not less fond, of course, of Husserl (just as Adorno confronted both Kant and Hegel, no where better or more clearly than in *Negative Dialectics*). And yet a task I would hope might someday come into fashion as a research project (I say "research project" because a good deal of hermeneutic muscle would be required) would be to read Adorno's *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie. Studien über Husserl und die phänomenologischen Antinomien* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1956), tr. by Willis Domingo as *Against Epistemology. A Metacritique* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983) together with Derrida's seminal reading of Edmund Husserl's *L'Origine de la géométrie*, tr. by John P. Leavey, Jr. as *Ed-*

many artists or musicians. This deficiency makes us anxious and thus we are able to find him elitist and pompous and, at the same time, inoffensive not only because we infantilise him by calling him Teddy but as already noted because we dismiss him as passé. Then, too, there is the difficulty of finding common ground between Adorno's claims and those of contemporary conventionalities. For Adorno does not say about Hegel what today's social thinkers would have him say, nor does he say about Kant what today's theorists of knowledge or practical reason or aesthetics would have him say nor, indeed, the "right" things about Marx or Nietzsche (especially given Habermas' own ambivalence with regard to Nietzsche).¹³ In sum, as many commentators have claimed, Adorno is held to be unsalvageable (as if everything in his work, such as his outrageous views on jazz, might somehow defy rehabilitation) or, once again: outdated (as if philosophy were in the business, *pace* Kant, of making progress).

Adorno, it would seem, ought best be abandoned to the dustbin of history as an unusually ill-tempered and intolerant academic, while the rest of us should get on with the business of talking about the half-dozen figures *du jour*.

But Adorno will not go away.

Adorno *is* his irrecoverability; his datedness and his politically impolitic incorrectness, *avant la lettre* (at least when it came to jazz—How could he?—and what would he ever have said about reggae, hip hop, etc.?), is part of the point (as a different set of so many coordinated constellations would be the point for his lifelong adversary, not antipode—the distinction is important—Martin Heidegger).

The problem may indeed be less with Adorno than with ourselves, as readers and above all as thinkers, taking both practices in a *critical* sense. For Adorno assumes that we will have read not only Ben-

mund Husserl's "Origin of Geometry": An Introduction (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989). For a discussion of Adorno and Husserl, see David Sherman, *Sartre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 59ff. The first two contributions to *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, by J. M. Bernstein and Joel Whitebook respectively, begin by declaring Adorno's compound, i.e., dialectical, antipathy to Hegel. Kant, a more difficult affair in any case, presents still further issues.

¹³ See overall the contributions to *Nietzsche, Habermas, and Critical Theory* (ed.) Babich (Amherst: New York. Humanity Books, 2004).

jamin but also Lukács and Brecht and Kafka and Beckett (and so on) with as much care as we've read Kant *and* Hegel, which means reading not as literary or political critics read Kant and Hegel, but exactly, rigorously, more philosophically than the philosophers, who inherited (as Adorno saw them) the limits and not the strengths of either Kant *or* Hegel. Indeed and as Adorno, here quietly echoing Heidegger, argues that "Hölderlin's late hymns philosophically outstripped philosophy" (ND, 389), I have argued that we need to read Nietzsche philosophically beyond traditional philosophy, doubting, as Nietzsche himself expressed it, "more radically" than Descartes and taking critical reflection beyond Kant's own critiques. And it is from this Nietzschean juncture that we might re-read Adorno.

Here, reading in this way, I consider the themes of nihilism in general and animals in particular as also and along the way, advertising and propaganda, throughout Adorno's work. And animals are at once the easiest and the most difficult of these themes. Hence the authors who note Adorno's references to animals tend to over-read them, supposing their primary function to be revelatory, telling us about Adorno himself, as a code for psychoanalysing his personal life, his family and so on.¹⁴ I take this to be an error and I think such readings miss the point of Adorno's fundamental *respect*—a respect, he warns us, in the section on "Freedom" in *Negative Dialectics*, that Kant *does not* accord to animals. Here, beyond Kant (and to anticipate), Adorno suggests by contrast that it would perhaps suffice for any ethical system—and, for Adorno, this includes a critique of Heidegger's *Daseins-analyse*—that one endeavour so "to live that one may believe oneself to have been a good animal [*so zu leben, daß man glauben darf, ein gutes Tier gewesen zu sein*]." (ND, 299, translation modified) The formula is Kantian, the dialectical tension Nietzschean rather than Hegelian, but the sentiment, contra Kant, Heidegger, and the entirety of traditional religious culture, as well as traditionally enlightened philosophy, ie., contra the whole self-satisfied culture of "humane" civilisation, is all Adorno's own.

¹⁴ See, for instance, and for further discussion, Robert Savage's review of Stefan Müller-Doohm's *Adorno: Eine Biographie*, in Savage's "Adorno's Family and Other Animals," *Thesis Eleven*, n. 78 (2004), 102-12. For a general overview (and partial exception), see Christina Gerhardt, "The Ethics of Animals in Adorno and Kafka," *New German Critique*, vol. 97, no. 1, 33 (2006), 159-78.

For Adorno invokes the animal both out of his own respect for animals (this is awe but this is also playful enthusiasm) and in order to distinguish “mere” animal being from the increasingly reified consciousness of human experience. Our own reflexivity breaks and then compounds what Adorno calls the “spell” that “seems to be cast on all living things.” (ND, 345)¹⁵ This entangled disenchantment is contrasted with “the innocence of mere being the way one is.” (ND, 346) Such “mere being” also characterises the human at its most innocent and thus *most humane and most animal* being. This “mere being” and the appreciation of it, not in a so-called or Levinasian Other and, thus, exactly not in another *human being*, but in beings *other* than ourselves, is articulated in Adorno’s “respect” for animals because it is also an overtly fond awareness of, an astonished and delighted attunement to animals. In addition, and here Adorno and Heidegger coincide, merely to be “the way one is” often eludes human beings. And exactly such “mere being the way one is” characterises animals like the wombats of which (of *whom!*)¹⁶ Adorno was so fond that he could write his friend, Bernhard Grzimek, a veterinarian and zoologist and the director of the Frankfurt Zoo, to urge him to restore wombats (of all the animals that needed to be ‘restored’) to the then-being-rebuilt zoological garden while (note the contradiction) at the same time offering his assistance to Grzimek’s campaign to discourage hunting safaris.¹⁷ Affection is part of this desire to acquire wombats, if

¹⁵ Compare John Llewelyn, *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991). Giorgio Agamben takes up this theme in *The Open: Man and Animal*, (tr.) Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). For a discussion, see Tracy Colony, “Before the Abyss: Agamben on Heidegger and the Living,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 40 (2007), 1-16.

¹⁶ I note that the biologist Marc Bekoff, too, emphasises this: not the animals *that* we eat, but those *whom* we eat, animals as sentient, all-too-personal living beings. Please see, most recently, Beckoff’s *The Animal Manifesto: Six Reasons for Expanding Our Compassion Footprint* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2010).

¹⁷ In a letter from 23 April 1965, cited in Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures*, (tr.) Rodney Livingstone (London: Polity, 2006), 299. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as HF. Grzimek, originally trained as a veterinarian and later a zoologist, was professor at the University of Giessen, and, after the war, director of the Frankfurt Zoological Garden and a trustee of Tanzania and

talk of hunting safaris was inevitably involved with the co-option of nature as something “planned, cultivated, and organized” (HF, 121), and, as Adorno describes it, the dialectically inevitable decay of nature as “gradually turning into a nature reserve” (*Ibid.*), that is, in quasi-Baudrillardian terms, into “a semblance of nature.” (*Ibid.*, 122) By speaking here of the “semblance of the natural” in the nature reserve, Adorno’s point is predicated upon the dialectic: “Semblance is the prophetic warning of an increasingly powerful spell.”¹⁸ The overall scheme we cannot but note, of both zoos and hunting expeditions, involves the egregiously inhumane that remains interior to what we call the humane. Thus the ideal of humanity, as Jacques Derrida reminded the inhabitants of Frankfurt when he accepted the Frankfurt Adorno Prize in 2001, referring to Adorno and to animals in the context of ethics,¹⁹ had always managed, in biblical as in Aristotelian as in Kantian as in Levinasian traditions, to exclude animals from ethical consideration.

