

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE “GENIUS AESTHETICS”

IN ADORNO’S PHILOSOPHY

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The Reconstruction of the “Genius Aesthetics” in Adorno’s Philosophy

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Abstract

Özge Özdüzen, “The Reconstruction of the “Genius Aesthetics” in

Adorno’s Philosophy”

This study claims that the Jena Romanticist philosophy created a unique subject within the history of philosophy. The romantic subject has a certain mission which is “romanticizing the world.” This unique subject emerges in opposition to the Enlightenment values since the Jena Romanticists were one of the most prominent reactionaries of the Enlightenment thought. Their concept of *Bildung*, however, implies that the Jena Romanticist philosophy is still consisted of universal ideas. In that sense, it could be argued that there is a certain ambivalence in Jena Romanticist philosophy which unfolds itself especially in the ironic existence of the Romantic artist. On the one hand, the Romantic subject is a self-sufficient, empowered and all-encompassing subject. On the other hand, it knows that the world is finite and “to romanticize the world” is an unattainable goal.

In this thesis it is maintained that, although on the surface Adorno is critical of the Jena Romanticist subject and, accordingly, of the concept of the Romanticist artist, he also embraces an influence of the Romanticist concept of artist. This is mainly because of his definition of “the autonomous artist” who is isolated from the society. Together with the artist, the expert listeners are also regarded as very much away from the other listeners. Furthermore, art’s being so remote from the society in its autonomous status also results in the isolation of the artist and the abandonment of society to its own. All of the above are the most important reasons for arguing that Adorno’s aesthetics comes closer to the “Genius Aesthetics.”

Tez Özeti

Özge Özdüzen, “Adorno’nun Felsefesinde “Deha Estetiği”nin Yeniden İnşa Edilmesi”

Bu çalışma Erken Alman Romantizmi akımının felsefe tarihinde eşi benzeri olmayan bir özne doğurduğunu öne sürmektedir. Sözü geçen romantik özne kendine “dünyayı romantikleştirme” misyonu biçmiştir. Erken Alman Romantikleri, Aydınlanma düşüncesinin en belirgin karşıtları oldukları için bu eşsiz öznenin Aydınlanma değerlerine karşı ortaya çıktığı söylenebilir. Ancak, *Bildung* kavramı Erken Alman Romantizmi’nin az da olsa hala evrensel değerlerden oluştuğunu ima etmektedir. Bu açıdan sözü geçen akımda, özellikle romantik sanatçının ironik varoluşunda ortaya çıkan belirli bir kararsızlık veya tutarsızlık olduğu söylenebilir. Bir yandan romantik özne kendi kendine yeten, güçlü ve her şeye muktedir bir öznedir. Öte yandan ise en büyük ideallerinden biri olan “dünyayı romantikleştirme” idealinin ulaşılmaz olduğunun bilincindedir.

Bu tezde öne sürülen, Adorno ilk bakışta her ne kadar Erken Alman Romantizmi akımının çizdiği özne ve buna paralel olarak sanatçı kavramına karşı duruyormuş gibi görünse bile Romantik sanatçı kavramından belirli bir ölçüde etkilendiğidir. Bunun en önemli sebebi Adorno’nun toplumdan uzakta tasvir ettiği “özerk sanatçı” kavramıdır. Sanatçıyla beraber uzman dinleyici de diğer dinleyicilerden oldukça farklı bir biçimde kurgulanmıştır. Buna ek olarak sanatın özerk statüsünde toplumdan ayırık olma durumu, sanatçının izole olmasına ve toplumu kendi başına bırakmasına yol açmıştır. Tüm bu anlatılanlar Adorno’nun estetiğinin “Deha Estetiği”ne yaklaşmasının önemli sebepleridir.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the feudal times, art was not an autonomous social institution but was subsumed within other institutions such as the state or the church. From the time of the Renaissance onwards, art has gradually become more independent as a social institution. Within the art scene the Jena Romantic¹ movement can be said to represent the culmination of this tendency of emancipation from other institutions. For the first time in the history of art, “autonomy” has become a decisive factor behind the fate of the artworks. The most prominent outcome of this schema is obviously the artistic freedom of the artist. “At the point at which art became more or less irrelevant to the services of the institutions of society, the artist acquired freedom from the interference of the state.”² Although autonomy in art is an advantageous achievement, it also leads to unforeseen effects. In achieving such a freedom the artist started to be more and more isolated from the society. At the same time this way the artist started to have contempt for the masses.

The modern artist is also analogous to the Jena romantic artist. The modern artist is also “a-fly-on-the-wall”³ figure within the society just like his Romantic

¹ German Romanticism is consisted of three main circles, one of them is the Early German Romanticism. In this thesis the phase will be referred to as Jena Romanticism and the members of it as Jena Romanticists. Furthermore when Adorno’s similarity to this movement will be mentioned, the Jena Romanticist aesthetics will sometimes be referred to as “Genius Aesthetics” in order to emphasize the great role that the artist plays in this tradition. In fact there are many philosophers and poets who fall under the category of Jena Romanticism. The main figures of this movement can said to be the brothers Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, their wives Caroline and Dorothea, the theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, the poets and novelists Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), the theorist of the fine arts Wilhelm Wackenroder, and the philosopher Friedrich Schelling. (Richards, 17) In this thesis when Jena Romanticism will be uttered, only Novalis and F. Schlegel will be meant.

² Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (Routledge, 1998), 3.

counterpart. In other words, just like the romantic artist, the modern artist is through with the worldly matters and he is retired. In this thesis project, the fundamental emphasis will be on inquiring the similarity between the Jena Romanticist concept of the artist and the particular description of the modern artist by Adorno. It should be noted, however, that it is not the purpose of this project to analyze Adorno's "potential" Romanticist roots. There are obviously no such roots which can clearly be traced from his criticism on the romantic subject. Rather, the main purpose of this thesis is to reveal the analogy between the Jena Romantic concept of artist and that of Adorno although on the surface it seems to be an unattainable task.

"Of all "isms" that populate Western art of the past two centuries, Romanticism has always been the most difficult to define."⁴ It can be said that this is mainly because of the ambivalence of the Romantic movement which owes its ambivalence to the lack of a "certain well-defined goal". In that sense Romanticism can be defined as "a certain state of mind rather than a conscious pursuit of a goal."⁵ To lack "a conscious pursuit of a goal" implies that Romanticism in general and the Jena Romanticism in particular, are not grounded upon firm foundations which will be discussed in the first section of the first chapter. In order to elaborate this, it should be pointed out that Romanticism was a reaction to the Enlightenment thought.

For that reason the focal point of the first chapter will be to analyze one of the most overarching ideals of Enlightenment thought, namely rationality by the light of

³ *Fly on the wall* is a style of documentary-making used in film and television. The name derived from the idea that events are seen candidly, as a fly on a wall might see them. In the purest form of fly-on-the-wall documentary-making, the camera crew works as unobtrusively as possible; however, it is also common for participants to be interviewed, often by an off-camera voice. (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fly_on_the_wall)

⁴ Horst Woldemar Janson, *History of Art* (Thames and Hudson, 1997), 672.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Romanticist philosophy. It will be argued that the Romanticist philosophy is not completely in contradiction with the Enlightenment concept of rationality. Originally Novalis and F. Schlegel were foes of the Enlightenment concept of rationality because of their opposition with first principles. Nevertheless the fact that the Romanticist concept of *Bildung* constitutes the core of the Romanticist philosophy, which can be defined as the education of humanity as a whole, it appears that the Jena Romanticist philosophy still embraces the traces of the Enlightenment thought. In that sense, their relation with the concept of rationality is not that much clear cut, it will be argued that it is rather ambivalent.

Adorno, on the other hand, is tremendously afraid of the expansion of the Enlightenment thought through the veins of society. It will be argued in the third chapter that this is mainly because the hegemony of the Enlightenment gives birth to its anti-hegemony which is described as “mass culture” in Adorno’s framework. This anti-Enlightenment culture culminates in *Auschwitz* experience. As a result, even though Adorno is not an antagonist of the Enlightenment thought, his fear of the growth of fascism leads him to doubt the validity of the Enlightenment concept of rationality.

The reason why the similarities and differences of Adorno’s and Jena Romanticists’ viewpoints regarding the concept of rationality will be emphasized is that their criticism on this notion would provide further ground on the way to comprehending their concept of subject and ultimately their concept of the artist. Before going through a comprehensive analysis of the Jena Romanticist concept of the artist and its similarity to Adorno’s concept of the artist, the mode of the romantic artist will be briefly discussed throughout the fourth chapter. The Jena Romanticist artist bears an ironic existence which implies that the Jena Romanticist artist makes a

mockery of everything including him and the other subjects. In presenting the romantic irony, the characteristic of the romantic artist will also be briefly mentioned because these two concepts are inextricably intertwined. Furthermore another reason for explaining the romantic irony at length is that the romantic irony clearly demonstrates the fact that there is a wide gap between the ideals of the Jena romanticist thought and their final achievements. This is also parallel to the inconsistencies and under achievements in Adorno's theory.

In the fifth chapter, Adorno's general criticism on the romantic concept of the artist will be introduced. Upon a closer glance, Adorno's own concept of the subject will unfold within this chapter. It is going to be argued that in Adorno's theory, however, a controversial concept of artist arises from Adorno's general thoughts on art and its appeal on the masses throughout the capitalist era. It will be argued that, in fact, this underlying concept of artist creates a discrepancy to his criticism on the romantic subject.

The aim of the sixth chapter is, accordingly, to introduce the romantic artist in relation to the romantic concept of rationality and irony. The most noteworthy aspect of the Jena Romantic artist is his goal of romanticizing the world. In that sense it can be claimed that the romantic artist has a prominent role within the society, which is the fundamental reason of the fact that the romantic artist considers himself over and above the masses. Such a viewpoint on the society also reflects the Jena Romanticist viewpoint on the art in general. It can be said that since one can talk about a considerable amount of contempt for the masses, art also takes its share from such a picture. It is attributed a domain in which the artwork is separated from the worldly affairs and isolated to the artist's own realm. In such a realm, the artist becomes the most significant figure in producing, judging and criticizing the artwork.

Throughout the last chapter the parallels between the Jena Romanticist concept of the artist and Adorno's concept of the artist will be presented. It will be argued that the main line of similarity between these two distinct traditions lies on the relation of the artist with the society. In Adorno's characterization of the artist, the listeners or the audience of artworks in general are underestimated except the expert type of listeners. This is mainly because the mass culture is threatening all the layers of society. In order to protect the society from such degeneration, Adorno's suggestion was to preserve art a separate realm in which it can freely cherish its own existence without the intervention of other institutions such as state, church etc. In doing that, however, art has become so much separated from the worldly affairs. It will be argued that this has unexpected results in that the artwork is stuck with the artist's moods and tendencies of the market. Obviously this was what Adorno attempted to avoid in the first place. This is analogous to the ironic existence of the romantic artist because as it will be displayed in the romantic irony section, the Jena Romanticist philosophy also ends up promoting an ideal which does not correspond to their ultimate achievement. This, I believe, constitutes one of the principal lines of analogy between Adorno's and Jena Romanticists' concepts of the artist.

CHAPTER 2

JENA ROMANTICISM AND THE CONCEPT OF RATIONALITY

Introduction

Within the Jena romanticist framework, rationality is a concept which has an ambivalent function. In their writings, the Jena romanticists do not directly emphasize the concept of rationality. Rather, their concept of rationality can be derived from their viewpoints on the first principle, *Bildung*, art and philosophy. On the one hand, one of the most prominent aims of the Jena Romantics was to emancipate philosophy from the overarching ideals of the Enlightenment. In doing that, they underlined their opposition to Fichte's notion of first principles in particular and the Enlightenment notion of philosophy in general. The underlying implication of the fact that the Jena romanticists are strictly in opposition to first principles is roughly that they insist upon change and they are not in favor of ever-constant ideals and principles which would possibly dominate the rest of the system. Rather than insisting on one single first principle, they propose an interaction between at least two principles.

The romanticists also insist upon a unity between poetry and philosophy. Their emphasis upon such a unity also means that they break away from the uniform and fixed norms as well. In this case their aim is to diverge from the dominant modes of comprehending philosophy. Before the romanticist attack on the definition and aim of philosophy, what shall be included within the boundaries of philosophy has long been well defined. Rather than insisting on consolidating the relationship between philosophy and science like their antecedents, the Jena romanticists' general purpose was to build a relationship between philosophy and poetry. Their aim as

such is also an evidence of their distance from completed systems and well-defined ideals.

However, this is not to say that in romantic framework one can assume a complete dissolution of reason. The fact that their ambivalent concept of reason –as this project considers it to be- unfolds itself especially in the concept of *Bildung* which will be focused throughout this project. As the Jena romanticists' criticism of the conventional understanding of reason, philosophy and art takes its basis from Fichte's philosophy, firstly Fichte's notion of the first principle and accordingly his notion of the subject will be briefly presented.

Fichte and the Still Water of the First Principle

In Fichte's framework philosophy has a certain objective; that is establishing grounds for all experience. For Fichte the certainty of all judgments results from their being unconditioned and well-established. In Fichte's system there are three fundamental principles. In the first place, there must be a first principle which functions as a ground for other principles. The certainty and unconditionality of this first principle must be clear cut, so if it was to serve as a ground for other judgments; the certainty of these judgments would also be out of question. This unconditioned first principle is the ground of all sciences and it also provides warranty for the preservation of the certainty of all human knowledge. The first principle "is the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge."⁶ In this framework, the "I" has the absolute causality which means that it is not determined by any other cause. "Everything that exists, exists only for an "I", and what is supposed to exist for an

⁶ J.G.Fichte, *Science of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 93.

“I” can only exist through an “I”.⁷ As the ground of all there is, the “I” posits itself and at the same time it posits the external world. However, the “I” posits its own being unconditionally whereas it posits the external world conditionally. In order to go beyond ‘I am I’, “I” has to posit its negation. In that sense the “not-I” is the second principle of the entire *Wissenschaftslehre*. It should further be pointed out that other than positing itself, the “I” must posit a world outside itself. According to Horstmann:

“For Fichte the “I”, over and above its positing itself, has the ability to posit unconditionally the “not-I”, that is, it has the power, by what Fichte calls “an absolute act”, to counter-posit something that is exactly the opposite of, or in opposition to, the “I”. This act of counter-positing is the object of the second principle. The “I” is also in the position to posit unconditionally the divisibility of the “I” and the “not-I”. This idea of divisibility is taken to be the third principle.”⁸

In that sense in Fichte’s system there is also a third principle which is the “I-hood”.

Fichte argues that “only with the third act can the subject posit itself as an absolutely free being as the sole ground of something.”⁹

According to the Fichtean system, the “I”’s spontaneous activity of positing itself and the “not-I” is a process that holds for all rational beings. In order to put the difference between the “I” and the “not-I” in better terms, it can be assumed that whereas “the first activity relates immediately to the “I” as such, it relates mediately to the “not-I”.”¹⁰ This is not to say that the “not-I” is a passive entity. Yet there is a certain condition of “not-I”’s being active. “The “not-I” is active only in so far as it is

⁷ J.G.Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24.

⁸ R.P. Horstmann, “The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling”, in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 125.

⁹ J.G.Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, 40.

¹⁰ J.G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 227.

posited as active by the self.”¹¹ The reason why the “I” posits a world other than itself is because in order to realize its act of self-positing, the “I” has to posit a world in opposition to itself. With its self-positing activity the “I” ascribes a free efficacy to itself. However, without ascribing a free efficacy to others, the “I”’s ascription of a free efficacy to itself remains incomplete. To summarize, in Fichte’s framework self-consciousness is a self-sufficient concept which establishes ground for all other propositions that follow it. It must be underlined that self-consciousness of the “I” even provides ground for external world and it also endows it with certainty.

Schlegel’s *Wechselerweis* versus First Principle

F. Schlegel, who is one of the most significant figures of the Jena Romanticism, strongly opposes the tendency of grounding philosophy upon a first principle. The reason why such a criticism of Schlegel is vital for the purposes of this project is because in this way he also criticizes Fichte’s notion of the subject. By criticizing Fichte’s notion of subject, Schlegel explicates his own notion of subject and in explicating his notion of the subject; his notion of rationality comes into light accordingly. In opposition to Fichte’s claim that there is a first principle which grounds philosophy, Schlegel points out that one cannot ground philosophy on one single certain principle. Rather, in Schlegel’s theory, there must be an ever-changing interaction between principles. In other words, instead of a constant first principle, there must be a never-ending relation between at least two principles.

The interaction between principles is also an indication of the interaction between the subject and the world. In Fichte’s system such an interaction does not seem to be as essential as it is in Schlegel’s framework. This is because rather than

¹¹ Ibid., 159.

the interaction itself, the “I” appears to have the priority in Fichte’s framework. For Schlegel, on the other hand, the relationship between the knowing-subject and the world has to be presupposed and it is in fact one of the core issues of Schlegel’s philosophy. In this regard, the knowing subject’s own activity in which it posits itself, should not have priority before the activity which relates it to the world or to the objects. Here it is assumed that the fact that with its activity the “I” posits the “not-I” indicates a certain dependency of the “not-I” on the “I”. At this point it can be assumed that it is Schlegel who added “a dribblet of the concepts of change interaction and mediality to Fichte’s framework,”¹² since his assumption is that the never-ending interaction between principles is absolutely necessary.