To be sure, scholars have begun to pay more attention to the question of the animal, but it may be that we are rather more moved by the words of those like Derrida at the beginning of the 21st century, naked to the gaze of a cat at the end of his life (and everything Levinas would not have said) but also like Giorgio Agamben and only thus we turn to Adorno’s 20th century words, words that are not new. Words indeed, and just to stay with the 19th century, that we could already have read in Schopenhauer, Emerson, and in Nietzsche.

Uganda National Parks. See also Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno. Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 525. Adorno was thus, along with Grzimek, an advocate of conservation, but as Matthew Scully emphasises, an unabated enthusiasm for hunting continues to characterise capitalism, and members of Safari Club International will pay tens of thousands of dollars for the privilege of killing an elephant and even more for killing other animals. See Matthew Scully, *Dominion: The Power of Man, The Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* (New York: Macmillan, 2002), 47ff. It remains part of the problem that the human animal’s desire to keep animals in “nature,” that is to say, in discrete reserves, or stuffed and mounted under glass in museums, or behind bars in zoos or “safari parks,” is, beginning with suburban life, predicated upon the organised hunting of animals, first to keep “wild” animals out of (human) inhabited areas and then to stock and replenish zoos.

¹⁸ Adorno, *History of Freedom*, 122.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Fichus: Discours de Francfort* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).

Far from the “musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims” (ND, 365), we have our own invisible and thus distant (however physically, geographically proximate they may be)²⁰ slaughterhouses. We hide the manner of living lived by the animal victims of our insensitivity, our indifference (not noticing, or not caring whether we notice, is colder and more common than intentional cruelty), our voracity for their fur, hair, feathers, skin, flesh and blood.

Before they die what “deaths” they die,²¹ it is certain that their lives are not lived but suffered, a burden borne without seeing the sun, without companionship or affection, surviving on the most monotonous food, pumped full of carcinogens and other poisons designed to accelerate growth, as well as antibiotics to fight the pathogens endemic to such an un-lived “life,” a life steeped in the foul air of their own waste and the waste of the hundreds, the thousands of others around them, without comfort of any kind, including bedding. And although we hide the manner of their deaths (“[t]hey die,” as one reporter put it, “piece by piece,”²² because the meat industry insists on letting the animals bleed to death, which means that they die their deaths for as long as possible, as alive as possible), we today serve up the burnt offerings of so many lives. Animals alive today, and every other day, even without the mocking word of the sadistic concentration camp guard to tell them this, will nevertheless, tomorrow and every single tomorrow to come, “wriggl[e] skyward as smoke” (ND, 362) from the chimneys of restaurants and, of course, our own kitchens. In this sense, as always, and with nothing less literal than an oven, Adorno’s “[a]bsolute negativity is in plain sight and has ceased to surprise anyone.” (*Ibid.*)

Writing of Auschwitz, Adorno mused on the problem of the impotence of human culture: “That this could happen in the midst of the traditions of philosophy, of art, and of the enlightened sciences says

²⁰ From where I sit in New York City, I am reminded that New Jersey, just across the Hudson River, is one of the largest “manufacturers” of pork in the U.S., and slaughters more than 100 million pigs yearly.

²¹ Disputes about whether we should speak of animals “dying” or “perishing” may be left to the Heideggerians (but also to the pragmatists). The point about death, as Heidegger emphasizes it, is really a point to be made about life.

²² Joby Warrick, “‘They Die, Piece by Piece.’ In Overtaxed Plants, Humane Treatment of Cattle Is Often a Battle Lost,.” *Washington Post*, 10 April 2001.

more than that these traditions and their spirit lacked the power to take hold of men and work a change in them. There is untruth in those fields themselves, in the autarky that is emphatically claimed for them. All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage [*Müll*].” (ND, 366–67) Adorno’s point here is Brecht’s: there is no way out of this— anyone who seeks to maintain this “radically culpable and shabby culture becomes its accomplice, while the man who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be.” (*Ibid.*)

The problem of nihilism and culture is exemplified by the efficacy of propaganda, which also works by way of silence and non-mention. This efficacy is manifest in our current (I am talking about the current day, not the time of Mephistopheles in Hollywood or the glory days in Adorno’s time at the New School in New York City) non-attention to suffering—our failure even to mention the now long, ongoing U.S. war in Iraq and Afghanistan, or to note the suffering of the poor, the suffering of the least among us, which would be and above all, the suffering of animals in our agribusiness combines and factories, and our university and industrial laboratories for animal testing. Adorno had already highlighted the numbing of critical reason beyond both Kant and Hegel: “The questions are not solved and not even their insolvability is proven. They are forgotten and any talk of them lulls them so much more deeply into their malignant sleep.” (ND, 383, translation modified) To talk about the numbing of critical reason, we have had to begin with nihilism, which first required reflection on modern science. Propaganda and advertising come in where, as already noted, for Adorno, the problem of nihilism concerns our insensibility, our lack of feeling, and indeed our capacity for inattention.

In addressing nihilism, Adorno cannot but speak of Nietzsche and the chain of associations linked not only to Nietzsche but also to Jaspers and to Heidegger just because it is not possible to speak of nihilism without such interlinked resonances: the opposition between emptiness and fullness in the very talk of the “fullness of life” (ND, 378)—this is the language of experience. Nihilism is a wildly metonymic conception, associated in particular, as Adorno reflects, “with the slogans of ‘emptiness’ and ‘senselessness’.” (ND, 379) Alluding to the implications of what Adorno calls the “compact”, i.e., “Kant’s own lesson that reason cannot but entangle itself in those antinomies which he proceeds to re-

solve by reason” (ND, 382), Adorno recalls that “Jacobi first put the term [nihilism] to philosophical use, and Nietzsche adopted it, presumably from newspaper accounts of terrorist acts in Russia.” (ND, 379)²³ The consequence of what Adorno here describes as Nietzsche’s “intellectual honesty” radicalizes, as I read it, Kant’s “critique of the faculty of reason” (ND, 382), which had already engendered the paralogsms of Kant’s epistemology. For Adorno, these same “bad checks” “went to protest with the unfoldment of science into a mechanical activity.” (ND, 388) Becalmed, these bad checks “drift,” for Adorno, precisely at the Rhodian juncture Jacobi and cohort, fore and aft,²⁴ sought to reclaim culminating in “a ban on all thinking.” (Ibid.) Nor does Heidegger’s critique of science diverge from this. Thus Adorno makes self-destructive nihilism part of the Kantian critical project, which he here calls a block: “What the Kantian block projects on truth is the self-maiming of reason, the mutilation of reason inflicted upon itself as a rite of initiation into its own scientific character.” (Ibid.)

Adorno understood as almost no commentators on Nietzsche before or since have understood that Nietzsche’s own invocation of nihilism concerned the inherent nihilism interior to the ascetic ideal both religious and modern, that is to say, the ascetic ideal of technological or industrial science.²⁵ Nietzsche employed the word “with an irony to which our ears have been dulled in the meantime...to denounce Christianity as the institutionalized negation of the will to live.” (ND, 379)

The metonymic absorptions of nihilism stuck (something always

²³ Adorno here cites Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, “KdrV, 290ff.”

²⁴ See Friedrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1994), esp. 519. See for a discussion of the epistemologically, spiritually radical responses to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Babich, “*Ex aliquo nihil*: Nietzsche on Science and Modern Nihilism,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*. 84-2 (Spring 2010): 231-256, particularly “Section II: Nietzsche and Philosophical Nihilism,” 240-244.

²⁵ For a discussion of religion and science as versions of the ascetic ideal, see Babich, “Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Science: Morality and the Values of Modernity,” in Babich, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 175-226 and Babich, “The Genealogy of Morals and Right Reading: On the Nietzschean Aphorism and the Art of the Polemic,” in *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals*, (ed.) Christa Davis Acampora (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 171-90.

does), and philosophers henceforth refused to be parted from the word, but “in a direction contrary to Nietzsche’s,” as Adorno correctly emphasises, “they refunctioned it conformistically into the epitome of a condition that was accused, or was accusing itself of being null and void.” (*Ibid.*) Like the usual criticisms of Nietzsche’s epistemological self-contradiction, double talk, talk of nothing—“Everything is nothing” (*Ibid.*)—can pretty much be used to say anything one pleases contra anything at all.