To put it more clearly, according to Schlegel at least two principles have to interact in order to secure knowledge. This is what Schlegel calls *Wechselerweis* which is “the central structure of his philosophy.”¹³ *Wechselerweis* is Schlegel’s alternative to the absolute first principle. The underlying implication of the concept of *Wechselerweis* is that only one principle cannot lead us to the ultimate truth. However, if Schlegel was to assume that there are no principles that would lead us to truth, such a claim might have entailed a skeptic stance on the part of the Jena Romanticists. However, Schlegel’s concept of *Wechselerweis* “does not indicate that there is no truth to be found but what is assumed with it is simply the fact that the use of a first principle can lead us to error.”¹⁴ In order to prevent this, following F.

¹² E. Millan, “Friedrich Schlegel’s View of Early Romantic Philosophy: A Study on the Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism” (Phd Diss., University of New York at Buffalo, 1998), 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Millan, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (State University of New York Press, 2007), 135.

Schlegel, there must be a never-ending interaction between principles, ideas and concepts; that is the *Wechselerweis*. Only in this way one can approach the truth.

Furthermore, rather than grounding philosophy upon a first principle, Schlegel insists on a “history of philosophy” in order to ground philosophy. In that sense, annihilating the first principles does not mean that philosophy is situated upon a slippery ground or is not grounded upon anything at all. To elaborate this, it must be said that for Schlegel grounding philosophy upon history of philosophy implies that it is necessary and vital to compare philosophical claims with various other philosophical systems or theories. With such an approach, philosophy will have a realm which is independent of speculative efforts or domination of any one philosophical system. In that sense, as stated above, in Schlegel’s framework “philosophy cannot be based on a single, absolute first principle.”¹⁵ If it does so, it commits itself to dogmatism. This is because positing a notion of an absolute or a first principle would limit knowledge and truth. Schlegel’s philosophical taxonomy puts him into a position of being liberated from the confines of any one fixed and ever-constant system. One of the most significant conditions of such emancipation lies in a principle’s passing through the filters of history.

Wechselerweis and the Concept of Change in Jena Romantic Philosophy

Upon a closer glance, what seem to arise from Schlegel’s concept of *Wechselerweis* are the priority of the concept of change in Schlegel’s philosophy in particular and its priority within Jena romanticist philosophy in general. In that sense it would rather be an injustice to the romantic philosophy to assume that there is a fixed notion of rationality which might be labeled as an immutable notion of rationality. If

¹⁵Ibid., 150.

“immutability” was the case with principles such as rationality, the interaction between principles would be totally unnecessary. The concept of rationality cannot be considered as constant and immune to historical processes and to different individuals. In that sense it might be assumed that Schlegel’s theory of *Wechselerweis* is an indicator of the fact that one cannot talk about a complete and clear-cut definition of rationality in Jena Romantic philosophy.

For Novalis, in order to develop categories in a more certain and precise manner, moving from the particular to the general should be preferred over the inclination of beginning from the general and arriving at the particular. In that regard, in his *Fichte Studies*, Novalis also proposes an alternative to the Fichtean system. According to Novalis, instead of positing an all-encompassing first principle, it is more suitable to observe every step both forwards and backwards. “Philosophy should therefore consist of a continuous back and forth movement”¹⁶ rather than being dependent solely upon a backward or a forward movement. In Novalis’s words, “Fichte has taken the analytic route, following a synthetic principle. I take the analytic and synthetic way one and the same time. I observe every step forward and backward.”¹⁷ At this point it might be assumed that Novalis’s approach is on a parallel ground with Schlegel’s criticism of the first principles. What makes their theories similar in terms of their approach to the first principles and rationality, is their emphasis on the interaction between various principles or steps. Where Schlegel talks about it by using the term *Wechselerweis*, Novalis explicates his viewpoint on the same subject by saying that within a plenitude of principles, one has to move both in forward and backward directions at the same time.

¹⁶ Dalia T. Nassar, “The Ontology of Presentation: The Ontology of the Finite and the Infinite in German Romantic Philosophy” (Phd diss., Boston Collage, 2007), 32.

¹⁷ Novalis, *Fichte Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 90.

Unity of Philosophy and Poetry

In order to comprehend the significance of the concept of “change” in romantic philosophy, it is also crucial to construe the relationship between poetry and philosophy. For Schlegel, “the whole history of modern poetry is a running commentary on the following brief philosophical text: all art should become science and all science art; poetry and philosophy should be made one.”¹⁸ In Novalis’s framework in order not to limit itself, philosophy should hinge on poetry. Parallel to Schlegel, for Novalis poetry and philosophy are inseparable from one another. “If the diversity of the methods increases –the thinker eventually knows how to make everything, out of each thing –the philosopher becomes a poet. Schlegel also claims that “whatever can be done while poetry and philosophy are separated has been done and accomplished. So the time has come to unite the two.”¹⁹ In that sense, from now on the conventional understanding of philosophy and poetry should strictly be avoided.

In Novalis’s framework the poet is “the highest degree of thinker.”²⁰ The underlying implication of the romantic insistence upon a union between poetry and philosophy is a rebellion against the long-prevailing disdain of poetry among philosophers. As it is obvious, such a disdain is not only a disdain of one of the two disciplines over the other one, but rather it is a disdain of a so-called linear, determinate and well-established system upon a so-called indeterminate, slippery and disordered system.

¹⁸ Friedrich Schlegel, *Frederich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments* (University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 14.

¹⁹ Novalis, *Fichte Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 104.

²⁰ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia* (State University of New York Press, 2007), xxiii.

In this project the reason why the romanticist's insistence on the unity between poetry and philosophy is emphasized is that it is considered as an indicator of the romanticist understanding of the concept of rationality. Instead of a well-established and self-sufficient ground such as science, the romantic philosophy relies on a seemingly more slippery ground such as poetry. Parallel to this, it can be assumed that, within romantic framework one cannot talk about a fixed notion of rationality which holds for the whole of humanity at all times. One of the most obvious reasons of this is the fact that one also cannot generalize "humanity" as a fixed and ever-constant group of people.

In that sense, within Jena romanticist framework, it is rather an arduous task to fixate a permanent and determinate concept of rationality. As it is evident, the romantic insistence on the unity of philosophy and poetry is one of the many aspects of the reason why the romantics are labeled the "irrationalists" of their own time. For instance, according to Isaiah Berlin, "romanticists undermine all universal and necessary laws of reason and make personal decision the sole arbiter of truth and value."²¹

Bildung, Art and Their Relation to the Romanticist Concept of Rationality

Isaiah Berlin's claim as to the irrationality of the Jena romanticist school is rather a deeply pretentious one. Even though the Jena romanticists might be said to have shaken the grounds of the long-lasting laws of reason, their approach upon reason is not that clear cut. This is mainly because of their concept of *Bildung*. The concept of *Bildung* is a vital concept in romantic framework in that it concerns the education of humanity as a whole. *Bildung* is one of the most important concepts especially in

²¹ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 64,

Schlegel's framework. Schlegel announces that the *Bildung* alone is the highest good. In Schlegel's words "*Bildung* or evolution of freedom is the necessary result of all human activity and suffering."²²

In his study of Greek Poetry, Schlegel lays out the stages of modern poetry. For F. Schlegel modern poetry has gone through two stages and at his time it was at the beginning of the crisis of the transition from the second to the third period.

According to F. Schlegel:

"in the first period the one-sided national character present throughout the entirety of *Bildung* had the decisive upper hand. In the second period, the theory and imitation of the ancients ruled to a great extent the entire mass: but subjective nature was still too powerful to be able to obey fully the objective law; it was bold enough, however, to slip in under the name of the law. The resultant anarchy of all individual styles, of all subjective theories and of the different imitations of the ancients and the eventual effacement and destruction of one-sided nationality characterizes the crisis of the transition from the second to the third period. In the third period objectivity is truly attained—at least in individual aspects of the entire mass: objective theory, objective imitation, objective art and objective taste."²³

Aesthetic theory seems to reach the point where at least an objective achievement cannot be far.

It is obvious that masses cannot educate themselves within this picture. In order to enable the ideal of *Bildung*, it is obvious that there must be some actors behind its promotion among the members of the society. These actors in society are mainly the artists within the Jena Romanticist framework. As it was stressed above, the reason why the Jena Romanticists cannot easily be characterized as irrationalists, lies in their ambivalent notion of *Bildung*. Their understanding of *Bildung* allows us to comprehend their ambivalent notion of rationality. On the one hand, the romantic

²² Friedrich Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (State University of New York Press, 2001), 25.

²³ *Ibid.*, 89.

ideal of *Bildung* comprises the development of our human powers which all human beings should share. On the other hand, *Bildung* is related to all our distinctive individual powers which are unique to each of us as different human beings.

One of the main reasons why romanticists can be considered as bearing a parallel position to the *Jena* Romanticists when it comes to rationality lies in Schlegel's concept of art itself. To put it briefly, Schlegel does not believe that perfection is achievable in art. He defines romantic poetry as being in an eternal state of becoming rather than being fixated upon a certain ideal or principle. Yet, although Schlegel and other *Jena* romanticist figures take *Bildung* as a core concept in their framework, one can still talk about a certain ideal that is put forward in order to form society into a cohesive whole. Even though they seem to oppose Enlightenment thought, their ideal of educating the humanity as a whole, which they seem to inherit from Schiller, puts them into a parallel position with the Enlightenment thought. In that sense it might be assumed that rather than rejecting enlightenment concept of reason altogether, the romanticists' aim is to "refine" it.

The "Refinement" of the Enlightenment Concept of Reason

In *Jena* Romanticist framework, the fact that a concept such as *Bildung* has been announced as the highest good within romantic philosophy displays that the concept of rationality is still at work within society. This is because, even though the Romanticists seem to show a considerable distance to the Enlightenment thought in terms of their concepts of subject, philosophy, rationality etc, their viewpoint on the possibility of "education of the humanity as a whole" enables them to bear a similar attitude. Their insistence upon the "education of the humanity as a whole" might be

said to presuppose a notion of reason which is meant to be shared by all the members of society.

Even though within romantic philosophy the individual character of human beings is highly valued, the concept of *Bildung* implies the contrary of this since the main implication of the concept of *Bildung* is to provide ample education for everyone. In that sense it unfolds the romantic understanding of a “humanity as a whole” approach, like their antecedents; the Enlightenment philosophers. But this is not to say that the Jena Romanticists are completely in favor of unity in society. This is mainly because rather than aiming at a total “subordination of the individual to the ends of the group, the romantics championed an ethic of individualism of divine egoism.”²⁴ Besides, according to Schlegel the attempt at grasping of the whole always misleads the humanity. This is mainly because of the significance of the concept of change and emphasis of the individuality in Schlegel’s philosophy.

The Role of Reason within Society

Besides bearing parallels to the Enlightenment thought, which is assumed to be inherent in the concept of *Bildung*, it should be pointed out that the romanticist thought is also indebted to Spinoza’s philosophy. In their criticisms of Fichte, one of the most significant aims of the Jena Romanticists was to emancipate nature from the confines of the subject. In doing that, they did not attempt to ground their system upon science but rather their philosophy was backed up by poetry. Yet this does not mean that they kept distance from science. As a synthesis of Fichtean and Spinozan philosophies, one of the main undertakings of the Jena romanticist philosophy was a synthesis of science and nature. According to Onur Küçükarslan,

²⁴ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 51.

“admiration of Fichte was a common attitude at the time, but respecting Spinoza was a really unique position for the Romantics. F. Schlegel clearly expressed his positive feelings for Spinoza: “I barely comprehend how one can be a poet without admiring Spinoza, without loving him, and becoming entirely his.”²⁵

In that sense other than Fichte, Spinoza provided the Jena Romanticists with inspiration. What attracted the Jena Romanticists to Fichte is his notion of subjectivity and freedom. “What they admired in Spinoza was his Spinoza’s synthesis of religion and science. The Jena Romanticists believed, Spinoza’s pantheism resolved the traditional conflict between reason and faith, by divinizing nature and naturalizing the divine.”²⁶ The synthesis of these two traditions also implies a synthesis of reason and faith or feelings. To my mind, therefore, this synthesis appears to have a certain level of ambivalence.

In that sense, it might be pointed out that even though their viewpoint seems to be parallel to Adorno’s when it comes to the concept of reason, in fact it is not that much similar. This is mainly because rather than making a dialectical criticism of the Enlightenment notion of rationality, the romanticists intended to make a synthesis of reason and faith or feelings. They intended “to make a religion out of science by divinizing the nature, and a science out of religion by naturalizing the divine.”²⁷ In that sense, the fact that they criticized enlightenment with regards to the enlightenment concept of rationality like Adorno and Horkheimer did does not mean that Jena Romanticists are on the same level with Adorno and Horkheimer.

²⁵ Onur Küçükarslan, “Aestheticism and the Romantic Absolute: The New Mythology of Early German Romanticism” (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2008), 85. Küçükarslan quotes F. Schlegel, “Dialogue on Poetry,” in *German Romantic Criticism* by A. L. Willson, ed. (New York: Continuum, 1982).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁷ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 134.

The fact that the romanticists did not lay aside the concept of reason does not indicate that reason was attributed a positive task by the romantic circle. In their framework, reason has rather a negative duty; it combats prejudice, dogmatism and superstition. In romanticist picture, reason's duty is not altogether overlooked. According to this schema, despite being a negative duty, reason still has a certain role in the society. As it appears, reason's role is a regulative one in the society within the Jena romanticist framework. In other words, reason's role might be said to alleviate the possible conflicts that might arise within society. While attributing a negative role to the reason, the romanticists assigned a positive role to art which culminates in their concept of *Bildung*.

The fact that one can still talk about the existence of a certain regulative role of reason brings about another significant discussion. It is the controversial discussion as to whether it makes the Jena romanticists followers of Enlightenment thought or not. However, in this project it is assumed that due to the ambivalent nature of their notion of reason, they cannot exactly be classified as followers of Enlightenment tradition. This is partly because unlike the Enlightenment tradition, they position art and aesthetic education accordingly as having the uppermost weight in their system. In that sense, in such a framework feelings seem to acquire priority over reason since feelings lie at the core of the appreciation of artworks for the Jena romanticists.

Accordingly one of the most crucial aims of Hölderlin's and Novalis's philosophies was to intertwine feelings and desires with Kantian framework which is dominated by the all-encompassing wings of reason. In that regard, the fact that the Jena romanticists have refined the Enlightenment concept of reason does not bring them to the same position with the Enlightenment philosophers. From a very general

outlook, rather than being considered as followers of the Enlightenment thought, it is better to assume that the Jena Romanticist were one of the most prominent reactionaries to the Enlightenment thought.

CHAPTER 3

ADORNO, ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE CONCEPT OF RATIONALITY

General Remarks on the Enlightenment Thought

In their book, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer criticize the most tenacious ideals of the Enlightenment, especially “rationality.” Before going through their criticism of the Enlightenment thought, the main line of enlightenment notion of rationality will be briefly laid out. Within the context of Enlightenment thought reason has become the main source of authority. “Reason serves as a general tool, useful for the manufacturing of all other tools, firmly directed towards its end, as fateful as the precisely calculated movement of material production, whose result for mankind is beyond calculation.”²⁸ Reason, in that sense, is utilized as a catalyst for the production and deployment of the other tools of the Enlightenment.

According to the Enlightenment thought, neither religion nor any other practice or institution but only reason can account for everything in nature. Its authority is so enormous that it can challenge the ground of all the previous establishments. However, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the Enlightenment thought indicates the opening up of a new barbarism mainly because of its attempt to exterminate all the norms and values inherent within society and its inclination towards establishing an ever-constant system.

Before the Enlightenment thought, there was a tendency of taking beliefs as a source of knowledge. Besides, beliefs were also being taken as a standard of truth. Beginning with the Enlightenment line of thought, rather than an unstable and a contingent norm or mechanism, “reason has started to be the sovereign standard of

²⁸ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso, 1997), 30.

truth and other than that, it also became the final court of intellectual appeal.”²⁹ The main reason underlying all the power of reason is the fact that it is regarded as universal and objective. According to the Enlightenment thought, other than being a standard of truth, reason operates as a basis of morality, politics and religion. If reason were not to be the ground of all these institutions, all of them would fall victim to dissociation, degeneration and they might even be the victim to chaos within societies. “The constitutive features of enlightened reason became disenchantment, self sufficient rationalism and universalism.”³⁰

On the one hand, Enlightenment thinkers were anxious about the fact that myths have been surrounding society throughout the feudal times. On the other hand, it was terrified by the feasible chaos that might spring due to the lack of any regulative norms or values if myths are strictly avoided. In that sense, Enlightenment thought can be considered as a turbulence of criticism, a criticism of what is traditional and settled within the feudal society. It is a web of criticism which is directed to the settled rules but it also aims at constructing other regulative rules in order to dominate society and also nature. The most general aims of enlightenment are “emancipation from fear and the establishment of humankind’s sovereignty.”³¹

Enlightenment thought presupposes that everyone has the same sense of reason and it assumes that it is totally appropriate that members of society can be bureaucratically managed and determined by it. Assuming that humanity shares the same rationality implies that the conclusions which are appropriate to be drawn by a member of the society are also the conclusions that should be drawn by others. To

²⁹ Frederic C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy From Kant to Fichte* (Harvard University Press, 1987), 1.

³⁰ J.M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 90.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

put it in better terms, the rational conclusions must be similar for each person in society since they all go through the same paths or stages of reasoning. In that sense there is only one logical answer or solution to each problem which is always constant for everyone. According to the Enlightenment line of thought, the natural ability of individuals within a society to reconcile their viewpoints prevents the system from being totalitarian. In this way, totalitarianism is avoided since everyone accepts the same thoughts by himself.