As Adorno remarks with his typical dryness:

For thinking habits that consider nihilism bad in any case, this condition is waiting to be injected with meaning, no matter whether the critique of the meaning, the critique attributed to nihilism, is well-founded or unfounded. Though noncommittal, such talk of nihilism lends itself to demagoguery; but it knocks down a straw man it put up itself. (*Ibid.*)

Democracy and Commercial Rule: On Advertising and the Politics of Propaganda

I suggested above that Adorno’s account of nihilism can best be understood with reference to Nietzsche and there are any number of such references. And if there are many readings of Nietzsche and nihilism, what kind of nihilism does Nietzsche himself have in mind, beyond that is—to quote Adorno again—Jacobi and the newspapers? For Nietzsche invokes the Russian-European rage for nihilism (and anarchy), “rejecting all teleology,” as aspects of a “Petersburgian meta-politics and Tolstoian ‘pity’” (GM III: 26), which Nietzsche goes on to oppose to the “*species anarchistica* within the educated proletariat” as the spectators of the same ideal, be they “historical” like Ernest Renan or “objective” as he characterises the political agitators of the German spirit of his day

The popular, fundamentally political deed of the anarchists who cry *Ni dieu, ni maître* as this inspires Nietzsche’s ire is a literary event: and the phrase is the title of a journal.²⁶ And as Karl Löwith first took

²⁶ The phrase serves as the title for a journal founded in 1880 by the anarchist socialist, Louis-Auguste Blanqui. A photographic portrait of Nietzsche himself is included in the Carpenter Collection of the Fogg Museum at Harvard under the rubric of “Anarchism: Germany. Portraits of Nietzsche: Anarchism: Types

care to emphasise in his own account of willing backwards, or *amor fati*, the “literary” nihilism of Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and others, hardly exhausts Nietzsche’s meaning.²⁷ Nietzsche challenges “the lie involved in belief in God,” a lie which includes, as he writes in *The Gay Science*, both the religions of the East and the West and which same lie, as we see in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, includes science: “in us the will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a problem.” (GM III: 27)

It is on the terms of what was above reviewed as “philosophical nihilism,” the inherent nihilism of the will to truth, that Nietzsche is able to raise the question of the phenomenon of the ascetic ideal as a manifestation of the human will and its intrinsic “*horror vacui*,” a horror so entrenched that it would “rather will *nothingness* than *not* will” (GM III: 1) What is involved in this? To ask the question Nietzsche asks again and again: What is the meaning of ascetic ideals? If we read Nietzsche after Baudrillard (and just to help us to read Adorno), it turns out that we are looking at the unreal ideal of the imaginary real world, as Baudrillard speaks of the totalistically mediated world of today, as “integral reality,”²⁸ and as the “hyperreal” world that is increasingly the world of our ultimate desires and our ordinary, everyday, lives.

Adorno, after emphasising contra Heidegger that one could well wish “not to *have been* born,” that one could indeed wish this, retroactively, that is: as a survivor of Auschwitz, goes on to offer the counterclaim: “That men might want nothingness, as Nietzsche suggests on occasion, would be ridiculous hubris for each definite individual will. ... Faith in nothingness would be as insipid as faith in Being.” (ND, 379) As he underscores Schopenhauer’s rigorous pessimism, Nietzsche’s pessimism of strength for Adorno points to a complete philosophical doctrine. Thus our contemporary anxiety regarding nihilism reflects the truth of

of Philosophical Anarchists: Nietzsche, philosophical individualist.” For an extended discussion of Nietzsche and anarchism, see John Moore, *I Am Not A Man, I Am Dynamite!* (ed.) Spencer Sunshine (London: Autonomedia, 2005).

²⁷ This is the point of Löwith’s invocation of Nietzsche’s nihilism, a point he needs to make contra Jaspers as much as contra Alfred Bauemler. See Löwith, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, (tr.) J. Harvey Lomax (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977 [1935]) and Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought*, (tr.) David Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964 [1939]).

²⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil* (London: Berg 2005).

the then and still repressed suspicion that everyone might not share the social cheerfulness in the life of enlightened-progress-achieved, that is to say, the ordinary good life of the ordinary citizen in today's mediatised world. This is the often overlooked point of Horkheimer's and Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* and it is the telos of Adorno's *The Culture Industry*. The good life we know by advertising and advertising is political: not merely reminiscent of, it is exactly *propaganda*, as Jacques Ellul also reminded us.²⁹

Advertising (the product manufactured by Adorno's "culture industry") is also the integrating pulse of Baudrillard's "hyperreality." Saturated with the myth of itself on every billboard, every television screen attuned to the rhythm of human optic saccadic movements, punctuating any venture onto the internet just where vision alone—that is the sheerest glance at a screen with constantly shifting advertisements—automatically, whether one notices it or not (and this non-advertence would be the point) transforms one's mind, one's spirit, into pure or open access. And *access* to whom or what? Access for whom or for what? Let us ask: Why is dissemination on the internet profitable? For whom? Who benefits? How do they 'earn' their profits? How does this earning work? Even better to ask if we need a "they" at all?

And here we have another contender for the equivocality of nihilism, for we may suppose there is no "they" there, as we suppose that no corporation profits in some traditionally "direct" fashion. But what is not in doubt in any case is that somehow, someone reaps the benefits. Still we may ask: benefits from what? From flashing ads on a screen? How does that work? Who responds to ads? One clicks on an ad: what follows? There is no there there; there is nothing to force one to buy anything.

Still it works and there is money to be made from nothing but nothing. Before Baudrillard, Marcuse, before Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer, and, if we had time to trace this here, also Günther Anders,

²⁹ See in addition to Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, (tr.) Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Knopf, 1973) Ellul's *The Technological Society*, (tr.) John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1965). See for a contemporary reading, Karim, Karim, "Cyber Utopia and the Myth of Paradise: Using Jacques Ellul's Work on Propaganda to Analyse Information Society Rhetoric," *Information, Communication & Society* 4/1 (2001):113-134.

a student of both Heidegger and Adorno,³⁰ and even Nietzsche writing about journalism arguably reflected upon media transformations.³¹ What is at stake today is the significance of advertising as “the formation” of human attitudes, convictions, beliefs. Where Marcuse could speak of a comfortable, all-too-comfortable “unfreedom” to describe the one-dimensionality of Western, capitalist society,³² the advertising that makes this unfreedom function as it does turns out, as Jacques Ellul had diagnosed it to be more political than economic and as had indeed already been well and all-too pragmatically understood beginning in the theoretical studies of radio in the 1930s.

Advertising is more than Horkheimer and Adorno seem to have guessed, although they made valiant efforts, especially if one adds Marcuse’s reflections and more recently those of Baudrillard and Virilio. For it matters that the writers of the Frankfurt School wrote at the dawn of what advertising would become and those in control do indeed (but they do not only) “entrench” themselves, as Horkheimer and Adorno first expressed it, in and *through* advertising (as Ellul and as Baudrillard also argue).³³ Adorno had, one may argue, already seen the consequences of

³⁰ Anders was also Husserl’s student and Arendt’s ex-husband. He argued a Heideggerian line contra technology in Adorno’s spirit but frontally and without the obliquity to which I refer above. See Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution* (Munich: Beck, 1980), a manuscript composed during Anders’ post-war exile in the United States and drawing upon his experiences with both Heidegger and Adorno.

³¹ See, for example, and among others, Friedrich Kittler’s *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1999) and Douglas Kellner’s *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics Between the Modern and the Post Modern* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 98ff.

³² Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

³³ See Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, (tr.) James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996 [1968]). Jean-François Lyotard, in spite of his insight into the fate of the narrative, master and mini, did not see this and his faith in the benign spirit of the internet is strikingly noncritical. See Babich, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra, or Nietzsche and Hermeneutics in Gadamer, Lyotard, and Vattimo” in *Consequences of Hermeneutics: 50 Years After Gadamer’s Truth and Method*, (eds.) Jeff Malpas and Santiago Zabala (Evanston: Northwestern University Press,

the ideology of media in the age of mechanical reproduction, writing in advance of Baudrillard (and today's "embedded" journalists) of the utter "obliteration" of war "by information, propaganda, commentaries, with camera men in the first tanks and war reporters dying heroic deaths, the mishmash of enlightened manipulation of public opinion and oblivious activity."³⁴ For Adorno, here seemingly illuminating Baudrillard's *hyper-real*, "It is as if the reified, hardened plaster-cast of events takes the place of events themselves. Men are reduced to walk on parts in a monster documentary film, which has no spectators since the least of them has his bit to do on the screen."³⁵

To mention those media relevant to us today, we call for a media-specific-analysis (we are sure that none of these can possibly be the same) of cell-phones or portable mp3 players, ebook readers, and we may name: Iphones, Blackberrys, Ipods and such,³⁶ all in a system of objects of personal fetishism, the real accessories of cyborg life and not less of human life.³⁷ We hardly need implants (or the media fantasy of uploading one's mind to the internet): we have direct access to our brains already in our earphones, earbuds, the speakers, morphed from two (stereo) to four (quadraphonic) to five and more (surround sound) in our home theatre systems. And HDTV is only the latest part of that accessorised mental access. Inherently political as an instrument of social sanction,³⁸ advertising is the ultimately efficacious engine of seamlessly to-

2010), 218-243. Although we still await a sociological study of the French relationship to the internet (perhaps including a discussion of French readings of technology after Ellul, as indeed after Baudrillard and Virilio). For a first discussion, of the French Minitel (an telephone based electronic information technology, like the internet), see H.L. Moulaison, "The Minitel and France's Legacy of Democratic Information Access," *Government Information Quarterly*, 21 (2004): 99-107.

³⁴ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 55.

³⁵ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 55.

³⁶ These are all brand names, like Xerox or IBM.

³⁷ See Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the elimination of Television* (New York: William Morrow, 1978). Also of use in exploring this complex issue in addition to Jacques Ellul and Herbert Marcuse, see Neil Postman, Ivan Illich, etc. For the system of objects, see Baudrillard's study cited above.

³⁸ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (tr.) Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 131.

talitarian control.

Thus I recall my own experience of Eastern Europe, and of East Germany in particular, beginning in 1984—a year notable for its anticlimactic character after Orwell, who indeed and in the interim turned out to be right all along, if not quite in the way one expected: there is no need for loudspeakers to program society, we have television, the internet, and in general, we voluntarily wear earphones and beyond a common dedication to mass media, one also submits to searches on demand and other inconveniences of life in a society of suspicion). It was to me at the time obvious, if also counter the conviction of the day, that the impetus for the so-called “revolution” there had at the time little to do with the “velvet” influence of literature propounded in university departments of literature.³⁹ Much rather the turn to embrace the politically vaporous ideals of the Western world (as we like to say) reflected the same being-unto-advertisement that Horkheimer and Adorno had observed as characterising both Western democratic, i.e., and that is to say capitalist, industrial society and the old-fashioned phantasm of the Eastern totalitarian state that had control but never any goods to sell.

On the other, Western, side of the old iron curtain, on the Western side of the now quaintly chic Berlin wall, was nothing more than simple desire and its imaginary. There were never barriers that could keep the radio waves or television broadcasts out of Eastern Europe,⁴⁰ not to mention intoxicated word of mouth or the newspapers and the glossy magazines filled with the advertisements we in the West had long practice in supposing to ourselves that we did not mind and were not reading. *News* of the so-called “free world,” it always seemed to me, was *always* irrelevant: what ultimately mattered were the ads illustrating

³⁹ Or, of authors like Havel, Kundera, Wolff, important as these Western and democratic authors were and are.

⁴⁰ It is a (is this surprising?) non-adverted to side-effect (or consequence) of the turn to HD television broadcasting that such subversive modes of transmission will soon be antiquated memories (for all that anyone today reads Rudolf Arnheim’s *Rundfunk als Hörkunst*). With digital transmission, television and cable broadcasters will be able, even more so than cable and other broadband providers already can, and just as your Internet provider (and Google itself) already does monitor, if they choose to do so, what sites you do and do not visit. More than a shadow of big brother, everything you watch will be a matter of digital record. Cell phones too. And, given street cams: so too the corner bar.

that freedom.

And when, to work on Nietzsche, I returned to Weimar in 1991, the most patent evidence of unification was the seduction and simulacrum of Baudrillard's already cited "system of objects,"⁴¹ objects for sale, not only on display in the market windows, an item here, an item there, as had been the case merely six years earlier, but flashy, new "consumer goods," choking the shop windows and overflowing the shelves. The fulfillment of the totalitarian insistence of capital matched the uncontrolled excess of a child who suddenly can buy (or who suddenly imagines he can buy) all the candy in the store, and who wants, no matter whether he can or cannot have it all, to *see* it all on display. There are erotic parallels here, if it is an eros that happens to be more appealing to a technologised consciousness (and perhaps more to one gender) than another. Instead of none or one deodorant brand, one now had an entire drugstore row, the very same row of choices we both take for granted in the West in an everyday capitalist way (and this includes a tendency to exaggerate the actual or real array of choice as Marcuse so astutely observed),⁴² an array of choice we Westerners have learned to treat as an obstacle to finding our favorite (this is the primal joy of the hunt, this is the reason drugstores and supermarkets are set up as they are).

Horkheimer and Adorno were not concerned with the charms or the signifiers of such literally fetishised values. Instead they reminded us, as Bertolt Brecht and Rudolf Arnheim also analyzed this same point to a different end,⁴³ that simply by means of radio the "dissemination of popular songs" became (and it is no less so with the radio and the internet today) "practically instantaneous."⁴⁴ The effects for the consciousness of a polity were world changing. The critical implications they drew

⁴¹ See again, Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* and Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, (tr.) Sheila Glaser (University of Michigan Press, 1995).

⁴² Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 9-10 and ff.

⁴³ Bertolt Brecht, "Radiotheorie 1927-1932" in *Gesammelte Werke. Band VIII: Schriften 2: Zur Literatur und Kunst, Politik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 117-137 and Rudolf Arnheim, *Rundfunk als Hörkunst. Mit einer neuen Einleitung des Verfassers* (München: Hanser, 1979 [1936]) in addition to Horkheimer and Adorno, "Kulturindustrie: Aufklärung als Massenbetrug" in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969 [1944]), 128-176.

⁴⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 134.

from this instantaneity has elicited surprisingly little commentary: “If the German fascists launch a word like intolerable [*Untragbar*] over the loudspeakers one day, the whole nation is saying it the next.”⁴⁵

What do the loudspeakers of fascist assemblies have in common with the personal surround sound systems with which all of us accessorise ourselves (ears and living rooms), everywhere we go, every minute of our lives?⁴⁶ Writing of the mythical messenger of doom resurrected in radio, Adorno reflects: “The power of society behind the speaker turns of its own accord against the listeners.”⁴⁷ Writing of a symphony broadcast on the radio, Adorno elsewhere notes the “revenge on great music immanent in its role as ideology,” which “ideology as the pure lie” both destroys the symphony and is at the same time an “unfolding of truth.”⁴⁸ Indeed he continues: “Only as ghosts can the dissociated works survive their downfall.”⁴⁹

What is lost is the very aesthetic possibility of illusion, that is subversion and hence Adorno can speak of the advance of “muteness”⁵⁰ or neutralisation, arguing that radio abolishes both the “volume” of symphonic space and, recalling the grass angels of Kabbalah, the “absolute transience of music,”⁵¹ the time of memory: “no technical progress can obliterate the loss of all this on the radio.”⁵² As Adorno remarks “the less the listeners—especially those bombastically invited into music culture by the radio—know about the unmutated work, the more exclusively

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* See again Arnheim, *Radio als Hörkunst*. Arnheim’s study is also available in English, no translator listed, as *Radio* (New York: Da Capo, 1972).

⁴⁶ This a difficult question to bring together but see for a reading of Gustav le Bon’s *The Crowd*, via Foucault and explicit appropriation of the postmodern, Lisa Blackman and Valerie Walkerdine, *Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001) as well as Frances Dyson, “When is the Ear Pierced?: The Clashes of Sound, Technology, and Cyberculture” in *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, (eds.) Anne Marie Moser and Douglas MacLeod (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 73-101.

⁴⁷ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 49.

⁴⁸ Adorno, *Beethoven*, 120.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 121.

they are exposed to the radio's voice, the more obliviously and powerlessly they succumb to the effect of neutralization."⁵³

What is "broadcast" in radio broadcasting? On the internet? HDTV?

In both free and "unfree" political society, no company under capitalism spends the money required for advertising solely for reasons of social pressure as Horkheimer and Adorno had already observed. Nonetheless: "Only those who can keep paying the exorbitant fees charged by the advertising agencies... that is those who are already part of the system or are coopted into it by the decisions of the banks and industrial capital, *can* enter the pseudomarket as sellers."⁵⁴

At issue for Horkheimer and Adorno was the ideological working dynamic or functioning of brainwashing. We no longer speak of political and social propaganda, and no one but today's madman (to use Nietzsche's image in the current context) speaks of "mind control" apart from the workings of fanatics, religious and otherwise, or if political, always and only the politics of regimes not our own. Thus "proper" governments and multinational corporations in the "free world" would never—we think we know this—have recourse to such a thing. And if this supposition were not sufficient, it is easy to enough to declare that after all it has been shown that social programming through such means as repetition on a range of auditory frequencies, images, flashed intermittently or coordinate with music or olfactory cues, i.e., that the means and mechanisms of garden variety brainwashing, aka mind-control, were and are ineffective.⁵⁵ Again: we *think* know this. But after Kant's and Schopenhauer's epistemological nihilism, but also after Adorno, Ellul, Illich, and Baudrillard, etc. we ought to ask, this is Nietzsche's critical epistemic legacy, how so? As Nietzsche would push us here: *why* are we so sure that we know? And however would we know (one way or the other)?

Today, exposed to more "programming" techniques than ever before in history, attuned to cell-phones and texting, to the internet and to a pretend or virtual community of friends (Facebook), to television pro-

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 131.

⁵⁵ I am here following Jacques Ellul's contrafactual rhetoric here as it is part both in his time and in ours, for different reasons, of academic discourse on the subject of propaganda.

gramming and a steady diet of films (ah, videos), we still suppose that we know that brainwashing practices were never more than the ineffective fantasies of the *fascist state*: the Nazis, the Soviets, etc. And *these* fascist states lost and *this* free world—the world that would never stoop to such means (and of course I am joking! And of course I have to say that I am)—won.

Such things are the stuff of fiction, that would be those authors we tend not to read any longer, George Orwell as I have already mentioned his *1984*, Aldous Huxley, etc. As Baudrillard, speaking in a Nietzschean voice writes:

Today what we are experiencing is the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising. All original cultural forms, all determined languages are absorbed in advertising because it has no depth, it is instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten. Triumph of superficial form, of the smallest common denominator of all signification, degree zero of meaning, triumph of entropy over all possible tropes. The lowest form of energy of the sign.⁵⁶

If we all *know* that there is no such thing as propaganda, we also know that we cannot escape advertising. Baudrillard goes on to remind us:

All current forms of activity tend toward advertising and most exhaust themselves therein. Not necessarily advertising itself, the kind that is produced as such — but the form of advertising, that of a simplified operational mode, vaguely seductive, vaguely consensual (all the modalities are confused therein, but in an attenuated, agitated mode).⁵⁷

We *want* advertising as Baudrillard notes, here, as we now see, echoing Adorno, “Without believing in the product, therefore, *we believe in the advertising that tries to get us to believe in it.*”⁵⁸ Like Baudrillard, Mar-

⁵⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, 87.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

cuse too has explored this same dynamic of absorption and appropriation.⁵⁹

Despite the confidence of our convictions in this regard and others, Horkheimer and Adorno offer the example of *Blitzkrieg* to illustrate the functioning of cooption as Marcuse likewise explores this dynamic.⁶⁰ Thus coopted, the word *Blitzkrieg* was repeated—and that means, given the mechanisms of the human psyche, with or without trauma: absorbed taken up, appropriated—by those *against* whom it had been originally directed in times of fascist aggression: “The universal repetition of the term denoting such measures made the measures, too, familiar, just as, at the time of the free market, the brand name on everyone’s lips increased sales.”⁶¹

Advertisement works by way of repetition and saturation, and a great many of us live, and have always lived in such a world.⁶² The parallel with the “selling” of candidates in a “democratic” system that reduces political choice, as in the US, to that between two brands (or parties), has been made and yet no sooner is it made than it is forgotten, which is the mechanism of both advertising and ordinary or clinical hypnosis. We just went through such a campaign. Yes we did! What is politically significant is neither one’s accord nor one’s choice but what Marcuse called a voluntary and hence “democratic unfreedom.”⁶³

Hence and in the political realm of Western democratic society, it just so happens that there are no candidates apart from those of the official parties, a system which then as now guarantees “that the wielders of influence remain among their peers.”⁶⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno go on to draw an economic parallel between the collusive function of advertising and the “resolutions of economic councils which control the establishment and continuation of businesses in the totalitarian state.”⁶⁵ As they reflect, the “costs of advertising, which finally flow back into the pockets of the combines spare them the troublesome task of subduing

⁵⁹ See Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 67ff.

⁶⁰ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* and elsewhere.

⁶¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 134-135.

⁶² And it just happens that we prefer Coke to Pepsi or whatever else, to whatever else, much less, horrors, generic cola.

⁶³ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 1.

⁶⁴ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 131.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

unwanted outsiders...”⁶⁶ Apart from noting Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s now dated terminology for megacorporations, i.e., “combines,” it would seem that little has changed in the interim. Thus as already noted in the political realm of Western democratic society, it just so happens that there are no candidates apart from those of the official parties, a system which then as now guarantees “that the wielders of influence remain among their peers.”⁶⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno go on to draw an economic parallel between the collusive function of advertising and the “resolutions of economic councils which control the establishment and continuation of businesses in the totalitarian state.”⁶⁸ Wanting the latest gadget or the latest game, the sexiest beer (who thought this up?), happiness is brandmarked and therefore located and the polity (let us call it the economy) is premised on the pursuit of the same. In an age of consumer politics, of targeted or individualised advertising, legislated as it is in the US by obligatory HD (i.e., digital) TV programming, one cannot but ask, with Adorno and his emphasis on the individual, where nihilism has gone? Would one, *can one*, “want” nothing in an age where manufacturing wants has been elevated to the rank of a science? If it is all a fable, all myth, as Baudrillard and as Gianni Vattimo have suggested, ought we not begin to wonder whether life, increasingly articulated in correspondence with advertisements, might also be a myth? Vattimo’s great strength, his *Judo move*, as I think of it, is to answer in the affirmative.⁶⁹

In the field of technology studies, what I here have named the Judo move has well-known analogues. Consumers use, so it is argued, and thereby “subvert” the products used, co-incidentally, incrementally. But how relevant is such a subversion when what it yields (on its own report) is the creation of still more need and still more consumption? Is the consumer’s absorption of (or cooption of) manufactured needs still subversion if nothing changes, that is to say, if consumption accelerates? If you still need and you still use the advertised product, even if for purposes other than those advertised, has anything gone wrong with the advertising?

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 131.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Vattimo has been saying this for some time but see most recently, Vattimo, *Art’s Claim to Truth*, (tr.) Luca Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

If advertising abolishes critical reflection, as Adorno and as Baudrillard had pointed out and as Ellul argues with respect to propaganda, just because we are complicit with it even as we do not believe it, one *ought to wonder*. Critical reflection, or thinking, is not, so Nietzsche urges us, a given: it needs to be learned, one has to make it one's own. We have to learn to wonder. Heidegger echoes this needfulness. But to say this is by far not to engage it, particularly where there is learning to be done, particularly where what is at stake is what Kant called *Mündigkeit* in *What is Called Enlightenment?* Coming into one's maturity as it were, as a sovereign individual guided by a will able to give itself its own law, autonomy is opposed to the self-imposed tutelage that is the still invisible cage of modernity. Thus it can be argued that Adorno made common cause with Heidegger and Arendt where he writes that "Piety, indolence, and calculation allow philosophy to keep muddling along within an ever narrower academic groove, and even there steadily increasing efforts are made to replace it by organized tautology."⁷⁰

For Adorno, it "is precisely the critical element that is wanting in ostensibly independent thought."⁷¹ But given this lack, we are *charged* to think for ourselves, to think, as Arendt has it, in the absence of guiderails or crutches.⁷² It seems patent here that Arendt's invitation to thinking must be thought with reference both to Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking?* as well as to Nietzsche's own staircase reflections on thinking

⁷⁰ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 66. Of course, Adorno does not embrace what he calls the "existential exposure" of Heidegger's "Being-in-the-world" but reflects that "Between delight in emptiness and the lie of fullness, the prevailing intellectual situation allows no third way." *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind, Appendix: Judging—Excerpts from Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1878), 258; *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World* (ed.) Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 336. See for a discussion of Arendt's striking phrase, Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 41. Most theorists undertake to do what Arendt herself seeks to do here. See Julia Honkasalo, "Praxis, Logos and Theoria—The Threefold Structure of the Human Condition," *TOPIOC* 2 (19) (2008): 169-180 and Tracy B. Strong has taken Arendt's "thinking without a banister" as the inspiration for his forthcoming *Politics without Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

(both his musing on treating others as so many steps, he did not think others thought well of this from their perspective but he also did not think it could be dispensed with), including his mountain climber's vision of ascending a crumbling staircase, not less and indeed Wittgenstein's famous ladder.⁷³

To think for oneself, *Selbstdenken*, even in correspondence with another ideal or future thinker likewise capable of thinking for him or herself, would mean to do without the media in the current age.