The same line of thought assumes that the reason why Enlightenment cannot become totalitarian is that this system already presupposes that every member has come to terms with each other and that there are not any more conflicts between the members of the society. The fact that it has resolved all the conflicts inherent in the society means that it cannot be authoritarian since all the conflicts have been naturally annihilated by the system. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, however, “Enlightenment thought is not at the vanguard of the liberation of humanity, but rather complicit with universal domination.”³²

Adorno’s Criticism on the Enlightenment Thought

Adorno defines enlightenment as “the wholesale deception of the masses.” For Adorno as quoted in Bernstein,

“Enlightenment is realized and reaches its term when the nearest practical ends reveal themselves as the most distant goal now attained, and the lands of which their spials and intelligencers can give no news, that is, those of the nature despised by dominant science are recognized as the lands of origin. Today, when Bacon’s utopian vision that we should “command nature by action” has been realized on a tellurian scale, the thralldom that he ascribed to unsubjected nature is clear. It was domination itself.”³³

³² Katerina Deligiorgi, *Kant and the Culture of Enlightenment* (State University of New York Press, 2005), 160.

³³ J.M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 42.

In that sense, Enlightenment reveals itself as achieving many unattainable goals which were in fact very much part of the daily life. Furthermore, what is implied here is the devaluation of nature due to the developments in science. “In the self-cognition of the spirit as nature in disunion with itself, as in prehistory, nature calls itself to account; no longer directly as mana but as blind and lame. The decline, the forfeiture, of nature consists in the subjugation of nature without which spirit does not exist.”³⁴

Adorno’s notion of “negative” dialectic stands in opposition to grand metaphysical schemes, especially the Enlightenment thought. As stated above, the essence of Enlightenment lies in domination and deception. The very principles of Enlightenment seem to create a theory of domination even though in theory Enlightenment attempts to demolish other dominations; the domination of feudalism, religion, and censorship. The reason why enlightenment itself creates a different kind of domination is that, following Frederic Beiser, “enlightenment’s reign of reason had become a reign of death and destruction.”³⁵ In Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s words:

“At the turning points of Western civilization, from the transition to Olympian religion up to the Renaissance, Reformation, and bourgeois atheism, whenever new nations and classes more firmly repressed myth, the fear of uncomprehended, threatening nature, the consequence of its very materialization and objectification, was reduced to animistic superstition, and the subjugation of nature was made the absolute purpose of life within and without. If in the end self-preservation has been automated, so reason has been abandoned by those who, as administrators of production, entered upon its inheritance and now fear it in the persons of the disinherited. The essence of Enlightenment is the alternative whose ineradicability is that of domination. Men have always had to choose between their subjection to nature or the subjection of nature to the Self. Within the extension of the

³⁴ Ibid., 39.

³⁵ Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 2.

bourgeois commodity economy, the dark horizon of myth is illuminated by the sun of calculating reason, beneath whose cold rays the seed of the new barbarism grows to fruition. Under the pressure of domination human labor has always led away from myth –but under domination always returns to the jurisdiction of myth.”³⁶

In such a picture of domination of reason, everything - even the individual - is converted into the repeatable, replaceable process, into a mere example for the conceptual models of the system. Within such a schema, the individual becomes the victim of this domination because of the system’s bureaucratic operation. The individual loses all that was once “individual” about him. In that sense, the individual posits himself or is compelled by the system to posit himself as bearing a repeatable and replaceable personality. He no longer has a unique individuality belonging to himself, but rather he conforms to the norms that are expected of him by the mechanisms of the system such as church, clubs, government, military etc.

It must be underlined that the main reason why the individual is attributed a repeatable and replaceable personality is the operation of reason. The reason at operation determines these “norms” which dominate society as a whole. “The Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity: its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows.”³⁷ It is such a coherent and integral thought that it serves as a ground for every other proposition. The “ground” that is mentioned here provides coherence and integrity which is nothing but reason itself. It operates to level the differences between individuals. It turns individuals into a group of entities who bear uniform personalities. The goal of the reason is to control the universe to the fullest extent, and in controlling it, its main endeavor is to leave no single detail out. For Richard T. Gray’s Adorno, “in this

³⁶ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso, 1997), 32.

³⁷ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1972), 7.

logically controlled universe, uniqueness disappears, and individuals are reduced to mere placeholders in an artificially inducible, infinitely iterable formal structure.”³⁸ In that sense the value of the individual can only be grasped in its relation to the autonomy of reason – if he/she has a value at all. Parallel to this, it should be underlined that “the concept of reason grasped by the Enlightenment thought might be defined as the chemical agent which absorbs the individual substance of things and volatilizes them in the mere autonomy of reason.”³⁹ This is because, as it is shown by Adorno and Horkheimer, in the process of the violation of the individual substance in everything, reason becomes both hegemonic and authoritarian since its aim is to level down all the differences and since it attempts to promulgate its complete power.

The Concept of Outsideness, Its Suppression and the Enlightenment

One of the main objectives of the Enlightenment thought is to conquer the world to the greatest extent. As stated above, within the Enlightenment system one of the main endeavors is to leave nothing unaccounted for. The spirit of the Enlightenment replaced the fire and the rack by the stigma it attached to all irrationality, because it led to corruption. All the things that do not fit to the norms of rationality have been excluded from the minds and lives of people beginning with the Enlightenment. This is because deviation was very much appalling for the permanence of the Enlightenment system. In that sense “outsideness” is one of the most threatening concepts for the Enlightenment. The reason why outsideness is one of the most threatening concepts is that if something is left intact and outside by the mechanisms of the system, it can fall outside the realm of the very system. This means that later

³⁸ Richard T. Gray, “The Dialectic of “Enscenment””: Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum* as Critical History of Enlightenment Culture,” *PMLA* 108, no. 3 (May, 1993): 489.

³⁹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso, 1997) 89.

on it can be a threatening factor for the operation of the system. For that reason, each and every detail must be known and controlled by the system

In order not to leave one single detail unknown, the Enlightenment system attempts to establish the ground by mathematical calculation. In that sense it can be assumed that Enlightenment is a historical process with which everything has become subject to mathematical calculation. One of the most important aspects of the Enlightenment thought is that with it even thought itself has been reduced to a mathematical apparatus. In that sense not only the individual, but also thought is subject to such a process of calculation. Adorno claims that one of the main goals of the Enlightenment is the acquisition of a particular level of objective certainty.

Yet, in attempting to make everything subject to rational inquiry and to eliminate all residues of uncertainty and unpredictability, Enlightenment embarks on a large-scale plan of assimilation within society. As underlined before, one of the most significant purposes of this assimilation project is the equalization of all differences. This assimilation levels down what was once unique and different about the individual or about the society. This is what is hegemonic and problematic about the large-scale assimilation program of the Enlightenment project.

“This process of suppression, denial and assimilation are, for Adorno and Horkheimer, part and parcel of the process of fashioning the enlightened bourgeois subject.”⁴⁰ This enlightened subject is epitomized by Homer’s Odysseus as it is shown in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Adorno and Horkheimer. Odysseus distinguishes himself from slaves and upper class women by defeating his temptation to surrender to his instincts. He is not guided by his instincts anymore. What is more,

⁴⁰ R. D. Emerick, “Critical Theory, Critical Subjects” (Phd diss., University of California, 2007), 75.

he does not immerse himself in the inescapable cycles of nature. In that sense it can be assumed that in opposition to the subjects of other epochs, the Enlightenment subject triumphs over nature and he overcomes the appeals of his instincts. It appears that nature is no more triumphant but the subject. In order to be triumphant, the subject renounces “the instinct for complete, universal, and undivided happiness;”⁴¹ a happiness intimated by the return to a blissful state of unity and immediacy. This is why, for Adorno and Horkheimer, Enlightenment civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice, in other words, the history of renunciation. It is the history of renunciation because what has long been taken for granted in the society is now overthrown. In such a picture of domination, in order to preserve himself as a rational subject, Odysseus has to sacrifice himself, that is, his inner “nature”, his happiness, his relationship with others. In other words, the individuality is sacrificed for the achievement of the ideals of universal happiness and unity.

However, Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of modernity, as it is briefly summarized above, is not meant to imply that they yearn for a return to the pre-modern times or that they do not attempt to conceptualize an idealized state of nature. Their critique of modernity seems to unfold their critique of pre-modernity as well. In other words, the footprints of their criticism on modernity can be traced in order to fully comprehend their critique of pre-modern times. This implies that Adorno is notably critical of all the systems that are dogmatic in origin.

Enlightenment as a New Form of Barbarism

For Adorno and Horkheimer, Enlightenment signifies a different but a new kind of barbarism. In their framework the barbarian is the reason, since it is the most prominent driving force behind this large-scale assimilation and suppression process.

⁴¹ Fred Ruch, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76.

Enlightenment accuses feudalism for being a victim of myths. Adorno and Horkheimer, on the other hand, accuse Enlightenment for being a victim of myths as well. Before the epoch of Enlightenment, instead of reason, myth and religion were the dominating forces among society. Enlightenment thought noticed the old power in Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics. With the rapid extension of the bourgeois commodity economy beginning with the Enlightenment thought, the dark horizon of myth is considered to be illuminated by the light of calculating reason. However, in Adorno's words:

“every spiritual resistance that the Enlightenment encounters serves merely to increase its strength. This means that Enlightenment still recognizes itself even in myths. Whatever myths the resistance may appeal to, by virtue of the fact that they become arguments in the process of opposition, they acknowledge the principle of dissolvent rationality for which they reproach Enlightenment.”⁴²

However, rather than illuminating, the light of calculating reason was also conveying cold rays just like myth and religion did in the ancient times. Underneath these cold rays, the seed of a new barbarism grows to fruition. As stated above, these seeds are the seeds of another dark age which is dominated by the equalization of the differences and the maximization of unity and cohesion. In other words, this process of the sacrifice of individuality and the leveling down of the differences inherent in society marks the beginning of another dark age.

Other than thought, the individual is also reduced to the operations that are expected of him within such a dark age. Beginning with the Enlightenment, the individual started to define himself “only as a thing, as a static element, as success or failure.”⁴³ The individual considered to be valuable only in terms of his harmony with the Enlightenment's ideals, but he came to the point of losing his own ideals

⁴² Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso, 1997), 6.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 28.

and personality. Enlightenment ideals seem to emanate through all the parts that make him an individual in order to make him conform and cooperate. No part of sea remains unknown to the Enlightenment rationality. This implies that enlightenment notion of rationality has the tendency of embracing everything without any exceptions.

In order to comprehend the Enlightenment thought in its entirety, what is necessary to do in the first place is to define the concept of the Enlightenment subject. “The principles of the Enlightenment are the principles of self-preservation. Immaturity is then the inability to survive. The burgher, in the successive forms of slave-owner, free entrepreneur and administrator is the logical subject of the Enlightenment.”⁴⁴ As it appears, within Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s context what is most crucial for the individual turns out to be nothing but his self-preservation and his so-called free activities. In that sense, it might be assumed that on the part of the ego, alienation and egocentrism can be the result of such a thought. Parallel to such an assumption, according to Adorno, Enlightenment as such is the main reason why the world history has witnessed *Auschwitz*.

Auschwitz as the Culmination of Enlightenment Thought

For Adorno, *Auschwitz* is the exact result of the implications of the Enlightenment doctrine even though the objective of Enlightenment thought cannot directly be considered as such. Adorno is extremely at odds with the “repressive equality” that the enlightenment project implicitly attempts to spread over the society. For Adorno the culmination of such a repressive equality can be traced especially in Hitler’s Germany. However, this is not to say that Adorno and Horkheimer condemn the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 83.

Enlightenment doctrine as being a unilateral line of thought. Rather, in Adorno's and Horkheimer's framework, *Auschwitz* is a twofold process. On the one hand, the period of *Auschwitz* might be considered as a total abolition of the values of the Enlightenment. This is because "it violated the humanitarian ideals of the historical Enlightenment in an abhorrent and devastating manner."⁴⁵ The reason why it is the abolition of the Enlightenment values is because humanity was exposed to inhuman treatments during the *Auschwitz* period, which is originally contrary to the intentions of Enlightenment thought.

On the other hand, for Adorno and Horkheimer, *Auschwitz* also signifies the pinnacle of the Enlightenment way of thought. The reason why *Auschwitz* is an embodied form of the Enlightenment thought is that it is an instance of the culmination of the instrumental reason which is the most pronounced enemy of humanitarian ideals. At this point, the Frankfurt School's notion of "instrumental reason" should be briefly defined. According to Herbert Marcuse, who is one of the most prominent figures of the Frankfurt School, "instrumental reason is the technological rationality which develops a set of truth values which hold good for the functioning of the apparatus- and for that alone."⁴⁶ By apparatus, capitalism and its various devices seem to be what Marcuse intends to convey.

In other words, with *Auschwitz* social oppression has become widespread because of the fact that at the period instrumental reason, whose boundaries are clearly defined by the enlightenment thought, was at work to the full extent. Western society has been dominated by instrumental reason ever since the Enlightenment.

⁴⁵ Finlayson, James Gordon. "Adorno: Modern Art Metaphysics and Radical Evil." *Modernism/modernity* 10, no. 1 (2003): 71–95.

⁴⁶ Fred Ruch, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, 67.

One of the most threatening aspects of instrumental reason is the fact that it is devoid of self-reflection since it only works for the functioning of the apparatus of the system alone. For that reason, it lacks any trace of self-criticism on its own part.

Initially a harsh critique of the mythic world, the Enlightenment abandoned its critical self-reflection. The fact that it loses its self-reflection gives rise to its assuming the same role once played by myth in ancient societies: it cannot be questioned and, at the same time, it can hardly be justified. In that sense it can be assumed that what was once the initial ideal of the Enlightenment thought does not correspond to its ultimate achievement. This is because, according to Adorno's and Horkheimer's line of thought, the unique self never wholly disappeared. The unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual: for individuality makes a mockery of the kind of society which would turn all individuals to one collectivity.

Furthermore, Enlightenment characterizes the mythic imagination, which was the dominating force in the feudalist period, as sanctioning fate. In a "fated" world everything is pre-programmed; hence there is nothing left to be discovered. The reasons and results of every action are predetermined in such a world. However, Adorno and Horkheimer argues:

"the Enlightenment drive toward explaining every event, contriving laws and patterns in its scientific endeavors, advocating adaptation as the means for mere preservation and focusing on known and immanent causes and events betrays the same fatalism. Just as the myths already realize enlightenment, so enlightenment with every step becomes more deeply engulfed in mythology. Mythology itself set off the unending process of enlightenment in which ever and again, with the inevitability of necessity, every specific theoretical view succumbs to the destructive criticism that it is only a belief –until even the very notions of spirit, of truth and indeed, enlightenment itself, have become animistic magic."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso, 1997), 11.

In that sense it appears that the Enlightenment “receives all its matter from the myths, in order to destroy them; and even as a judge it comes under the mythic curse. It wishes to extricate itself from the process of fate and retribution while exercising retribution on that process.”⁴⁸ If there is nothing left to discover, if everything that was thought to be different is made equal, then it means that everything is pre-determined, stable and same. To keep it short, “the very program which was originally considered to be an extirpation of the eternal sameness that constitutes myth becomes itself mythic.”⁴⁹ Enlightenment as a reaction to the mythic imagination turns out to construct a mythic world itself. In criticizing the predetermined and pre-programmed system of the feudalist society, it also falls into the same trap.

The reason why the Enlightenment rationality cannot posit itself in a complete opposition to the mythic imagination is that just like the inclination of the mythic imagination, its main purpose is also to cut down all resistance that attempts to threaten its ideals. At first glance, cutting down all resistance and dissidence might seem plausible. However, it also exterminates all differences and cuts down any inclination towards progress. This means that Enlightenment still construes itself in myths which are the very traps that it is caught. As stated above, the most prominent example of such trap can be seen in the death camps of *Auschwitz*, which is a period completely constructed out of myths.

All of what is laid out about their criticism of the Enlightenment thought and on its extension, the *Auschwitz* period, does not indicate that Adorno and Horkheimer

⁴⁸ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1972), 12.

⁴⁹ Fred Ruch, *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, 73.

are favoring a mere return back to a kind of state of nature as stated above. Theirs is an attempt that is far from proposing an alternative or drawing an ideal portrait of society. Rather, “their philosophy of history attempts to break the grip of all closed systems of thought; it is conceived as a contribution to the undermining of all beliefs that claim completeness and encourage an unreflected affirmation of society.”⁵⁰ Since yearning for a return back to the state of nature would also imply an acceptance of the domination of one system, Adorno and Horkheimer are in opposition to the state of nature as well.

Jena Romanticism and Adorno: Final Remarks on Their Notions of Subject, Repressive Equality and History

After briefly presenting Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s account on rationality, for the purposes of this thesis its similarity with the Jena romantic conception of rationality should be stressed. At the outset their undertakings appear to be divergent in terms of their criticisms on the Enlightenment thought. However, their paths seem to intersect at a certain point. Both the Jena romanticists and Adorno draw similar conclusions regarding the concept of rationality, because they attempt to protect the individuality of the subject from external factors. Despite being from different angles, both have worries about the deployment of repressive equality among the layers of society. In that sense their main objective is to eliminate all the bondages which can result in such a repressive equality among society. The greatest concern of Adorno is the jeopardy of fascism which is one of the main reasons why he is against many claims of the Enlightenment thought. In criticizing the Enlightenment notion of rationality, the Jena romanticists are appalled by the damage that it might cause to the artistic

⁵⁰ David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (University of California Press, 2000), 150.

creativity. Although their points of departure are different, the outcomes of these different departure points are similar regarding their concept of rationality. Both accounts are well aware that the imperialism of the Enlightenment rationality might spread among society and the best way to avoid it is to promote the preservation of the differences within society which would further support artistic creativity and would also prevent fascism to dominate the society.

However, all of these claims do not imply that Adorno proposes a total abolition of the Enlightenment ideology. What he in fact attempts to do is proposing an alternative comprehension of the Enlightenment thought. If Enlightenment thought is based on a history whose constitutive element is “continuity” and “coherence”, Adorno depicts “a concept of history which is based on the unity of continuity and discontinuity.”⁵¹ By this regard, rather than seeking the solution in a mere return back to an ideal state of nature or in a pessimist abolition of the inherent system, Adorno insists that “universal history has to be both construed and denied”⁵² at the same time.

Adorno’s viewpoint on history might seem to be irrelevant regarding the initial aim of this chapter. However, it appears that it has an indispensable role, when a broader analysis on Adorno’s thought is made. Adorno’s concept of history clarifies his criticism regarding the concept of rationality and it also marks his distinction with the Jena Romanticists. On the one hand, he interrogates the feasibility of a universal concept of rationality and history. On the other hand, he does not propose the view that the notion of a universal concept of history should be denied altogether. In that sense, it can be argued that Adorno refrains from proposing

⁵¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Continuum Publishing Company, 1983), 314.

⁵² Ibid.

a return back to an ideal stage or suggesting the establishment of a new ideal society
which is based on nothing but fantasy.

CHAPTER 4

ROMANTIC IRONY: LIFEGUARD AGAINST THE

DULLNESS OF THE WORLD

As it was argued throughout the last chapter, The Jena Romanticists oppose the Enlightenment notion of rationality. If the Jena Romanticists' criticism on reason is reviewed, it appears that their antagonism with it can be said to spring from their opposition to any fixed essence. Among the members of the Jena Romantic circle, the tendency of eliminating essentially fixed grounds, which originate from a universal norm, unfolds another utterly significant concept in their framework; the romantic concept of irony.

Irony as a Part of Daily Life

As a literary device or as an apparatus within daily language, irony parts company with the conventional norms that are inherent in language. As a part of daily language, irony is most often regarded as “saying what is contrary to what is meant.”⁵³ Before analyzing the romantic concept of irony, it should be noted that, within the Jena Romantic framework, for the first time in the history of aesthetic theory, irony ceased to be a mere literary device. The Jena Romanticists, especially F. Schlegel, have incorporated irony into the veins of life itself. After its incorporation as such, one cannot talk about the essence of life as a fixed category anymore, but rather life is regarded “not as a thing to be known but as a process of creation.”⁵⁴ At this point, it should be underlined that the transformation of life brings about another transformation; the transformation of the subject. The

⁵³ Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (Routledge, 2004), 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

transformed self can be considered as a micro-indicator of the society as a whole and also of life itself. In that sense, it can be pointed out that romantic irony has ceased to be a device within language and it has started to be a mode of existence of the novel subject.

For Kierkegaard, the origin of romantic irony can be traced in Fichte's notion of the subject. Kierkegaard maintains that the fact that Fichte infinitized the activity of the "I" resulted in the dependency of everything on the "I's own positing in Fichte's framework. For Kierkegaard, the fact that Fichte infinitized the "I" as such "turned any actuality pale."⁵⁵ In Fichte's framework the activity of the "I" is considered as a constitutive activity. However, Kierkegaard underlines the fact that Fichte's notion of the "I" as the first principle of the whole *Wissenschaftslehre* is in fact an abstract identity in the sense that it has no actuality besides itself. In order to depict this subject, Kierkegaard makes use of a metaphor. He likens the Fichtean subject to "a god who can lift the whole world and who in fact has nothing to lift."⁵⁶ In their theory, the Jena Romanticists seem to inherit Fichte's notion of the subject and they apply it to their concept of the artist which has an ironic existence as Kierkegaard's words briefly explain it.

Romantic Irony and the Subject

With the incorporation of irony into life, the tendency of regarding subjectivity as a ground has been questioned. Rather than serving as a basis for other propositions and for other entities, the subject is to be defined as undergoing a process of an infinite becoming within the Jena Romanticist framework. The footprints of the romantic irony with regards to its relation to life and also subjectivity can be best traced in

⁵⁵ Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 273.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.

Frederic Von Schlegel's widely-known novel *Lucinde*. At the very beginning of the novel, Schlegel writes:

"Even if this world isn't the best or the most useful, still I know that it's the most beautiful." Nothing could have shaken me in this feeling or conviction, neither general doubt nor my own fear. For I believed I was looking deeply into the secrets of nature; I felt that everything lived eternally and that even death was only an amiable deception. But, actually, I didn't think about this very much — at least I wasn't particularly disposed to classify and analyze abstract concepts. Instead I lost myself gladly and deeply in all the comminglings and intertwinings of joy and pain from which come the savor of life and the bloom of feeling, spiritual voluptuousness as well as sensual beatitude."⁵⁷

It appears that in attempting to convey Julius's feelings as a subject, as a backdrop element Schlegel sets forth that the world is not the best place to live. However, Julius does not pay attention to the fact that the world is not perfect and behaves as if he has an eternal existence which is full of joy and pain. Schlegel further underlines that "like love, as humans we are immortal."⁵⁸ From Julius's feelings about the world, it appears that the romantic subject deems himself as the lawgiver and the ground of all there is. He also tends to consider himself as an immortal being, but at the same time he is well aware that life does not endure forever and the world is not perfect. For Schlegel "irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos."⁵⁹ Just because the romantic subject is aware that life is a process of infinite chaos, it can be laid out that he takes an ironic attitude towards the world.

In his novel *Lucinde*, when talking about Julius, Schlegel also utters that "everything lost its fixity, and the only thing that became increasingly clearer and

⁵⁷ Friedrich Schlegel, *Frederich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments* (University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 43-44.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

more certain to him was the fact that great and perfect folly and stupidity were intrinsic prerogatives of men, and wanton malice, combined with naive coldness and laughing insensitivity, the congenital art of women. That was all he learned from his painful attempt to gain an understanding of human nature.”⁶⁰ As it appears from Schlegel’s novel *Lucinde*, in fact the efforts of construing or making sense of human nature or any other fixed principles or origins will be proven abortive. The best that a person can do is to make a mockery of all the fixed and essential origins.

The Annihilation of the Idea of an Original Plenitude

At this point, it should be laid out that the romantic irony deliberately reverses the relation between origin and effect. The Jena Romanticists insist on the fact that there was no original paradise or plenitude from which we are separated. In that sense it would be trivial to wish for a return back to such plenitude. Rather, the Jena Romanticists propose that:

“it is only in diverse life itself, in all its difference and fragmentation, that we get any sense or idea of some whole or origin. Rather than being a fall from an original infinite plenitude, finite daily life is overwhelmed by a sense of infinity that lies beyond any closed form. An ironic fall, therefore, realizes that there was no paradise before the sense of loss.”⁶¹

Since only a sense of infinity is what the human beings should attempt to achieve, it is underlined conspicuously by the above claim that it is a redundant endeavor to look for such an overestimated origin or cause.

According to Schlegel, “if every infinite individual is God, then there are as many gods as there are ideals.”⁶² As it appears from Schlegel’s framework, we

⁶⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁶¹ Claire Colebrook, *Irony*, 49.

⁶² Ibid., 48.

cannot talk about only one ideal as we cannot talk about an origin which appears to be a paradise. This is because of the fact that it is even feasible to talk about the existence of many gods, which is also a clear indication of the existence of the innumerable ideals and origins. As stated above, the romantic irony exactly has to do with the innumerability of the ideals. In the absence of determinate ideals, the self also oscillates between an ego which feels as if it is the absolute and an ego which perceives itself as a grain of sand at other times.

In order to comprehend such an ambivalent existence, one needs to refer to Novalis. On the one hand, Novalis pronounces that “selfhood is the foundation of all knowledge – as the foundation of permanence in change – as well as the principle of utmost diversity.”⁶³ It appears that Novalis regards the self as “the foundation of all there is” at certain points in his writings. On the other hand, Novalis claims that “we catch a glimpse of ourselves as an element in the system – and consequently, in an ascending and descending line, from the infinitely small to the infinitely large – human beings of infinite variations.”⁶⁴ As it comes into sight from the above quotation, Novalis also considers human beings as just another usual part of the system of other things and beings.

Novalis’s ambivalent reflection on the romantic self extricates the very source of the ironic existence of the romantic subject. The subject appears to serve as a foundation and at the same time it is just another element within a system which consists of many elements. The fact that the subject is always in a state of confrontation with nature prevents it to cheer up his sovereignty to the fullest extent.

⁶³ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia* (State University of New York Press, 2007), 151.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

According to Schlegel, “in the center of men’s own essence, his enemy, namely the nature, has established ground.”⁶⁵ However, its threatening confrontation as such does not mean that the romantic ego is deprived of its all-encompassing character. Rather, in Schlegel’s words, “our Ego shines with a new light, illuminating with its bright radiance even the night of the future.”⁶⁶

With regards to the confines of the subject, the Jena romanticists exceeded the limits. Other than illuminating the paths of future as Schlegel claims, in Novalis’s framework even the universe is regarded as part of the subject himself. In Novalis’s words “we dream of journeys through the universe, but is the universe not within us? We don’t realize the profundities of our spirits. Inward is the direction of the mystic path. Within us or nowhere is eternity with its worlds of past and future.”⁶⁷ It appears from Novalis’s fragment that whether the subject is aware of his potentials or not, even “the eternity with its worlds of past and future” lies within the subject. In that sense one can hardly talk about any physical limit to the activities and potentials of the romantic subject.

The Romantic Artist and His Ironic Existence

Within the Jena Romanticist framework, the unique character of the artist as “the art maker” is insistently stressed. In Jena Romanticist philosophy, together with nature, art represented one of the two main revelations of god. Art played a very vital role in their philosophy as a matter of course. Whereas nature was the first direct revelation of the absolute, art proceeded through the artist. The fact that the artist plays the role of a mediator between the absolute and the artwork attributes an enormous role to the

⁶⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (State University of New York Press, 2001), 25.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁷ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Emergence of Romanticism* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 52.

artist. He is attributed the role of “the creator.” This creator has the duty of teaching humanity how to live as a work of art. In F. Schlegel’s words “what men are among the other creatures of the earth, artists are among men.”⁶⁸ In that sense both the artist as “the creator” and the artwork as his “creation” are highly valued within this line of thought.

In romantic aesthetics, the author has the ability to rise above the earth and see himself all above it and at the same time since he is above it, he has the ability to see the earth as if it is vanishing. For F. Schlegel, if we do not destroy what we adore, the way we comprehend the world would turn out to be deficient. Destroying what we adore is the precondition of the feeling of infinity. For that reason, in order for the artist to be infinitized, he has to underestimate the value of his work in addition to his contempt over the outer world, which is in fact independent of him.

For Schlegel:

“In order to write well about something, one shouldn't be interested in it any longer. To express an idea with due circumspection, one must have relegated it wholly to one's past; one must no longer be preoccupied with it. As long as the artist is in the process of discovery and inspiration, he is in a state which, as far as communication is concerned, is at the very least intolerant. He wants to blurt out everything, which is a fault of young geniuses or a legitimate prejudice of old bunglers. And so he fails to recognize the value and the dignity of self-restriction, which is after all, for the artist as well as the man, the first and the last, the most necessary and the highest duty. Most necessary because wherever one does not restrict oneself, one is restricted by the world; and that makes one a slave. The highest because one can only restrict oneself at those points and places where one possesses infinite power, self creation, and self-destruction.”⁶⁹

Parallel to this, Novalis claims that “what is valued in this line of thought is to perceive the world as a beautiful error in which played a wonderful theatre.”⁷⁰ It

⁶⁸ Friedrich Schlegel, *Frederich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, 97.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁰ Ricarda Huch, *Alman Romantizmi* (Doğu Batı Yayınları, 2005), 195.

appears that the world both overwhelms the artist with its beauty and it is also an error that should be abolished. Following this line of thought, irony, as the attitude of the romantic artist, can be described as a state of contradiction, contradiction with anything great and well-established. All of these designate that, even though the ironist endeavors to escape from the fact that there is a whole outer realm which is independent from his own, he is overwhelmed by it and at the same time he is well aware that he is in fact bounded by it.

As mentioned above, the basis of the romantic irony lies in “the recognition that even though we cannot attain the truth, we must still strive for it because only then we could approach it.”⁷¹ For Schlegel the “most authentic contradiction” in human self-consciousness is the feeling that we are at the same time finite and infinite; the conditioned and the unconditioned.

Irony also works as an organizer within society. According to Schlegel, “Society is a chaos that only wit can organize and bring into harmony. And if one doesn't trifle and amuse oneself with the elements of passion, then passion gathers itself into thick masses and makes everything grow dark.”⁷² In that sense, wit and irony have a very vital function in the society. Their function is even more prominent than that of reason among society in the sense that it makes society a harmonious entity and prevents it from turning to a dark and hopeless place.

Kierkegaard and Hegel on the Concept of Romantic Irony

In his doctoral dissertation *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard analyzes two kinds of irony, namely the Socratic and the romantic irony. Despite the similarities between

⁷¹ Frederik C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 129.

⁷² Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, 86.

these two kinds of ironies, the main difference between them might be defined as follows: “In the Socratic case of irony, the individual is emancipated from the bounds of finitude and so he takes steps on the way to a new positivity and thereby to a new commitment. In the second case, this emancipation through irony comes to be misused by the individual for his own egoistic purposes.”⁷³ For the first time in history, Socrates saw the power in the individual in that the individual could destruct the conventional understandings of life, constitution, morality, etc. It was the first time that “the individual had realized its subjective freedom and autonomy.”⁷⁴ It is a turning point within the history of subjectivity. Even though like Socratic irony, romantic irony doubts the existent moral codes, religion, etc., Kierkegaard, following Hegel, treats Socratic irony as a historically necessary concept where he condemns romantic irony as being flippant.

For Kierkegaard irony has no purpose but self-motivation. For the ironist, the actuality has lost all of its validity. The ironist is not delimited by anything except himself. However, for Kierkegaard the ironist cannot free himself from the actuality any time he wishes. In order to save itself, the subject positions itself independent of other things. Hegel also criticizes the Fichtean “I” on the grounds that it has the capability to create and at the same time the ability to annihilate what it has created. In that sense all the values, state, constitution, etc. are at the risk of this arbitrary annihilation. Likewise, Kierkegaard defines irony as something for which there is nothing established since at the same time it can annihilate the establishment. At this point, it seems that the stance of the romantic artist is ironic, since in place of the thing it annihilated, it does not attempt to create something anew. In their context,

⁷³ Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought* (Princeton University Press, 1971), 57.

⁷⁴ Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151.

therefore, no foundation is secured and no new foundation is established after the annihilation of the existing one.

Furthermore, the relation of irony to the past is also problematic. It can be said that since it assumes itself to bear an infinite existence, its relation to actual history becomes vain. Even though Schlegel seems to attribute history a great role in his philosophy, in fact he puts forward very open-ended arguments regarding history. With Jena Romantic framework, history turns to myth. For Schlegel, “artists make mankind an individual by connecting the past with the future in the present.”⁷⁵ But nowhere in his writings does he specify how artists would fulfill such a profound task. Schlegel also insists upon the claim that “there is no self-knowledge except historical self-knowledge.”⁷⁶ It can be assumed from his statement that even one’s own knowledge is not obtainable if it is not based on history. However, the relation of self-knowledge to history in general or historical self-knowledge in particular is not clear-cut once again.

For that reason, since an event that happened in the past does not seem to restrict irony, the subject is able to catalyze the beginning of an ironic existence anytime it wishes. For Kierkegaard “irony is ‘the awakening of subjectivity’; that is the awakening of the conception of oneself as a subject, something separate from and undetermined by a certain immediately given historical entity.”⁷⁷ However it is ironic that, for the ironist not only the history, which he regards as an entity outside himself, loses continuity, but with it his own life also loses continuity. This is partly due to the failure to obtain a “historical self-knowledge.” This becomes the basis of

⁷⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Frederich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments*, 100.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷⁷ Alastair Hannay and Gordon Daniel Marino, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 137.

the inability on the part of the subject to relate himself to his own past, let alone relating himself to history in general.

Hegel also disaccords with the romantic notion of subjectivity and accordingly the romantic concept of irony. Hegel's two arguments regarding the concept of irony can be summarized as follows: Initially for Hegel, "the artistic genius is the "absolute I" and secondly irony is the attitude of the genius to the world it knows to be its own product."⁷⁸ According to Hegel –as it is for Kierkegaard-romantic irony has its roots in Fichte's notion of the "I." As stated above, in Fichte's system everything depends upon the activity of the ego that involves relating everything to the self. Since everything depends on its own activity, it occurs that the subject is capable of the creation and at the same time the annihilation of everything. This implies that with its activity the Fichtean "I," which is the basis of the romantic irony, can annihilate all values, constitution, morality or state. Since everything is posited by the "I" itself, everything can as well be abolished by it. In other words, according to Hegel, the fact that the "I"'s activity is so extensive implies that "the objective goodness is something that is created by me alone and as lord and master of it I can make it come and go as I please."⁷⁹ In other words, even the ground of objective goodness has been challenged by the very activity of the "I."