Is such a thing possible today? Repeating words from others (and not even from the past, this is the beauty of the advertisement), we seem far from the enlightenment vision of being able to think for ourselves. Perhaps we have nothing but banisters, frames, guidelines today. What does it mean to say, as Nietzsche did, that we, in our humanity, with all of its strengths and all of its limitations, would rather will nothing than not will at all?

The problem is what Adorno and Baudrillard have taught us about "nothing but nothing." We are brought back to Adorno's reflection that "great works of art express hope more powerfully than traditionally theological texts." (ND, 347) This is an aesthetic theodicy, the God of art as a god intrinsically beyond any possibility of knowledge. This is the unknown God, the God veiled, as Michel Haar writes "because of his beauty,"⁷⁴ a god of nature, a god of interiority. This Nietzschean heart's genius⁷⁵ is enormously seductive and enormously elusive: Dionysus as

⁷³As Arendt explicates this point, we take it for granted that "as you go up and down the stairs you can always hold on to the banister. But," she goes on to explain, the problem is that we have "lost the banister." In *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, 336. Not all regard this "modern condition" as a particular problem and one author holds that what Arendt here argues is that we "have indeed the ground." See Kimberley Curtis, "Aesthetic Foundations of Democratic Politics," *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics* (eds.) Craig Calhoun and John McGowan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 37.

⁷⁴ Michel Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics* (tr.) Michael Gendre (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 147.

⁷⁵ See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §295. I discuss the specifically democratic if also esoteric impetus that inspires Nietzsche's "genius of the heart" in Babich, "Become the One You Are: On Commandments and Praise—Among Friends," in *Nietzsche, Culture, and Education* (ed.) Thomas Hart (London:

“tempter god,” as the “seducing” god just to the extent that “he teaches man to discover and to follow what is divine within himself,”⁷⁶ that is, as Adorno writes in a voice that is as Kantian as it is Nietzschean, “it is only in expressing its own naturalness that the genius soars above nature.” (ND, 397)

If there has never yet been, as Eugen Fink writes, “an alternative to the ascetic ideal which denies nature,”⁷⁷ we still need (this would be the musical aesthetic that is also a musical ethic, hinted at in Adorno’s *presque rien*, as the mere presence of sound and as “all music consists of mere sounds”)⁷⁸ to find a way that might help us meet Nietzsche’s desire in the face of the thoughtless disregard of human beings concerned not with death, not with eternity, not to change them but “to do something that would make the thought of life even a hundred times more appealing.”⁷⁹

For Animals: Deadening Feeling

Adorno argues that civilised rational progress tends to deaden rather than to increase feeling for the other. And this deadening loss also sacrifices one’s awareness of one’s own consciousness of wonder, an awareness of the sheer presence, the being, the “joy”⁸⁰ in the being of one’s own being as of the being of others but also an awareness of (this is not the same as

Ashgate, 2009), 13-38.

⁷⁶ Haar, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, 147.

⁷⁷ Eugen Fink, *Nietzsche* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1968), 120.

⁷⁸ Adorno, *Beethoven*, 4. “The ideological essence of music...lies merely in the fact that it is a voice lifted up, that it is music at all.” Ibid. 6. Cf., 188ff.)

⁷⁹ Nietzsche, GS §278.

⁸⁰ With reference to the affect of “joy,” John Michael Coetzee rightly chooses this word, using the voice of his “Elizabeth Costello,” to highlight the joy of animals. See Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). For an extended ecological discussion of animals and world, having and not having a world, of dying and not dying, but also using the language of joy, see Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, (tr.) William McNeill and Michael Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), chapters three and four. It remains to connect this notion of joy with Adorno’s sense of happiness as indeed with Nietzsche’s similarly musically attuned sense of happiness, the happiness he also qualified as his own: *mein Glück*. See note 21 above.

feeling) the *pain* of others. In this deadening, the claims of suffering are silenced, this is part of our utter inattention to the suffering of other beings so often, and so often very minimally, invisibly, consequent upon our actions.

Conscious of what it is being taught at every moment, the child learns passivity, helplessness, acceptance, complicity in the face of the subjugation of nature: “An unconscious knowledge whispers to the child what is repressed by civilized education: this is what matters, says the whispering voice.” (ND, 366) This is the collateral or subsidiary point in all education, all cultural experience. Thus the farmer’s child learns to drown excess kittens and puppies without a word, the city child learns to walk away from beggars on the street, learns that pigeons are dirty, that strays are to be ignored or left behind. Thus we learn to look away from suffering; we are taught that such things do not count.

At issue for Adorno is all the suffering of the world, the same suffering Pierre Bourdieu sought to underline, bringing in as many voices as he could at the end of his life to do so, beyond theory.⁸¹ This suffering is for Adorno *not limited to* the suffering of human beings—and Adorno’s attunement, once again, is rare in philosophy, and let us underscore that not even Levinas does this and Derrida himself comes to it only at the end of his life.⁸² At the same time, and it takes an Adorno to make this work, the suffering that is not the suffering of *human beings*

⁸¹ This is the spirit of Bourdieu’s collective book, edited by Bourdieu, *et al.* *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, (tr.) Alain Accardo & Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Ivan Illich sought to express this same collectivity, perhaps still more purely (although in later years, as it sometimes happens, his openness was often closed off by his friends). What should never be suppressed in the case of Ivan Illich or Jacques Ellul, in their various books, which we may after so much time regard as so many attempts to write politically, is the awe in the face of the other and the counsel to let be. What is that but quietism we may ask? It is respect and requires that we stay well out of the way. If the case of humans is inevitably complex, it is not with animals. To swim with dolphins kept for the purpose is a treat for the human tourist, but an agony for the captives. So too watching them perform as entertainment or in a laboratory setting.

⁸² I make an exception for Agamben but I would point out that Agamben also happens to be reading Heidegger, just as Derrida read Heidegger (along with the Adorno Derrida never excluded from his purview).

includes not only the unimaginable numbers of animals *who* suffer at human hands, but also and inevitably, so goes the logic, the suffering of all those (very human) beings we count *out* of the equation, be they Jews or Arabs, be they blacks or whites or the wrong blacks or the wrong whites, or the aged, or women, or, indeed, everyone on the other side of either side of genocidal conflicts and war, etc. These others are those whom civilisation glosses over, their suffering is consigned to oblivion as what ultimately need not be seen, need not be named, need not be taken into account.⁸³

By foregrounding the face of human suffering, Adorno also tries (as does Heidegger in his own fashion as the son of a farming mother, but as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer also did) to think about *animal suffering*. I say Adorno (Heidegger, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer) *tries* to do this not because Adorno somehow fails in an otherwise straightforward matter but because thinking about the suffering of animals is neither easy nor straightforward.

Certainly we talk about such suffering, as suffering was just emphasised above, but do we really speak to it?