As it comes to light, whether deliberately or unintentionally, romantic irony has a great tendency of negating the objectivity since it is reinforced by a mighty subject which is the most prominent element behind the concept of irony. In this way, what is objective is to become identical with the subject itself. In other words,

⁷⁸ William Maker, ed., *Hegel and Aesthetics* (State University of New York Press, 2000), 133.

⁷⁹ Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 184.

nothing seems to be valuable in and for itself anymore. The non-conscious world becomes identical with the conscious one. In that sense, the difference between the “I” and the “not-I” vanishes, which brings forward another identity; that of existence and non-existence. It can be said that the “I” has lost any content accordingly since there is no genuine difference between the existence and the non-existence anymore. Even the existence of the subject starts not to make sense. “Every particularity, every characteristic and every content is negated in the ‘I’”⁸⁰ since everything depends upon itself. For that reason, everything turns out to be the show of the ego. However, within such an exaggerated display of power, even the existence of the subject is transformed into a means for the show itself.

Both Hegel and Kierkegaard attack the romantic conception of “living poetically.” They criticize the concept of the divine genius of Romanticism whose only aim lies in “living poetically.” The genius artist sees himself over and above the other people who cannot have a tiny effect on his creativity. In his conception of the world, he is not only free from herds of people, but he is also over and above any laws, traditions, etc. that may bound him. This is not to say that in rejecting all of these, the ironist creates a new actuality. Rather, for Kierkegaard he becomes a slave of his own uncertain moods in that he is not affected by actuality. In that sense all content is negated in his poem and what is left is only the artist’s mood. He is a slave since he hovers between “being god and a grain of sand.”⁸¹ Either he feels as if he is the ultimate creator of the world or he tumbles into pieces by the feeling of the finitude of his own life. In striving towards this idealized poetic life, what his life

⁸⁰ Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, *Aesthetics/Lectures on Fine Art: Volume I* (Oxford University Press, 1975), 64.

⁸¹ Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 284.

cannot become is in fact poetic. This is because, for Kierkegaard “true inward infinity comes not from destructive and egoistic enjoyment of life but only through resignation.”⁸²

For Kierkegaard not only the romantic himself is ironic but also the whole tradition of romanticism is ironic. This is because, even though they are all well aware that the glorious past is gone, they strive to go back to those days. Their desire to go back to those innocent days also contradicts with their annihilating all actuality. This is because, even though they attempt to construct something concrete in their desire to go back to those times, because of their flippant understanding of life, this attempt turns out to be meaningless as well. Rather than leaning upon something concrete, they in fact base everything on transitory grounds. In the first place, these transitory consequences are in fact what they attempted to avoid. However, within the Jena Romanticists’ schema “all that is solid melts into air”⁸³ or it turns out to be a mere game. What is left is only their poetry. This means that poetry is their so-called victory over actuality. However, such a victory, Kierkegaard holds, is ironic in such a way that because the romantic artist thinks that this kind of life is only preserved for him, the life of the romantic turns to a total nonsense. This is because, to believe that we should go back to those innocent days and that the genius is the only chosen one for whom the poetic life is preserved can only be an ironic claim.

Furthermore, there happens to be a huge gap between what is achieved and what is set as ideal within this line of thought. In fact “by starting from the freedom and the constitutive authority of ‘I’, one does not arrive at a higher principle but

⁸² Ibid., 305.

⁸³ David Harvey’s famous book, which is called *All That is Solid Melts into Air* is referred.

comes only to sensuousness.”⁸⁴ This means that it arrives at quite the opposite of what it longs for. For Kierkegaard what the romantic achieves is quite contrary to a poetic concept of life because the romantic experiences his ideals not in actual life but only in his dreams. At some point “the dead nature and the feelings” seem to be awakening but the romantic is still in his long sleep. At another point he wakes up too, but he just goes to sleep again. This is the tragedy of the romantic artist. All of this implies that depending on these conditions, his poetry cannot be said to be a genuine kind of poetry.

Last Criticisms on the Romantic Irony

An ironic attitude towards life can be said to bear an elitist characteristic. This is because, it is inherently expected that the person who would comprehend an ironic speech or the person who would assume an ironic attitude towards life is an enlightened individual. Otherwise it would not be possible for him to lead such a life or to comprehend such a speech. At this point it should be underlined that the Jena romanticists have an arrogant position in the sense that they promote a “poetic life style” among society but they do not think that each person is able to maintain a poetic life. Only the genius is able to maintain such a life and can have an ironic attitude accordingly. It is impossible for other members of society or “the herds” to live such a life. With such a position they seem to take a revolutionary step in the history of philosophy because in this way they become vanguards of elitism in Western Philosophy of art.

The fact that the romantic keeps a certain distance towards the conventional understandings of morality, state, etc. can be considered as a kind of a revolutionary

⁸⁴ Ibid., 301.

step. However, let alone taking a revolutionary step towards art, romantics are in fact far from creating a very small tremor on the earth. Following Walter Benjamin, a romantic artist might be compared to “a rider.” For Walter Benjamin “a rider can never reach the next village if he divides the journey up into its small components.”⁸⁵ Life is too short for such a journey. For the man who started his journey is different than the man who arrives. In that sense romantic artist’s journey towards life might be said to be flippant and pointless on the grounds that he arrives nowhere. Like his entire journey itself, his relation to other people is also flippant. He does not take other people seriously which I think is contrary to what an artist should do. He thinks that in total contrast to him, others only populate the world. For if people are considered as such, even the serious artistic production itself is jeopardized.

What is left in the picture is an artist who is overwhelmed by nothing but his own moods. In that sense such an artist can be said to be drifting in total loneliness and isolation, but he is just unaware of it. Even his moods lose their relation to reality. He cannot realize his tragic position which is completely isolated, extravagant and alone. This is because he diverts his attention to his ornate life. Quoting Kierkegaard might contribute at this point. “At times the romantic has a clear grasp of everything, at times he is seeking; at times a doubter, at times Jacob Böhme, at times the Greeks –nothing but moods.”⁸⁶

Being a slave to one’s own moods and acknowledging such a stance as an inevitable stance towards the world are problematic. For I think that the intellectual’s most important basis must be the society itself. To achieve this, the huge gap

⁸⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Notes From Svendborg,” in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings* Vol. 2 (The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), 788.

⁸⁶ Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 285.

between the author and the reader, created by the romantic school, must be narrowed. Otherwise the work of art that comes out loses its originality since it does not receive any feedback. Following Walter Benjamin, “the bourgeoisie is always happy to concede the artist, namely the freedom of the genius.”⁸⁷ This freedom granted to the artist might be said to be an illusory freedom since it has no grounds. It has only egoistic grounds which are too vague to be called “grounds.” All of this results in a profile of an artist within a total loss of character. Because the romantic artist’s moods are ranging from a piece of sand to god, his character is ambiguous. In that sense, the artwork that he produces turns out to be a by-product of this exaggerated subjectivity and it becomes a victim of such a drifting, because I think without a serious interest in the society, it is not possible to turn inwards as one loses his mirror.

⁸⁷ Walter Benjamin, “The Present Social Situation of the French Writer,” in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings* Vol. 2 (The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), 758.

CHAPTER 5

ADORNO'S CONCEPT OF SUBJECT WITH REGARDS TO

ART AND ARTWORKS

Introduction

Throughout the last section, in order to present introductory remarks on the differences and similarities between Adorno and the Jena Romanticists regarding the concept of the subjectivity of the artist, the romantic concept of irony has been introduced. The underlying reason for putting the concept of irony in the center of this project is that before turning to a deeper analysis of the analogy between the romantic genius and Adorno's definition of the artist, the romantic artist's mode of existence needs to be examined. Since irony is certainly the most significant characteristic of the romantic artist, such an emphasis on irony functions as an introduction to the precarious character of the romantic artist. After presenting the mode of existence of the romantic artist; namely the irony, Adorno's notion of the subject will be focused on. Before investigating Adorno's concept of the artist, which I think reflects the general subjectivity of the artist within the art scene during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Adorno's general notion of the subject will be analyzed.

Rationality versus Constitutive Subjectivity

In order to comprehend Adorno's notion of the subject, firstly Adorno's criticism on the Enlightenment notion of rationality should be recollected. Adorno's critique of the notion of instrumental reason has similarities with his critique of the concept of "constitutive subjectivity," the Fichtean "I". As I have discussed, this "I" can be

regarded as the basis of the Jena Romanticist notion of the subject in general and the artist in particular. In order to elaborate the analogy between these two seemingly divergent concepts regarding the subject, the constitutive characteristic of the Enlightenment notion of rationality should be recalled. According to Adorno “in truth, all concepts, even philosophical ones, refer to non-conceptualities because concepts on their part are moments of the reality that compels their formation, primarily for the purpose of controlling nature.”⁸⁸ In that sense, analogous to the aim of the Enlightenment concept of rationality, which can be said to dictate the humanity and the nature, the underlying aim of the constitutive subjectivity is also to exercise power over the nature and other subjects. Both the concepts of rationality and subjectivity, therefore, are utilized in order to regulate the society and impose certain rules upon the members of the society.

Similar to the consideration of the concept of rationality in this project, the constitutive characteristic of the subject can be regarded as an assurance of organizing the society into a whole. In such a line of thought, the preservation of the constitutive property of the subject is considered as a precondition of the emancipation of the other subjects within society because if the subject was the law-giver, the elements that make him a genuine subject would be protected. This is analogous to the Enlightenment notion of rationality which was taken as a source of guarantee for the preservation of unity within society. The reason why the analogy between the concept of rationality and the subject is drawn is that Adorno’s criticisms on both concepts are similar. As stated in the previous sections, what makes Adorno frightened is the emergence of a new barbarism with the Enlightenment notion of rationality while the original attempt of the Enlightenment

⁸⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Continuum Publishing Company, 1983), 11.

thought was to dissolve the barbarism that feudalism had long been creating within society.

Parallel to his consideration that the Enlightenment rationality was deployed through the membranes of society, Adorno also regards the overemphasis on the subjectivity as bearing the possibility of leading to barbaric and hazardous ends. Although Adorno never explicitly underlines such a link between the concept of rationality and subject, such an analogy can be said to unfold itself in his separate treatments of both notions. If the romanticist notion of subjectivity was to be spread among the layers of society, a tyranny of the subject would be the result. In order to prevent this, Adorno aims at constricting the sphere of the subject.

In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno lays out one of the most assertive and remarkable statements regarding the relation between the artist and the artwork. He quotes Wagner's words which can be said to represent one of the climaxes of his aesthetic theory. For Wagner, "artworks, not their authors are their self-positing law."⁸⁹ Throughout *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno underlines the vitality of the material itself rather than the "creator" of it. Adorno's quotation of Wagner displays the fact that his viewpoint of the artist is established in opposition to the Fichtean notion of the subject. In Fichte's picture, with its self-relating activity the subject posits himself and also the world. On the other hand, in Adorno's framework, rather than the artist, the artwork posits its own laws.

Furthermore, according to Adorno "in the artwork the subject is neither the observer, nor the creator nor the absolute spirit but rather spirit bound up with or,

⁸⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 223.

performed and mediated by the object.”⁹⁰ This implies that Adorno conceives neither the process of the production of the artworks as a process of “creation” nor the artist as a “creator.” Nevertheless, he does not conceive the subject as an insignificant observer either. This brings us to one of Adorno’s main line of criticisms regarding the relation between the artwork and the artist. As will be stated within this chapter, one of the main endeavors of Adorno is to present a dialectical analysis of the concept of the constitutive characteristic of the subject parallel to his evaluation of the Enlightenment concept of rationality.

The Relationship between “the Creator” and the Artwork

For Adorno, “artworks are alive in that they speak in a fashion that is denied to natural objects and the subjects who make them. They speak by virtue of the communication of everything particular in them.”⁹¹ Following Adorno, it can be claimed that the reason why artworks are able to talk to or communicate with their observers/audiences/readers is not a certain characteristic of “the creator” behind the artwork. Rather, they can be regarded as “unique” objects when compared to other natural objects because of a particular characteristic which is inherent in the artwork itself. This means that the artworks owe their power of communication solely to themselves rather than an external factor. In other words, the magic of the artworks lies in their own properties but not in the magic of their “creators.” In that sense it can be said that Adorno’s main endeavor considering artworks is to draw attention to the role of the material itself rather than that of its creator.

As it appears from this picture, in Adorno’s framework the artist’s role is to be narrowed. This also demonstrates Adorno’s notion of the subject in general. In his

⁹⁰ Ibid., 218.

⁹¹ Ibid., 5.

dissertation on Kierkegaard, in order to differentiate the Kierkegaardian “I” from the Fichtean “I”, Adorno explicates his criticism on the Fichtean “I”. As mentioned above, the Jena Romanticists’ subject owes its peculiarity to the Fichtean “I”. In that sense, Adorno’s criticism regarding the Fichtean “I” might be taken as a source of reference in order to comprehend Adorno’s possible critique of the romantic subject.

In Adorno’s words:

“when Fichte rendered the ego infinite he asserted an idealism in relation to which all actuality became pale, an acosmism in relation to which his idealism became actuality, notwithstanding the fact that it was docetism. With Fichte thought was rendered infinite and subjectivity became infinite absolute negativity, infinite tension and longing.”⁹²

Given Adorno’s viewpoints on the Fichtean subject, it can be pointed out that beginning with the romantic subject actuality loses all of its significance. To put it differently, the subject becomes the basis of actuality. Yet, this does not mean that the subject has a positive achievement on its part. It is rather a precariously negative achievement on the part of the subject. Its achievement is said to be negative because of the fact that it is bound to be in a state of constant tension rather than being in a state of serenity.

The fact that the subject considers itself to be a semi-god leads it to bear a variety of tremendous ideals. This is because, in comprehending itself, the subject is convinced that it is capable of doing everything without any limits. However, the harder its ideals become, the more the subject turns into a desperate and manic-depressive being. The increase in its tension is the inevitable result of such an inconsistency between the subject’s ideals and its achievements in reality. As it was

⁹² Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 28-29.

stressed in the previous section, this signals the ironic existence of the romanticist subject.

In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno is at odds with the extravagant characteristic of the romantic subject and his ironic existence, as stated above. According to Adorno, the subject cannot denounce its priority over the object anytime it likes. In terms of art, “in relation to the work, the individual who produces it is an element of reality like others. The private person is not even decisive in the factual production of artworks.”⁹³ As stated above, Adorno refuses the idea that the artist has a self-imposed task.

Furthermore, the artist is not even decisive when it comes to artistic production. For Adorno,

“it is hard to say whether in the production process the artist is faced with a self-imposed task; the marble block in which a sculpture waits, the piano keys in which a composition waits to be released, are probably more than metaphors for the task. The tasks bear their objective solution in themselves, at least within a certain variational range, though they do not have the univocity of equations.”⁹⁴

Considering artistic production, the artist is only one of the many determining factors. The production process, in that sense, is not a metaphorical process which takes place in the mind of the artist.

Adorno’s Notion of the Subject in General

In Adorno’s social and political writings, the subject is never described as an entity which seizes its power from an absolute. In this framework, the subject seems to be an ordinary entity just like other entities, such as animals, which lead a usual life. For

⁹³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 220.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

Adorno, “if the artist’s work is to reach beyond his own contingency, then he must in return pay the price that he cannot transcend himself and the objectively established boundaries.”⁹⁵ At this point, it appears that the objectivity of the world limits the subject and the subject should come up with ways of being aware of this fact. The footprints of Adorno’s possible criticism on the ironic existence of the romantic subject can also be traced here. If the subject was not aware of the fact that the objective world exists independent of him, he would lead a pathetic and desperate life just like the romanticist artist. In that sense, the objective world puts a limit to the activities of the subject and it also prevents the subject from being a victim of a never-ending period of crisis and depression. By that regards, the subject does not define himself as a transcendental subject. This is also the precondition of the object’s reaching beyond its own contingency.

Adorno also relates the objects and subjects to the historical processes. As it is obvious, both the object and the subject bear witness to history. This prevents them from acquiring ontologically distinct statuses from each other. Rather they are on the same level since both of them are determined by the already existing objective factors. For Adorno, “the enigmaticalness of artworks remains bound up with history. It was through history that they have become enigma, and it is history which gave them their authority.”⁹⁶ Enigmaticalness is one of the core concepts of Adorno’s aesthetics. Artworks owe their characteristic of being enigmas to the historical processes that they go through. In accomplishing such a characteristic, they also gain a certain amount of authority. In that sense, it can be laid out that one of the most

⁹⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 120.

important characteristics that attributes to the artworks their power is their testimony to the history.

Adorno also claims that, “the historical moment is constitutive of artworks; the authentic works are those that surrender themselves to the historical substance of their age without reservation and without the presumption of being superior to it. They are the self-unconscious historiography of their epoch; this, not least of all, establishes their relation to knowledge.”⁹⁷ For Adorno, therefore, one of the determining factors behind the authenticity of the artworks is their relationship with history and knowledge. Parallel to this, the artworks –on the condition that they are authentic artworks- reveal the characteristics of the particular epoch to which they belong.

The Special Case of Wagner

I briefly address Adorno’s interpretation of Wagner since his critique of Wagner as a composer seems to reflect his criticism on the concept of genius in general. Adorno distinguishes between Wagner and the romantic artist partly because, for him, Wagner’s music does not belong to the category of *l’art pour l’art*. This fact, however, does not necessarily mean that his interpretation of Wagner’s music cannot shed light on his criticism of the romantic artist. In fact, as far as I am concerned it can be assumed that Adorno’s conception of Wagner is an extension of his criticism on the romantic artist.

For Adorno “Wagner’s music is a worthy lad that treats the villains in like manner and the comedy of their suffering not only gives pleasure to whoever inflicts it; it also stifles any question about its justification and tacitly presents itself as the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 240.

ultimate authority.”⁹⁸ In that sense Adorno criticizes Wagner on the grounds that Wagner as an artist aims to create the feeling of authority upon the audience.

“The beat of Wagner’s music exemplifies his regression to the elementary and the barbaric. Wagner’s music has the tendency to disguise the estrangement between the composer and the listener by incorporating the listener into his work as an element of “effect”: As an advocate of effect, the conductor is the advocate of the public in the work. However, as the striker of blows, the composer-conductor gives the claims of the public a terroristic emphasis.”⁹⁹

In his analysis of Wagner, Adorno puts forward that “with its hostility to standard forms and his playful use of them, Wagner’s musical form not only does away with the feudal remnants of musical material, it also makes the material incomparably more pliant to the composer’s will than ever before.”¹⁰⁰ Following Adorno’s criticism on Wagnerian understanding of the relation between the composer and the artwork, it can be claimed that Adorno is highly critical of the material which becomes a captive to its maker. In such a picture of dominance of the subjects, the artworks become by-products of their makers. In Adorno’s framework there must be a certain distance between the subject and object. In other words, the object’s independent existence must be preserved for which the artist’s role must be restricted. If the object’s autonomous and independent existence cannot be preserved, then the autonomous production will also be at stake. All of what is underlined here implies that the emancipation of artworks relies heavily on the emancipation of the material rather than the emancipation of the subjectivity of the artist as it was stressed above.

⁹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (Verso, 2005), 11.

⁹⁹ Karin Bauer, “Adorno’s Wagner: History and the Potential of the Artwork,” *Cultural Critique* 60 (Spring 2005): 68-91.

¹⁰⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (Verso, 2005), 38.

If the focus was put heavily on the subjectivity of the artist, the objectivity would be at stake because actuality can turn into a game. “The self, the hoard of all concretion, contracts in its singularity in such a fashion that nothing more can be predicated of it: it reverses into the most extreme abstractness; the claim that only the individual knows what the individual is amounts to no more than a circumlocution for its final unknowability.”¹⁰¹ The loss of objectivity results in a hazardous state of unknowability. Even the most assertive component of this picture, the ego itself starts to lose its knowability. This is because it loses sight from the external reality that it is also a part of. Yet the first thing to be lost is in fact the sight that the ego has of itself.

Adorno’s Subject and his Relation to Society

In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno demonstrates that “the practice of the transcendental subject’s rule makes it a part of what it thinks it is ruling; it succumbs like the Hegelian master. It makes manifest the extent to which in consuming the object it is in bondage to it. What it does is the spell of that which the subject believes under its own spell. The subject’s desperate self-exaltation is its reaction to the experience of its impotence in the face of nature and society, which hinders self-reflection; absolute consciousness is unconscious.”¹⁰² At this point, Adorno’s ultimate undertaking of the dispraise of the constitutive subjectivity unfolds. The main objective of the constitutive subject is to dominate the society and the nature as stated above. During its exercise of power, however, what comes out as an inevitable result is its incapability of dominating the society and the nature. Even though the

¹⁰¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 75.

¹⁰² Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Continuum Publishing Company, 1983), 180.

subject praises itself to the greatest extent possible, the fact that it faces the reality brings it to a position of discrepancy.

In order to fully comprehend the subject's role in the society, it would be contributive to talk more about the origins of artworks. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno puts forward that "artworks become artworks only by negating their origin. They are not to be called to account for the disgrace of their ancient dependency on magic, their servitude to kings and amusement, as if these were art's original sin, for art retroactively annihilated that from which it emerged."¹⁰³ Here Adorno seems to talk only about the barriers such as magic and king. Within Adorno's theory, however, such a viewpoint can as well be applied to the constitutive subject's role on the artwork. Parallel to the fact that artworks are independent of the church or the kingdom, they might also be said to be independent of the power of the subject behind them. This is because artworks acquire their unique status only if they negate everything that might work as an origin for them, especially the subject itself.

Adorno's Dialectic Criticism on the Constitutive Subjectivity

In analyzing the relationship between the artwork and the artist, Adorno enounces that "for the artwork, thus for its theory, subject and object are its own proper elements and they are dialectical in such a fashion that whatever the work is composed of –material, expression, and form- is always both. The materials are shaped by the hand from which the artwork received them; expression, objectivated in the work and objective in itself, enters as a subjective impulse; form if it is not to have a mechanical relationship to what is formed, must be produced subjectively

¹⁰³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 4.

according to the demands of the objects.”¹⁰⁴ It can be said that the artworks demand a certain amount of subjectivity from their makers. However, this does not imply that they demand complete subordination of the subjectivity of their makers. The subject and the object are in fact in a dialectical relationship with each other, which is reminiscent of Adorno’s handling of the concept of Enlightenment thought in general and the concept of rationality in particular. As stated in the previous chapters, Adorno does not intend to propose a total abolition of the Enlightenment thought. Rather, he suggests an alternative comprehension of the Enlightenment thought and its extension; the concept of rationality. His viewpoint on the Enlightenment thought in general can be applied to his viewpoint on the constitutive subjectivity as well.

In order to elaborate this, it should be noted that unlike post-modern thinkers Adorno does not announce the death of the subject in general and death of the artist/author in particular. However, as it will be discussed in detail, even though Adorno seems to criticize the prominent subjectivity which springs from the Jena Romanticist thought, in fact he does not position his theory completely in opposition to it. Rather, he proposes a dialectical alternative to the constitutive subjectivity. Adorno’s viewpoint on this subject matter is dialectical in the sense that he proposes a synthesis of the subject and the object. As being two of the most prominent factors behind artworks, Adorno suggests a synthesis of the factors of objectivity and subjectivity. For Adorno, “the totally objectivated artwork would congeal into a mere thing, whereas if it altogether evaded objectivation it would regress to an impotently powerless subjective impulse and flounder in the empirical world.”¹⁰⁵ This means that neither subjectivity nor the objectivity is given priority. As it appears from the above

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 218.

¹⁰⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 230

quotation from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, the subjectivity of the artist is not a characteristic of the artwork per se, but rather it becomes a characteristic of the artwork in as much as the object demands it.

It appears that Adorno's main endeavor here is to limit the activity of the artist in order to make room for the autonomous status of the artworks since "those who produce important artworks are not demigods but they are often fallible, often neurotic and damaged individuals."¹⁰⁶ In that sense, an object attains its autonomous status only if it is rescued from the bounds that limit it. However, being exempt from each and every bound can also bring the artwork into the position of falling under the spell of the all-encompassing artist once again, since one cannot talk about an actual control mechanism left to criticize the artwork, which will be the primary subject matter of the next chapter.

In this chapter, mainly Adorno's notion of the subject in relation to the art and artwork has been laid out. A closer look at the subject in relation to art can also bring us to the comprehension of the subject in general. It can be claimed that in Adorno's framework the subject is not regarded as bearing a priority over the object. However, this does not mean that objectivity is determinate to the greatest extent. Rather, partly in his *Aesthetic Theory*, partly in his *Negative Dialectics* and his dissertation on Kierkegaard, Adorno seems to advocate the view that the subject and the object are in a mutual relationship with regards to the world. This prevents them from maintaining dominance over each other. However, in Adorno's conceptualization of the modern composer and author, which can be said to unfold in his texts on the sociology and philosophy of music and his writings on literature, it appears that there is a particular discrepancy. This discrepancy explicates itself through the rather

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 225.

remarkable difference between the subject that has been described throughout this chapter with regards to his criticism on the Fichtean “I”, and Adorno’s notion of the subject, which is one of the main subject matters of the next chapter that relies heavily on the notion of “autonomy.”

CHAPTER 6

THE JENA ROMANTIC CONCEPT OF THE ARTIST

Introduction

As it was argued throughout the previous chapters, the Jena Romanticists can be said to be against any kind of overarching ideals. In this framework one of the most prominent ideals, which was the focal point of the first chapter, is rationality. In the first chapter the Jena Romanticists' opposition to rationality was presented.

Throughout the second chapter, by discussing the Romanticists' notion of irony, their mockery of such all-encompassing ideals was introduced, which enables to cultivate a new perspective to this issue. Nevertheless, this is not to say that fixed grounds are completely underestimated within the Jena romanticist framework.

Frederic Beiser, who is a widely known historian of Early German Romanticism, maintains that “rather than making reason the highest authority and the ultimate standard of truth, as the Enlightenment thought aimed to do, the Jena Romantics gave such authority to the intuitions and feelings of art which transcend all conceptualization, judgment and reasoning.”¹⁰⁷ In this regard, it can be pointed out that, feelings of the subject, which do not bear the characteristics of being all-encompassing and well-definable in comparison to reasoning, become the source of ground within the Jena Romanticist tradition, especially when art is taken into consideration. These feelings serve as a ground especially in terms of the production process of the artworks.

Novalis and Hölderlin originally oppose any inclination towards positing first principles as it was argued throughout the first chapter. It was one of the objectives

¹⁰⁷ Frederik C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 43.

of the first chapter to state the striking difference between Fichte's and the Jena Romanticists' viewpoints regarding the first principles. On this subject matter, Beiser argues that "as Larmore is careful to point out, Hölderlin and Novalis's move to deny subjectivity the status of a self-evident first principle does not entail that they dismiss subjectivity as an illusion, so the romantics are not heralding the "death of the subject"."¹⁰⁸ It should be underlined that, unlike the post-modernist tradition, the Jena Romanticists' opposition to the fixed first principles does not necessitate that they are also against an overreaching notion of subjectivity. In that sense, throughout this chapter, it is going to be argued that even though the Jena Romanticists seem to deny the inclination towards basing philosophy upon certain first principles, they in fact base their entire philosophy on subjectivity which functions as a first principle.

Within the Jena Romantic tradition, therefore, the artist is considered as a "creator" who seizes power from "the absolute." Parallel to this, they categorize art production as a process of "creation." In this chapter, the main aim is to deeply analyze the concept of the artist within the Jena Romanticist framework, which functions as a first principle in their philosophy. For Novalis, "poetry is creation. Every poetic work must be a living individual."¹⁰⁹ The reason why the artist as a "creator" is insistently stressed is that creation is normally a characteristic of an absolute or a god. However, the fact that the romantic artist is regarded as a unique subject who seizes power from the absolute itself makes him become the absolute itself. To put it differently, the romantic artist might be considered as an extension of the absolute. In order to explicate the Romanticist notion of the artist, firstly the origins of such a notion, which seem to lie in Schiller's aesthetics, will be briefly

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Millan, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (State University of New York Press, 2007), 36-37.

¹⁰⁹ Novalis, *Pollen and Fragments: Selected Poetry and Prose of Novalis* (Phanes Press, 1989), 69.

presented. Secondly, the artist's relation to his material will be stressed. Finally, his relation to the society in general and to his readers/audience in particular will be deeply analyzed.

Schiller's Aesthetics: The Roots of Jena Romanticist Concept of Art and Artist

Before analyzing the Jena Romanticist concept of genius, the roots of the romantic concept of art and artist should be mentioned. In terms of aesthetics, the origins of Jena Romantics can be traced in Schiller's aesthetics. According to Onur Küçükarslan, "Schiller makes the transition from Kantian aesthetics to Romantic Aesthetics possible. Rather than the total triumph of reason, what Schiller endorsed was the domination of natural desires, intuitions and feelings."¹¹⁰ Schiller maintains:

"For art has to leave reality, it has to raise itself bodily above necessity and neediness; for art is the daughter of freedom, and it requires its prescriptions and rules to be furnished by the necessity of spirits and not by that of matter. But in our day it is necessity or neediness, which prevails, and bends a degraded humanity under its iron yoke. Utility is the great idol of the time, to which all powers do homage and all subjects are subservient. In this great balance of utility, the spiritual service of art has no weight, and, deprived of all encouragement; it vanishes from the noisy Vanity Fair of our time."¹¹¹

It seems from the above quotation that long before Adorno, Schiller attempted to separate art from the necessities of daily life and his main endeavor can be said to attribute art an autonomous realm. Even though Schiller's and Adorno's motivations behind such an undertaking were quite different, the outcomes of such particular undertakings turn out to be similar. In both pictures art's bearing a use value and the degradation of the humanity are considered as two of the most critical problems of the aforementioned eras. Parallel to this, the passivity of the masses has been one of the focal points of both theories' criticism. Due to the extensive degradation of the

¹¹⁰ Onur Küçükarslan, "Aestheticism and the Romantic Absolute: The New Mythology of Early German Romanticism" (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2008), 55.

¹¹¹ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1965), 26.

masses and the seemingly low quality of the artworks, both traditions of aesthetics proposed a separate realm for art. The reason why they are very much keen on art is that both of the traditions regard art as a gate which will ultimately lead humanity to freedom.

As a remedy to such a picture of degradation, Schiller puts forth his theory of “aesthetic education.” The basis of his theory lies on the assumption that “every individual man carries, within himself, at least in his adaptation and destination, a purely ideal man.”¹¹² In that sense, it is absolutely necessary to illuminate humanity by the help of aesthetic education since every man is potentially an ideal man. In his letters Schiller attributes a great role to the artist in order to evoke such a potential in men. Schiller suggests:

“Let the artist give birth to the ideal by the union of the possible and of the necessary. Let him stamp illusion and truth with the effigy of this ideal; let him apply it to the play of his imagination and his most serious actions, in short, to all sensuous and spiritual forms; then let him quietly launch his work into infinite time.”¹¹³

In order to elaborate Schiller’s notion of aesthetic education, it should be underlined that for Schiller humanity can reach the moral state only on the condition that they go through aesthetic education. According to Schiller:

One of the most important tasks of culture is to submit man to form, even in a purely physical life, and to render it aesthetic as far as the domain of the beautiful can be extended, for it is alone in the aesthetic state, and not in the physical state, that the moral state can be developed. If in each particular case man ought to possess the power to make his judgment and his will the judgment of the entire species; if he ought to find in each limited existence the transition to an infinite existence; if, lastly, he ought from every dependent situation to take his flight to rise to autonomy and to liberty, it must be observed that at no moment is he only individual and solely obeys the law of nature. To be apt and ready to raise himself from the narrow circle of the ends of nature, to rational ends, in the sphere of the former he must

¹¹² Ibid., 31-32.

¹¹³ Ibid., 53.

already have exercised himself in the second; he must already have realized his physical destiny with a certain liberty that belongs only to spiritual nature, that is to say, according to the laws of the beautiful.¹¹⁴

The Ambivalent Concept of *Bildung* in Jena Romantic Philosophy

In the first chapter, the concept of *Bildung* in Jena Romanticist framework was mentioned. It was argued that *Bildung* is a very crucial concept for making sense of the Romanticist approach to the overarching ideals in general, which can be considered as the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment thought. For the purposes of this project, a second reason why *Bildung* is a very critical concept of the Jena Romanticist thought should be emphasized. The main motivation behind the reexamination of this concept is that it would provide grounds for comprehending the relation of the romantic artist with his society. In that sense, it should be pointed out that the concept of *Bildung* is highly related with the Jena Romanticist concept of art in general and the role of the artist in his society in particular.

The ideal of the education of humanity as a whole is only possible by means of aesthetic education. At this point it should be noted that the Jena Romanticists obviously inherit the concept of “aesthetic education” from Friedrich Schiller as discussed above. Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert argues that “although Schlegel and Schiller did not see eye to eye on many issues, Schlegel had great respect for Schiller’s insights on the role of art for educating humanity, and his romantic project was, in many ways, an attempt to take Schiller’s project a step further, that is, to use poetry to shape society into some sort of cohesive whole.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 109.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Millan-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (State University of New York Press, 2007), 14.

Since the Jena Romanticists believed in the possibility of the education of humanity, they might be identified as the revolutionaries of their era. They might be labeled as revolutionaries because for a long time in the history of philosophy, they have been the first philosophers to emphasize the potential of a collective destiny for humanity. It can be pointed out that they have conceptualized a universal hope for all of the humanity with their concept of *Bildung*. Furthermore, as Schlegel also defines the “romantic poetry as a progressive universal poetry,”¹¹⁶ once more their inclination towards “progress” and “universality” is clearly observed.

On the other hand, it can be laid out that the Jena Romanticists are far from being revolutionaries in practice. This is because they do not conceptualize a universal notion of freedom and education that can be attained by the public on their own; rather they must be guided by the shining light of the artists. In that sense, as it was stated in the second chapter on irony, the original aim and the ultimate result do not correspond. The reason why they do not correspond is that in the first place they seem to develop a firm belief on the adequacy of humanity in determining its own destiny, but then they seem to believe the contrary.

In their writings both Novalis and Schlegel question the adequacy of the ordinary man to lead a life as a work of art even though their initial aim was to enable this. As an instance to this, some striking fragments from Schlegel’s *Philosophical Fragments* should be invoked. In one of them Schlegel emphasizes that “no artist should be the only, the sole artist among artists, the central one, the director of all the others; rather, all artists should be all of these things, but each one from his own point of view. No artist should be merely the representative of his

¹¹⁶ Schlegel, Friedrich, “Dialogue on Poetry,” in *German Romantic Criticism*, ed. Amos Leslie Wilson (New York: Continuum, 1982), 126.

genre, but should relate himself and his genre to the whole, and thereby influence and control it. Like the Roman senators, true artists are a nation of kings.”¹¹⁷ The fact that Schlegel went even further to claim that the artists are kings who are the director of others is an indicator of how the Jena Romanticists draw an enormous gap between the artist and the ordinary people

This clearly portrays the elitist and arrogant aspect of Jena Romanticist philosophy. I disagree with Onur Küçükarslan’s claim that “the Jena Romanticists were not elitists since they argued that the whole society must be educated aesthetically.”¹¹⁸ For I think that the special status of the genius rejects this framework since common people are considered as incapable of achieving their own ends especially in terms of education and determining their own destiny.