What degree of dissociative repression, what degree of madness lurks in all scientific thinking? For the annals of scientific research consist of countless tabulations of animal responses to pain, responses we can measure because it is so easy to do so—agitation, cries, grimaces as scientists discern and study grimaces in monkeys as in dogs and cats and mice—just as it is easy to cause pain (deliberately, as well as indeliberately) in observable settings, again and again. Animal pain experiments are paradigmatic science. Indeed we can even seek to take account of such pain and suffering, if only and to be sure for the sake of the profit and the loss or wastage caused by animal suffering on the way to slaughter, in the case of mechanised animal agriculture (to use Heidegger's name for it). But in this last case, the case Levinas uses to condemn the whole of Heidegger's thought, it is neither "humanity" nor what we call humane interests that move us. Financial interests motivate whatever changes may be considered for at least some "enlightened" animal "processing plants," as we name our meat packing factories, our slaugh-

⁸³ As Adorno emphasises: "a sense of shame bids philosophy not to repress Georg Simmel's insight that its history shows amazingly few indications of the suffering of humankind." ND 153.

terhouses, where we process animals, more than a million an hour, every hour of every single day.⁸⁴

Hence Temple Grandin's recommendations for processing food animals are, conscientiously so, recommendations directed to or for the sake of the meatpacker's sense of economy. In this way, Grandin's protocols do not answer bourgeois sensibilities nor do they concern the calculations of utilitarian theorists (i.e., most philosophers who write about animal rights). The same restrictions apply, *ceteris paribus*, to the limited protocols of animal 'welfarism' prescribing minimum comfort levels—surely, one thinks, one must be joking. Not so—for animals subjected to vivisection.

But what considerations can I be writing for? Are animals *not* beneath notice? Are they not just or 'only' animals, *mere* animals, just as Adorno reminds us that ordinary Germans once dismissed their own concerns regarding those (not themselves! Remember the dark Tolstoian comfort of the thought that "it isn't me") who were no more than or merely, and 'only' Jews? There's Adorno's word again: *nur*.

Writing on Beethoven (and the conclusion of *Negative Dialectics* as I have cited underscores that this point is not incidental), Adorno reminds us of the danger of the idea of "dignity," and "worth" as we ascribe it to humanity over against the market worth of things and animals.⁸⁵ Heidegger's infamous comments about the "manufacture of corpses" in the "agricultural industry"⁸⁶ are damningly appropriate in a context we are anxious to overlook, especially given the offensive parallel in Heidegger's expression.⁸⁷ And Isaac Bashevis Singer offers a similar example as he writes that in relation to animals, "all people are Nazis;

⁸⁴ For the beginnings of such an account, see Matthew Scully and other references cited above.

⁸⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, (tr.) Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 80.

⁸⁶ See Heidegger's 1949 Bremen lecture "*Gefahr*," where Heidegger characterizes the victims of the Holocaust by reflecting on their deaths: "*Sterben Sie? Sie werden Bestandstücke eines Bestands der Fabrikation von Leichen. Sterben Sie? Sie werden in vernichtungslagern unauffällig liquidiert.*" Heidegger, *III. Dritter Abteilung: Unveröffentlichte Abhandlungen. Band 79: Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 56.

⁸⁷ See however Emmanuel Levinas, "As If Consenting to Horror," (tr.) Paula Wissing *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1988-89): 485-488, see especially 485.

for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka.”⁸⁸

Using Singer’s comparison and alluding to Heidegger’s parallel as Levinas had underscored it, although Levinas himself will not draw a parallel with animals much less indeed even to those *other* than Jews, Adorno adamantly holds to his analogy, emphasising as clearly as he can—which does not mean that we will hear it—“animals play for the idealist system virtually the same role as the Jews for fascism.”⁸⁹ Adorno always kept to the point of critical theory even if Habermas and others who write in the tradition of what is today left of the Frankfurt School, have begun to forget it, as critical theory is all about speaking against the party line, about finding a word for those of us who still utter our concerns about Iraq, Afghanistan, about still fighting a still undeclared war, our concerns about the wartime censorship that continues to reign in the United States, etc. For the fact is that rather than speaking truth to power, a blinking anxiety continues to grip those of us who might wish to murmur, against today’s party line, that we are ethically and politically concerned to advance the claims of animal suffering, sufferings brought about by what we human beings do and have done in and to the civilised, or let us simply say, *developed* world, domestic or not.

To illustrate what is blocked or repressed by “civilized education,” Adorno needs nothing more than a child’s memory (whose?) of an innkeeper systematically clubbing rats as they sought to escape from the flooding of the holes they hid in: “That this has been forgotten, that we no longer know what we used to feel before the dogcatcher’s van, is both the triumph of culture and its failure. Culture...cannot bear to be reminded of that zone, and precisely this is not to be reconciled with the conception culture has of itself.”⁹⁰ Civilised education in Adorno’s day and our own is, once again, all about such lessons in complicity.

As we have observed, our blindness to the suffering of animals is matched by our blindness to the suffering of ‘things.’ Indeed Immanuel Kant’s rigorously moral theory of modernity articulates the distinction between the inestimable worth of human dignity and the utterly calculable market value or cost of objects. “In the realm of ends, everything has

⁸⁸ Charles Patterson’s *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002) borrows its title from Singer’s “The Letter Writer.” For the quote here, see Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, 183.

⁸⁹ Adorno, *Beethoven*, 80.

⁹⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 366.

either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has dignity. That which is related to general human inclinations and needs has a market price.”⁹¹ While animals have market price, human beings are beyond price and are said to have dignity as Kant here explains: “But that which constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself does not have mere relative worth, i.e., a price, but an intrinsic worth, i.e., dignity.”⁹² The distinction, which goes back to Roman law,⁹³ continues to this day. And indeed, scholastically rigorous in his thinking, Kant goes on to argue that even if we have no “direct duties” to animals we do have duties to them as indirect duties to human beings:

Animal nature has analogies to human nature, and by doing our duties to animals in respect of manifestations which correspond to manifestations of human nature, we indirectly do our duty towards humanity. Thus, if a dog has served his master long and faithfully, his service, on the analogy of human service, deserves reward.⁹⁴

The “indirectness” of this relationship does not abrogate our responsibility to animals as Kant elsewhere repeats the same analogical argument—even where he excludes the notion of any but human duties by “indirectly” including animals: “Even gratitude for the long service of an

⁹¹ Kant, *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Kant Selections*, (tr. and ed.) Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 277.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ For a discussion of this Roman tradition, see Don Chalmers and Ida Ryuichi, “On the International Legal Aspects of Human Dignity,” in *Perspectives on Human Dignity: A Conversation* (eds.) Jeff Malpas and Norelle Lickiss (Frankfurt am Main: Springer, 2007), 157-168. There are attempts to find an argument for animal ethics in Kant and such readings are essential in the larger field of environmental ethics. See, among the several attempts on hand, what seems to be the most comprehensive effort to date, Martin Schoenfeld, “The Green Kant,” *Environmental Ethics*, 5th ed., (ed.) Paul and Louis Pojman (Mayfield: Toronto, 2006).

⁹⁴ See Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, (tr.) L. Infield (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 239-240.

old horse or dog (just as if they were members of the household) belongs indirectly to man's duty with regard to these animals."⁹⁵ Thus, as Adorno points out, "A capacity for moral self-determination is ascribed to human beings as an absolute advantage—as a moral profit—while covertly being used to legitimize *dominance*—dominance over nature."⁹⁶ This is the basis for the moral distinction between persons and things. And while the very definition of a corporation allows it to claim the status of personhood, animals cannot lay claim to this status. The animal body is a thing, a thing that does not think, that is, as Descartes also says, a thing that does not have feelings or even the phantasm of feeling.

Defining corporations as persons, with the rights of the same, and animals as machines, this same mechanical distinction continues to count on a legal as well as a practical level as Descartes' enduring legacy for medical vivisection and that means scientific research to this day. If Descartes, (seemingly or not so seemingly) placated the theologians of Paris, appearing to draw the line at human beings, the physiological and bio-medical sciences he set in motion observe no such exception in practice. Hence even with regard to human beings, what is determinative when it comes to defining life and death is the mechanical notion of brain death, a medical definition that does the regulative work of legitimating the technical accomplishment that it is to excise the still-beating heart from a still-breathing human being in order to transplant it into the chest of another patient.⁹⁷ Mechanisms all, one simply changes out the missing part.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, (tr.) M. J. Gregor (New York: Harper, 1964), 107.

⁹⁶ Adorno, *Beethoven*, 80.