The Romantic Artist as the Educator of Humanity

The reason why Schiller’s concept of aesthetic education and its reflection to the Jena Romanticist framework has been discussed is that they provide an introduction to the concept of genius within Jena Romanticist framework. In this regard, the vitality of *Bildung* also unfolds. Beginning with the Jena Romanticist framework, individuality has been given great significance when compared to other historically close periods and traditions. As being one of the most prominent examples of the Jena Romanticist period, in the introduction part of the novel *Lucinde* it is contended that

¹¹⁷ Friedrich Schlegel, *Frederich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments* (University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 251.

¹¹⁸ Onur Küçükarslan, “Aestheticism and the Romantic Absolute: The New Mythology of Early German Romanticism” (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2008), 123.

“no two persons were ever alike, each had their own characteristics that distinguished them from everyone else; complete self-realization demanded actualizing these distinctive characteristics no less than our universal ones. This ethics of individuality is especially marked in Schlegel’s idea of divine egoism according to which the individual is sovereign over all the values of his life and should choose that most suitable to his personality.”¹¹⁹

In line with this, it can be said that there is no authority which is more dominant than the authority of the subject. The subject is the only authority that can posit laws to himself and to other entities as well.

This general characterization about subjects also applies to the subjectivity of the artist within the Jena Romanticist framework. When compared to other subjects “with the artist everything is an act – as with others everything is only tendency. The romantic artist makes something real whereas others can make something only possible.”¹²⁰ It can be assumed that there is seemingly an ontological difference between the ordinary person and the artist which is defined within this framework. For the ordinary person everything can only be possible whereas for the artist everything can be turned to reality anytime the artist wills.

In that sense, it can be contended that the artist is an active being who can will and change the way of things they are. On the contrary, the rest of the people can only be passive actors who seem to follow the path already illuminated by the artist and do not even dare to do anything with their own light. This is especially the case with the artistic production; the fact that the artist produces something out of nothing is the underlying reason why he conceives himself and he is conceived by others as different from the “herds of people.”

¹¹⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Frederich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments* (University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 27.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

Their conceptualization of the artist as such also brings about another crucial theme in Jena Romanticist framework, which is their conceptualization of poetry. According to Novalis, “poetry is the great art of the construction of transcendental well-being. Thus the poet is the transcendental physician. Poetry works its ends by means of hurt and titillation, pleasure and pain, error and truth, health and sickness. It mixes all in its great goal of goals, the raising of mankind above itself.”¹²¹ In this respect, parallel to Schlegel, Novalis defines the role of poetry as educating humanity, which was discussed in detail in the first chapter. In that sense it appears that art has another transcendental role within society which is to accommodate the members of the society with welfare. Furthermore, it can be argued that poetry is not considered as a realm of perfection in comparison to the concept of genius in Jena romanticist philosophy. Rather poetry is regarded as a realm that consists of error and truth, health and sickness as it was mentioned throughout the section on the romantic concept of irony.

The noteworthy point which should also be remembered here is that within the Jena Romanticist framework one can talk about a certain “educator” of the humanity who is defined above as a “transcendental physician.” This transcendental physician has the duty of providing humanity with transcendental well-being through his illuminating poetry. In that sense, the members of society seem not to be able to achieve well-being themselves. Likewise, the members of society cannot provide themselves with aesthetic education on their own. Rather, there is a certain provocateur within society who should pave the way to freedom and well-being. In that sense, the painter, the poet, the composer and the novelist should be in the

¹²¹ Novalis, *Pollen and Fragments: Selected Poetry and Prose of Novalis*, 69.

forefront of cultural reform, and they should be cast in the role of educators of human race.

In order to elaborate this claim, Novalis interpolates that “fundamentally the transcendental poetry includes all transcendental factors and contains the transcendental in it. The transcendental poet is the transcendental man himself.”¹²² In that sense, it can be contended that the Jena Romanticist concept of poetry owes its characteristic of transcendence to another external factor, that is, the transcendental poet. The romantic poet is considered as a transcendental man due to his transcendental duty in the society and also due to the peculiarity of his poetry.

Schlegel also sticks to Novalis’s opinion regarding the essence of life and the role of artist in this picture. In his novel *Lucinde*, when talking about the feelings of Julius, who is one of the two protagonists of the novel, Schlegel puts forward that “everything lost its fixity, and the only thing that became increasingly clearer and more certain to him was the fact that great and perfect folly and stupidity were intrinsic prerogatives of men, and wanton malice, combined with naive coldness and laughing insensitivity, the congenital art of women. That was all he learned from his painful attempt to gain an understanding of human nature.”¹²³

As it is obvious from the above quotation, one can talk about a general tendency of contempt for the ordinary men within the Jena Romanticist tradition. Their deification of the artist paves the way to a sort of contempt for the ordinary people who seem to be unable to reach the position of the artist. Frankly speaking, the Jena Romanticists originally believe the possibility of educating the humanity as

¹²² Ibid., 70.

¹²³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Frederich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments* (University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 83.

a whole but this ideal remains as an ambivalent ideal on their part. This is because they advocate the claim that the folly and stupidity are embedded in the society whereas the artist is conceptualized in such a different way that he is capable of protecting himself from all of this. In other words, the artist is exempt from such degeneration inherent in the society.

To a certain degree the Jena Romanticists seem to have a great endeavor to educate the humanity which seems to be contrary to the above reflection on the romantic artist. Theoretically, they well establish their concept of *Bildung*. When it comes to the practical side of the issue, however, the Jena Romanticists could not succeed on the education of the humanity as a whole. This is because their notion of *Bildung* remained so much theoretical and arrogant that it could never penetrate into the depths of social life. In that sense, it should be adduced that even though the Jena romanticists searched for an alternative way to educate the society as a whole, they failed since they were extremely arrogant to achieve such ends which correspond to reality. The main reason why they are regarded as “arrogant” here is that they posit a well-defined borderline between the artist who represents the highest level of education and the ordinary man who should in fact be educated by the artist. Just because of this strict borderline, however, their ambition towards *Bildung* turns out to be extremely vague.

Final Remarks on the Concept of Art and Artist within Jena Romantic Philosophy

The Jena Romanticists regard poetic production as an impossible achievement unless it is carried out by the all encompassing ego. In other words, poetry should be completely under the spell of the genius in order to achieve its genuine character. Schlegel argues that:

“how does any thinking and writing of poetry take place, if not by complete dedication and submission to some guardian genius? And yet talking and ordering are only secondary matters in all the arts and sciences: the essence is thinking and imagining, and these are possible only in passivity. To be sure, it is an intentional, arbitrary, and one-sided passivity, but it is still passivity.”¹²⁴

In that sense, the artistic production can be described as a passive process in which the influence of passivity is indispensable. The works of art produced can only be authentic products if they are submitted to the will of the genius behind them. Let alone “authenticity,” any kind of artistic production happens to be at stake unless the production of the artworks is in submission to the genius.

Within the Jena romanticist framework another significant aim is “to romanticize the world,” which is parallel to their ideal of *Bildung*. Beiser defines the ultimate aim of romanticism to be romanticizing the world.

“For the ultimate aim of Jena Romanticism was to romantize the world itself, so that the individual, society and the state would become works of art. To romantize the world meant to make our lives into a poem or novel, so that they would regain the meaning, mystery and magic they had lost in the fragmented modern world. We are all artists deep within ourselves, the young romantics believed and the goal of the romantic program is to awaken that talent slumbering within ourselves so that each of us makes his life into a beautiful whole.”¹²⁵

The reason of the Romanticists’ tendency to romanticize the world is parallel to their concept of *Bildung* is because in the first place their aim appears to be romanticizing the whole world and all people. In the end, however, it turns out that the aim towards romanticizing the society is also based on a selfish motivation. It is selfish on the grounds that it is an endeavor to improve the conditions of the genius. To put it differently, if the genius was not in need of an aesthetically enhanced world for itself, then he would not necessarily want to romanticize the world. One of the most

¹²⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, *Frederich Schlegel’s Lucinde and the Fragments* (University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 66.

¹²⁵ Frederik C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 19.

important aims of the genius seems to be romanticizing the world but only for the purpose of his own satisfaction.

As it appears, “rather than wanting to subordinate the individual to the ends of the group, the romantics championed an ethic of individualism of divine egoism.”¹²⁶ The egoism of the genius unfolds even when he seems to be longing for a communal end such as *Bildung* or their project of romanticizing the state and the society. This is because even when the Jena Romanticists sought for a universal end, they believed that the attainment of it can only be possible by the guideline or even by the domination of the genius. Within Jena Romanticist framework, “the creativity of the artist was simply the highest organization, manifestation and development of the same fundamental organic power active throughout all of nature.”¹²⁷ In that sense, bearing “the characteristic of the highest organization in nature,” the creativity of the artist happens to be an end, which is the basis of all other means such as *Bildung* or romanticizing the society and the state.

In this chapter, the general aim was to question the substantiality of the romantic concept of *Bildung* and art production with regards to the excessively empowering ego of the genius. The main thesis on this subject matter was that the romantic concept of *Bildung* and the art production remain rather insubstantial when compared to the glossiness of the subjectivity of the genius. To cut a long story short, it should be pointed out that both the art production and the aim of educating the humanity happen to be nothing but realms of “show business” for the genius.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 51.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 21.

CHAPTER 7

ADORNO'S CONCEPT OF THE ARTIST AND ITS RELATION TO "THE GENIUS AESTHETICS"

Introduction

Throughout the previous chapter, Adorno's criticism on the Romantic subject has been demonstrated. As it was argued, in his social and political writings, Adorno seems to be in opposition to the romantic subject. In this chapter, the main aim is to discuss that although on the surface Adorno seems to reject "the genius aesthetics," in fact genius aesthetics is implicitly reconstructed in his theory, especially in his sociology of music. Accordingly, in this chapter, it will be argued that one cannot simply maintain that the Jena romantic concept of genius has disappeared after the fall of the Romantic concept of art within the contemporary art criticism. Rather, it will be argued that Adorno's take on modern music in general; such as its inaccessibility, and the relationship between the modern composer and his audience enable a reconstruction of the "genius aesthetics" in Adorno's aesthetic theory.

In Adorno's time, fascism spread to the deepest realms possible. Adorno, who was affected by this disaster the most, had to run away from his homeland, Germany, and later became an exile in the USA. In this picture, his writings on culture industry and accordingly his extreme fear of the masses are not unexpected results. In this section the main undertaking, therefore, is to display the fact that while Adorno's original attempt was to avoid the dominance of fascism in the deepest layers of daily life, art being one of them, he himself tends to create another dominance, that of the artist and the highly educated listeners over the other, ordinary listeners. In that sense, whereas Adorno's general aim was to preserve art from fascism that had

already been embedded in the society, the outcome happens to be a prominent elitism which is also hazardous for society.

Before elaborating Adorno's notion of the artist and his role in the society, it should be noted that Adorno has various books and articles on the sociology and philosophy of music in which he investigates several composers such as Wagner, Mahler, and Beethoven. However, it is not the purpose of this project to analyze these composers with the light of Adorno's perspective. When needed, Adorno's inquiry only on Stravinsky and Schönberg will be mentioned.

Radical Music and its Relation to Culture Industry

At the beginning of his theory of modern music, it is obvious that Adorno was afraid of the fact that popular art was gradually contaminating the radical art. Adorno maintains that "because the monopolistic means of distributing music stood entirely at the disposal of artistic trash and compromised cultural values and catered to the socially determined predisposition of the listener, radical music was forced into complete isolation during the final stages of industrialism."¹²⁸ In that sense, the need to preserve radical music from the mass degradation was an urgent matter. In this framework of degeneration, because of his overarching fear of the corruption of the radical art and artist, Adorno suggests a total rupture from the society. Modern classical music, especially the music of Berg and Schönberg symbolized the culmination of a rupture from society. Their compositions were seen as autonomous constructions, which are strikingly distanced from the functional demands and practical concerns of everyday life.

¹²⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1985), 6.

By this regard it can be maintained that Adorno's non-conformist music is the exact anti-thesis of society. The reason why art should negate the society is that the actual society is dominated by the apparatuses of culture industry. "Those who have been duped by the culture industry push for the deaesthetization of art."¹²⁹ In this picture, art is at stake since it is prone to domination by people who are deceived by the culture industry. At this point, what Adorno means by culture industry should be explained. For Adorno,

"it is a matter of something like a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves, the contemporary form of popular art. The culture industry fuses the old and the new into a new quality. In all its branches, products which are tailored by consumption by masses, and which to a greatest extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to a plan. The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above."¹³⁰

In order to protect music from the administration of the culture industry, radical classical music should cut itself from the bondages of society. It has gradually isolated itself to the greatest extent, so did the artist since he is the main actor behind artworks. In his *Philosophy of Modern Music*, Adorno contends that "rather the strictness of musical structure, wherein alone music can assert itself against the ubiquity of commercialism, has hardened music to the point that it is no longer affected by those external factors which caused absolute music to become what it is."¹³¹ Music, in that sense, was forced to move itself to an extreme point above society because of the ubiquity of commercialism and mass culture. In doing that its attempt is to regain the content that it has lost. For Adorno, only Schönberg's most

¹²⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 16.

¹³⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (Routledge, 2002), 98.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

recent works could have regained such content in Adorno's conceptualization of the term.

As stated above, Adorno proposed the emancipation of the artwork from the demands of the culture industry.

“The liberation of modern painting from objectivity, which was to art the break that atonality was to music, was determined by the defensive against the mechanized art commodity –above all photography. Radical music from its inception reacted similarly to the commercial depravity of the traditional idiom. It formulated an antithesis against the extension of the culture industry into its own domain.”¹³²

In doing so, however, in the first place radical music and modern painting were alienated from the people who were seriously affected by the expansion of the culture industry. Inevitably, radical art had to draw itself completely away from the society and stuck itself into its own domain; thus, in the end it was completely isolated.

Art and its Impact on the Destiny of Society

As it was discussed in detail throughout the previous chapter, one of the most remarkable duties of the romantic artist is to educate the humanity and accordingly to romanticize the whole world. This duty on the part of the artist leads to an irreconcilable gap between the ordinary people and the artist mainly because artists are considered as the ones who would illuminate other people and, more importantly, as those who are believed to have such a capability. It was underlined in the previous chapter that even though their original attempt was to educate the humanity, the Jena Romanticists could not fulfill their original endeavor because of their concept of the egoist artist.

¹³² Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1985), 5.

Within the Jena Romanticist framework, in that sense, since the all-encompassing ego of the artist tends to dominate the society, the determinative factor behind the fate of the artworks cannot be said to be the priority of education which is distributed equally in the society. Instead, the determinative factor happens to be the moods of the artist. In that sense, within the Jena Romanticist movement, the destiny of the listener or audience does not seem to be taken seriously when compared to the well-being of the artist. It can be advocated that, parallel to the Jena Romanticists, Adorno also describes a concept of listener which is passive and accordingly a concept of artist which is essentially remote from the listener and thus from the society. Furthermore, in Adorno's conceptualization of the artist, it appears that there is also a great gap between the artist and the ordinary listener.

In the first chapter, art's necessary fracture with any established origins, which can be labeled as one of the core issues in Jena Romanticist aesthetics, has been mentioned. In this picture, in order to ensure its autonomous character, art must break away from the established origins as well as the determinative hold of society, since society also inhibits art's emancipation. In other words, in Romanticist philosophy, art was defined as an institution which must be emancipated from the bondages inherent in society, created by the people. For Novalis, "people who write books and imagine that their readers are the public and that they must educate it soon arrive at the point not only of despising their so-called public but of hating it."¹³³ Likewise, Adorno maintains that "the experience of artworks has as its vanishing point the recognition that its truth content is not null; every artwork and most of all artworks of absolute negativity, mutely say: non confundar. The non confundar of

¹³³ Novalis, *Pollen and Fragments: Selected Poetry and Prose of Novalis* (Phanes Press, 1989), 9.

artworks marks the boundary of their negativity.”¹³⁴ In Adorno’s framework, art also does not submit itself to the norms of the society; in fact, its main attempt is to negate them.

According to Adorno, “art is the social anti-thesis of society, not directly deducible from it.”¹³⁵ If art is so remote from society, however, this means that art may also be remote from the filters of criticism. This is because many people with different backgrounds and viewpoints are not truly taken seriously and accordingly the value of their feedback is sometimes underestimated. The fact that art is posited in confrontation with society may lead to artworks’ being vulnerable to the hazards of the egoist will of the artist. The artist’s will might end up being hazardous because under the absence of any external criticism, his egoism can go to the extremes, which will have inevitable effects on the destiny of the artwork as well.

This does not mean, however, that art completely negates the components of society in Adorno’s theory. For Adorno, “there is no art that does not contain in itself as an element, negated, what it repulses.”¹³⁶ In that sense, whether deliberately or unwillingly, art is also nurtured by the society. Adorno maintains that “an artwork is real only to the extent that as an artwork it is unreal, self-sufficient and differentiated from the empirical world, of which it nevertheless remains a part.”¹³⁷ In that sense, it can be said that artworks should be independent from society and they should be self-sufficient. Unfortunately, they do not, however, seize to be a part of the worldly affairs. From this picture, it can be maintained that Adorno’s desire to separate art

¹³⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 132.