⁹⁷ It is relevant that some of the research work that made such medical achievements possible on a neurological level was conducted by Karl Pribram and others who sectioned the brains of monkeys and still others who cut the heads of monkeys in order to transplant the one head to the body of the other, observing the blinking and the attempts to cry out, as these were the indications of how long the heads survived from one body to another. When I was at Stony Brook in the late 1970's, Pribram's work was cited (as it continues to be to this day, if with fewer details), in the textbooks.

⁹⁸ My students are Descartes' good heirs, and many tell me they would be happy to "upload" their brains (their brains?), to the internet and discard the pesky organic original, such is their trust in the mechanics of Cartesian metaphysics. See

From Descartes to Kant, the animal then is a thing, not a person. This thinghood holds for any animal no matter the scientific status of the claims to animal consciousness or for *animal* intelligence (notice how we qualify such terms, shall we think of the past language of *Jewish* consciousness or *Jewish* intelligence or—the still current discussion of—*women's* intelligence?) or and indeed for animal suffering. As for non-animal things, like trees and like plants in general but also like rivers and mountains, the issue is even more clear cut, hence even so-called “deep” ecologists tend to smile at extreme claims for the environment which itself tends only to be defined and defended as a means essential to so many aspects of human life, both now and in the future. Hence even well-meaning theorists pay little more than lip-service to the late Arne Naess’s claim that a mountain has dignity, and show impatience at the metaphorical notion, patent since Hesiod and Ovid that the earth itself can be raped, cut, gashed, looted, destroyed. Thus we dismiss as fools those who worry about cutting trees’ roots or the harm to the earth caused by mining.⁹⁹

Whatever are they talking about? Adorno does not need the subaltern or anything like a postmodern condition as an old school representative of critical theory highlighting our valuation of persons in the most patent sense, in our disregard for individual human dignity as in our collective blindness to the “suffering of humankind.” (ND, 366) It goes without saying, as Adorno tries to include just this point that we have, if possible, a still more incorrigible blindness when it comes to the sheer

for one enthusiastic account of the anticipated process in question, Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005), 198ff. The reference to Descartes makes it clear that Kurzweil’s technological singularity is only the latest blip in a long-standing confidence that life is merely a matter of mechanism. And when it comes to consciousness, we are so consummately, ecstatically, *intentionally* (to use the here indispensable language of phenomenology), beyond our physical happenstances that we forget where we are when we are “online.” So caught up are we in our technologically induced autism, playing with our cell-phones the minute the plane lands or whenever we find ourselves with an otherwise free moment, that we forget the everyday real world around us for the flat joys of the virtual, the unreal, the hyperreal world.

⁹⁹ See in addition to Naess, the work of Carolyn Merchant and Mary Daly among others.

idea of animal suffering, much less the deep suffering of the world.
(What again does that mean?)

Our scientists continue to raise the question of pain and suffering as a question, suggesting that the issue is an open one, suggesting that perhaps animals feel no pain. To determine this question, one repeats (to say it again), the same pain experiments, as undergrad and grad students do, semester in, semester out: all to research the possibility, just perhaps, that all the animal's agitation in such experiments is a sheer mechanical response to stimulus. The thesis of what philosophers call naturalism is only the flip side of human exceptionalism and both go hand in hand. And our words make all the difference here. Speaking of humans we speak of burning with heat or acid, or we speak of electrocution and even of torture, but to designate all this and still more, we opt for scientifically neutered terminology, calling whatever it is we do to the animal subjects of vivisection a "stimulus," as if it might be *scientifically* possible to prove that when burnt or harmed, i.e., that in response to a stimulus, animals are different than we are. Such enterprises are undertaken in patient bad faith and spite of the temerity of Descartes' language of mechanism that makes such a claim tautological in any case. For, mechanically, physiologically speaking—so comparative physiology tells us—we are the same. As we feel pain, animals feel pain, as we suffer, animals suffer, and contra the ancients who suggested otherwise, it may be that they suffer more than we do.

This blindness to the suffering of both humans and other animals corresponds to the casual or smiling nihilism of modern culture, a complacent nihilism that functions by means of nothing more exotic than forgetfulness. Philosophers, even those interested in political theory, moral philosophy, even social justice, have little interest in contemplating the working dynamics of our euphemistically named "Humane" Societies, or "shelters" (and why do we call them this?, where caring shelter is what is never granted to animals in such confines) but are so many institutions organised to *contain* the lives of animals, to catch "strays," to castrate/sterilise them *en masse*, to confine, and ultimately to exterminate them in daily holocausts, as our "shelters" do, including our pets, that is our "companion" animals (think of these as house slaves), the animals that are most "human" at least to some of us, at least some of them, at least some of the time.

If such humane societies (the SPCA in particular) must be

counted as today's version of Adorno's dogcatcher's van, we care even less about the agricultural practices of the "raising" of cattle, sheep, chickens, "farmed" fish, as we archaically, inaccurately describe the circumscribed penning of fish in tanks, lakes, oceans, or any of the whole horror that characterizes the technological "manufacture" of "corpses,"¹⁰⁰ to use Heidegger's language as he intended it. This factory manufacture literally yields the flesh of other beings for our use—all of them more and more mechanically or technologically raised, and always ultimately in order to take their lives at our convenience and for human "use," and let us not forget the exceptions, the ones we love, pets included. Thus and again, when our dogs, our cats, become inconvenient for us, we put them out of "their" misery, hastening a death we call a mercy. But whose suffering, whose discomfort is spared thereby?

The nihilism of civilised society breaks against more than the Lacanian Real: it stumbles over the vulgarity, the cheapness and the irreducibility of ontic reality. As Adorno puts it: culture "abhors stench because it stinks—because, as Brecht put it in a magnificent line, its mansion is built of dogshit. Years after this line was written, Auschwitz demonstrated irrefutably that culture has failed." (ND, 366-367)

For Adorno, the most recondite champion of the word as of needing to find a word, to find language, even, especially for what cannot be said: "Not even silence gets us out of the circle. In silence we simply use the state of objective truth to rationalize our subjective inca-

¹⁰⁰ See Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* [*Gesamtausgabe* 79] (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1994), 27. See for a discussion and further references, Babich, "Heidegger's Silence: Towards a Post-Modern Topology," in *Ethics and Danger* (eds.) Charles Scott and Arleen Dallery (Albany: State-University of New York Press, 1992), 83-106. The incendiary quote from this (then and still today) untranslated text, was cited in violation of authorized access, a matter of great consternation for the Heidegger family and even greater consternation for Heidegger's critics. Nevertheless the breach, in the form of a citation included in a book (itself otherwise little debated which says more about professional philosophy's lack of interest in the question of Heidegger and technology than anything else) inspired an academic scandal as excerpts can do (a-contextuality adds to this) in the Winter 1989 issue of *Critical Inquiry* 16/2, on the theme Heidegger and Nazism and featuring Gadamer, Derrida, Habermas, and, most significantly, Levinas's discussions of Heidegger's failure to speak about his Nazi past.

capacity, once more degrading truth into a lie.”(ND, 367)

Silence is the means we use to pass over the inconveniences of things we do not like to take account of, all the suffering of the world, animal and human. And it is worth recalling that Heidegger was incapable of getting past the first sentence of the first aphorism of Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power*: “Great things demand that one must either be silent about them or speak with greatness.”¹⁰¹ For his part in advance of Heidegger here, Adorno simply observed that Nietzsche’s consequent point that to speak with greatness would entail speaking both “cynically and with innocence.”¹⁰²

And it will take both cynicism and innocence to begin to raise the question of suffering today, human suffering and the suffering of other animals alike.

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¹⁰¹Nietzsche, KSA 13, 11 [411], 189. The chapter remains open on the relation between this line from *The Will to Power* and Wittgenstein’s silence. But see P.M.S. Hacker, ‘Wittgenstein and the Autonomy of Humanistic Understanding’, in R. Allen and M. Turvey eds., *Wittgenstein: Theory and the Arts* (London: Routledge, 2001), 39-74.

¹⁰² Adorno himself addresses the philosophical claim of Nietzsche’s cynic (contra Hegel, always a ginger undertaking for Adorno) and Peter Sloterdijk takes this further in his *Critique of Cynical Reason*, (tr.) Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). See for a discussion, Babich, “Sloterdijk’s Cynicism: Diogenes in the Marketplace” forthcoming in *Sloterdijk Now*, (ed.) Stuart Elden, (London: Continuum, 2011).