¹³⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 9.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 297.

from worldly affairs appears to be greater than how he formulates it. As a result, Adorno's concept of art is not completely isolated from the society, neither does his concept of artist. According to Adorno "no artist is able to overcome, through his own individual resources, the contradiction of enchained art within an enchained society. The most he can hope to accomplish is the contradiction of such a society through emancipated art, and even in this attempt he might well be the victim of despair."¹³⁸

It seems from the above quotation that Adorno proposes an alternative society in which the norms of the existent society are abolished. Only in this way, he contends, art can also be emancipated. Adorno, however, has an obviously pessimistic viewpoint of the direction of the prevalent society and, unexpectedly, of the ideal one as well. This is because Adorno does not suggest a solution or he does not attempt to make an analysis of the ideal society in which art would be emancipated, even though at some other times he appears to do so. Rather, he leaves us with a picture in which the isolated artist grieves since the criteria of emancipated society are left unknown.

Originally, the Jena romanticists had a belief in the education of humanity, namely *Bildung* even though their concept of *Bildung* is left in suspense due to the existence of ambivalences in their theories. As stated above, Adorno does not even believe in the attainability of such a universal and ideal destiny for humanity. Although fundamentally he was a Marxist, the worldwide expansion of fascism had triggered certain transformations in his Marxist viewpoint. After the experience of *Auschwitz*, Adorno grew more pessimistic about the contemporary society. For

¹³⁸ Ibid., 105.

Adorno, what obstructs the formation of autonomous and independent individuals is Enlightenment, which culminates in the experience of *Auschwitz*.

“The total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment, in which, as Horkheimer and I noted, that is the progressive technical domination of nature, becomes a mass deception and is turned into a means for fettering consciousness. It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals, who judge and decide consciously for themselves.”¹³⁹

In that sense, the Enlightenment is the process which is responsible for impeding the transformation of individuals into self-sufficient, autonomous and decisive characters.

Adorno's Characterization of the Modern Artist

The fear of the expansion of mass culture brings about indispensable effects on Adorno's conceptualization of the artist and his role in the society. Being a Marxist, rather than defining the artist as social and productive, he defines the artist as isolated since Adorno has a tremendous fear of the degeneration of the artwork and the artist because of the society. In Adorno's framework, the artist is not attributed an ironic existence but rather he is conceptualized as a pessimist figure in the society. By this regard, the modern artist also seems to be determined by his moods like his romantic counterpart. This is because in this picture there is also no filter of criticism which would regulate the artwork or the artist himself. Furthermore, the artist as such is also deprived of vigor because he is gradually losing contact with the worldly affairs.

Such a conception of art is similar to the Jena Romanticist concept of art because art was also severely dissociated from the empirical world at the time. Even though at that time art was not rendered in academies, it was still rendered in

¹³⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (Routledge, 2002), 106.

isolation from the society. This was because art was considered as a reflection of the creativity of the ego of the artist. In that sense, the more the artist regarded himself as being in an ivory tower, the more likely his art was to build imaginary walls over itself.

Another similarity between the romantic artist and Adorno's concept of artist, I contend, arises from the mood of the artist. As discussed throughout the previous chapter, the mode of existence of the Romantic artist was rather an ironic mode in which the artist was making a mockery of everything, even the taboos. The society was also under the risk of the insulting mockery of the Romantic artist. According to Schlegel, "society is a chaos that only wit can organize and bring into harmony. And if one doesn't trifle and amuse oneself with the elements of passion, then passion gathers itself into thick masses and makes everything grow dark."¹⁴⁰

This does not mean that the artist makes a mockery of everything, even the taboos, for the common good of the society. Rather, the ironist chooses a new carpet for his luxurious living room and has tea parties with his companions and he makes a mockery in order to cherish his own day. That is why he does not prefer to be involved in worldly affairs. Similarly, modern artist is snowed on under his pessimism. Even though the moods of the romantic and the modern artists seem to be the contrary, the outcomes of these moods are strikingly alike. Deprived of external criticism, both artists oscillate in their own isolated worlds. Indeed the artist in cold blood, either romantic or avant-garde, loses sight of reality.

¹⁴⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, *Frederich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments* (University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 86.

The romantic artist was remote from society because whether consciously or unconsciously he considered himself above the ordinary people. This is due to his possession of power from the absolute. However, this does not mean that he regarded himself as identical to the absolute. On the contrary, the romantic artist was making a mockery of all the extravagant claims, origins and entities which includes his mockery of even the absolute itself. This mockery of extravagant things also led to another mockery, the mockery of the masses. Constituting his own character out of irony, the artist has started to make fun of everything. This resulted in his inevitable disdain over ordinary things and people.

The Concept of Listener in Adorno's Aesthetics

The reason why Adorno's artist loses any filters of criticism is that on his way to differentiate himself from the herds, he also loses his contact with the society *en bloc*. Adorno's attitude towards the society *en bloc* is most prominent not in his dealing with a certain composer but it is rather revealed from Adorno's categorization of the five types of listener. Before presenting these four categories, firstly Adorno's consideration of the listener in general within the contemporary capitalist societies should be mentioned. For Adorno,

the delight in the moment and the gay façade becomes an excuse for absolving the listener from the thought of the whole, whose claim is comprised in proper listening. The listener is converted, along with his line of least resistance, into the acquiescent purchaser. No longer do the partial moments serve as a critique of that whole; instead, they suspend the critique which the successful aesthetic totality exerts against the flawed one of society.¹⁴¹

In that sense, rather than becoming a proper listener, due to the expansion of mass culture, the listener turned to a purchaser. Furthermore, in such a process the listener

¹⁴¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (Routledge, 2002), 32.

is described as a victim who has lost his ability to criticize the given. In his sociology of music, Adorno characterizes five types of listeners.

The first and supreme type is the expert: “the expert himself could be defined to be the wholly adequate type of listener. He would be the fully conscious listener whose attention tendentially catches everything and who takes stock of everything he has heard. For instance the listener who can when confronted with such a fluid piece as the second movement of Webern’s string trio, would meet the requirements of the first type. The second type is the good listener: “he too hears “beyond” the musical detail; he establishes interconnections in a spontaneous manner, judges a well-founded way, not simply following categories of prestige or arbitrary ideas of taste. The third is the cultural consumer: He is a frequent listener, under certain conditions, he collects records. He has a respect for music as cultural good, perhaps as something that has to be known for its own social validity. One lower type is the emotional listener: his relation to music is less rigid and indirect than that of the cultural consumer but in another respect it is farther from what he has listened to. What he has listened to, only serves to elicit instinctive impulses otherwise repressed or checked by civilisatory norms. The lowest type is the listener out of resentment who has nothing to do with music at all, only with politics and with its darkest and most aggressive type. The lower types of listeners are sociologically conditioned in a way that unless they all reach the upper level, which is impossible, they cannot even temporarily be changed under the impact of appropriating the highest quality musical work. All bonds connecting the musical work with the life of the recipient in a stimulating sense are cut; the hopes of a musical and social revival are lost.”¹⁴²

All these data on Adorno’s conceptualization of the listener and the artist display that for Adorno there seems to be either no method or a very limited method to educate certain layers of society. There is no hope for the education of these layers; they will always be duped by the culture industry. Unfortunately these layers constitute the majority of society.

As emphasized many times before, Jena Romanticists had a belief in the education of the humanity as a whole. Adorno does not even have such a belief. Rather he blossoms a belief upon the impossibility of the education of the masses.

¹⁴² Ferenc Feher, “Rationalized Music and its Vicissitudes (Adorno’s Philosophy of Music),” in *The Frankfurt School* Vol. 3, ed. Jay Bernstein (Routledge, 1994), 268-270.

This implies that his hope for a collective destiny has diminished because of the deployment of the mass culture. In terms of music, the situation is even worse. Rather than music of high quality, popular songs started to dominate the music scene. In this way certain types of listener emerge. According to Adorno, “the perceptive faculty of the listeners has been so dulled by the omnipresent hit tune that the concentration necessary for responsible listening has become permeated by traces of recollection of this musical rubbish.”¹⁴³

Modern Artwork: Lack of Dynamism and the State of Isolation

There is also another aspect to the artist’s being remote from society. Artist’s isolation does not only have effects on the future or the destiny of the society. To put it differently, the artist’s estrangement does not only hinder the further development of society, it also has direct effects on the fate of the artworks themselves regardless of their role in the society. This implies that the artworks lack dynamism and spiritedness on the condition that his maker has lost contact with worldly affairs. These artworks lack liveliness because in the name of autonomy, they are deprived of their connection with the tumult of life. Such artworks are cold blooded just like their makers. “On the one hand there is the positive liberation of music from cult functions, making way for the development of the autonomous works of art in the liberal age; on the other hand this autonomy has resulted in the isolation and alienation of both art and artist from society within which music has become largely a matter of passive experience: “For the great mass of humanity, music has become an art for passive enjoyment, excluding any deeper spiritual participation”.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (The Continuum Publishing Company, 1985), 10.

¹⁴⁴ W. V. Blomster, “Sociology of Music: Adorno and Beyond,” in *The Frankfurt School* Vol. 3, ed. Jay Bernstein (Routledge, 1994), 217.

The lack of dynamism and spiritedness is displayed when, for instance, one is listening to a composition of Schönberg, who can be said to be Adorno's favorite composer, one does not quite feel immersed into that work. This vindicates that if someone has not received a proper music education at one of the best universities known, it is nearly impossible for that person to appreciate Schönberg's music because the most important aspect of it is its technical perfection. Especially when Schönberg's compositions are compared to a song of Leonard Cohen or a suite by Dimitri Schostakovich, one can quite comprehend what is meant by "technical perfection." Leonard Cohen's songs or Schostakovich's suites bear the traces of this century. They provide us with an acknowledgement of everyday history, which bears witness to struggles and passionate turmoil. In that sense, to my mind Schönberg's or Berg's compositions do not reflect the turmoil of life itself. Rather they have become dependent on the tendencies in music academies which establish another "industry."

This is not to say that Schönberg did not bring about any innovations in the music scene. On the contrary, he was the one to abolish the conventional techniques in radical music. According to Robert W. Witkin:

"If Schönberg's music is good, it is because Schönberg makes, at musical level what Adorno sees as the proper response to the powerful collective forces that threaten to overwhelm the individual in modern society. Similarly if Stravinsky's music is bad, it is because it regresses into infantilism, primitivism and traditionalism; growing ever more complicit in the death of the subject and of expression, it is music which he sees as celebrating the triumph of oppressive collective forces."¹⁴⁵

After his demolition of the conventional forms, however, classical music was "technically" emancipated. In that sense, it can be assumed that in terms of technique Schönberg was a revolutionary. Yet when it comes to liveliness and appeal,

¹⁴⁵ Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (Routledge, 1998), 145.

Schönberg fails. Parallel to this, the individuality that Schönberg's music reveals is rather an asocial individuality. In fact, this ego has intentionally set itself apart from primitivism and traditionalism. This is because of its isolated and asocial character which can be described with millions of other labels, but not "revolutionary".

As art was gradually isolated, it possessed an extremely introvert character. This had enormous effects on the mass appeal of art. As it is obvious, Adorno never intended to make art a mass appealing domain of affairs. Even Adorno, however, did not aim to preserve art from "any" appeal. I contend that the inevitable fate of radical music would be lacking "any" appeal outside the boundaries of music academies. This would be the inevitable result of art's dissociation with anything concrete and becoming extremely introverted. This could even mean the death of art in its self-built prison. Right now for some people art might seem not to be in such a danger, but in the future it might lose contact with any kind of reality and it might even extinct. This is because nowadays art is gradually becoming a domain which is only rendered in academies.

The Artist, the Listener and the Obstruction of Criticism

Adorno's original endeavor is to prevent fascism from dominating the society. When it comes to practice, however, his attempts are not fulfilled since ultimately he abandons the society and attributes the artist and art a separate realm as if it is even possible to be exempt from the society. For Adorno "art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with

existing social norms and qualifying as “socially useful”, it criticizes society by merely existing.”¹⁴⁶

As stated above, what makes Adorno afraid is the sacrifice of individuality in this schema. It can be claimed that within this schema, in order not to sacrifice individuality to the mass culture, art must be asocial. “The sacrifice of individuality, which accommodates itself to the regularity of the successful, the doing of what everybody does, follows from the basic fact that in broad areas the same thing that is offered to everybody by the standardized production of consumption goods.”¹⁴⁷ Since everybody has been standardized by the culture industry, they lost what was once determinative of their individuality. Everybody has started to do what the other one does.

In Adorno’s theory, such worry also unfolds in the realm of artistic production. In order to differentiate the genuine artistic production from the lighter one and in order to differentiate the genuine listener from the lower types, Adorno should have found a way to emancipate the artist together with the expert listener. Furthermore Robert W. Witkin argues that:

“Adorno celebrated the idea of inaccessibility of modern music. He believed the languages of modern art were necessarily difficult and inaccessible to the mass of people not because the latter were intellectually incapable but because they were victims of a false consciousness, fetishising commodities, hypnotized by the lies, false promises and seductions of a modern materialist culture, with no desire to be awakened and preferring only to have their comforting illusions confirmed.”¹⁴⁸

“In every improvement to which the artist is compelled, often enough in conflict with what he considers his primary impulse, the artist works as social agent,

¹⁴⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 296.

¹⁴⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (Routledge, 2002), 40.

¹⁴⁸ Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (Routledge, 1998), 11.

indifferent to society's own consciousness. He embodies the social forces of production without necessarily being bound up by the censorship dictated by the relations of production, which he continually criticizes by following the rigors of his *métier*.¹⁴⁹ Even though the artist seems to be described as a social agent who resists the censorship inherent in the society, the fact that he criticizes such censorship following the rigors of only his *métier* can still lead to tyrannical results. In that sense, it can be said that being that much indifferent to society's consciousness is also hazardous since it runs the risk of obstructing criticism.

¹⁴⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (Continuum Publishing Company, 1997), 43-44.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Many traditions in Western Philosophy have been greatly worried about art's servitude to various institutions which dominate society such as the church, courts, military and other state mechanisms. Many theorists have been afraid of the transformation of art into a tool of these institutions and accordingly artist's being a victim of such an enchained production. In order to prevent this, art has long been conceptualized as being in a complete isolation from society. To put it differently, art has been described as completely exempt from the worldly affairs. The Jena Romanticist aesthetics and Adorno's sociology and philosophy of art are two such tendencies in Western Philosophy.

As being an anti-Enlightenment movement, Romanticism denied any attempt to ground philosophy on well-established grounds. The only common ideal that they pursued was *Bildung*, the education of humanity as a whole. Within the Jena Romanticist framework, other than promoting an ambivalent concept of *Bildung*, one of the most important characteristic of the artist is having an ironic attitude towards the world. The Jena Romanticist artist makes a mockery of the society and of the masses. In order to differentiate the artistic production from the dullness and absurdity of the society, with the help of the all-encompassing artist, art was put in a separate realm.

Similarly, throughout the modern times one of the most common tendencies is to conceptualize art as endangered. Art is seen as endangered because of its confrontation with many institutions such as communist and fascist states, the church etc. One of the most important endeavors of Adorno's aesthetics is to prevent art

from turning into a tool of these apparatuses. With the help of the artist and various “alternative” institutions, academy being one of them, art has been attempted to be put in a separate realm completely in isolation from the majority of people. Especially radical music and avant-garde tendencies in painting are isolated from people. This is because nobody, even the experts, is able to appreciate these works of art since these artworks have gradually lost their meaning. Whether artworks lost their liveliness depended on their isolation from the worldly affairs. In this way, they lost their meaning as well because they lost contact with anything concrete or serious. In that sense, even though the ego of the modern artist does not seem to be as developed and all-encompassing as the ego of the romantic one is, the modern artist, as described by Adorno, implicitly bears some of the characteristics of the “genius aesthetics.”

Throughout this thesis project, it has been argued that even though the modern artist, which is depicted by Adorno, and the artworks which they produce might be taken as reactions to the commodification of the artworks, their isolated character also consolidates the commodification of culture. This is because the more art is estranged from society; the more society loses one of the most significant media of preventing culture from decadence. It, in fact, does not pretend to lose this medium since “autonomous art” is already “there” even though it is very far away from society. Nevertheless, the fact that art is “there” is not sufficient to keep society from degeneration. At this point it should be emphasized that art is defined in contradiction to society, which is one of the main aims of Adorno’s and Jena Romanticists’ philosophies. Yet art must also be aware of the society’s dynamics in order to be able to deeply criticize it. Otherwise, the only critic will turn out to be the

ego behind the artwork, which is hazardous to both the fate of the artwork and more importantly the fate of society as a whole.

If the art production remains in this schema, the society will remain prone to the even more corruption of the masses. Besides, autonomous artworks would turn to fetish objects. “Like other products under capitalist conditions, they would hide the labour that has gone into them and appear to have a life of their own. The fetish character of autonomous works implies that they appear to be superior cultural entities somehow detached from economic and social conditions.”¹⁵⁰ In order to avoid such a picture, there must be a way for the artist to keep away from the demands of consumer society but at the same time be intertwined with the society. Adorno seems to aspire to such an undertaking in the first place, but then he abandons all his hopes and that is why his aesthetics becomes a sub-category of the “genius aesthetics.”

¹⁵⁰ Lambert Zuidervaart, “The Social Significance of Autonomous Art: Adorno and Burger”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 48, No. 1. (Winter, 1990): 64.

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