ESJP
#26 | 2025

The Senselessness of Reason

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

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This paper reassesses Theodor W. Adorno's (1903–1969) critical thinking in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Readers may find Adorno's arguments ambiguous without understanding his literary style and intellectual attitude. To make Adorno's thought less ambiguous, I suggest that we should interpret his work through a specific Early German Romantic attitude, which reflects his style and philosophical thinking. A deeper analysis reveals the similarities between Adorno and the Early German Romantic movement, highlighting his philosophical affinities and structural echoes with Early German Romanticism. In Adorno's thinking, we find motifs such as aesthetic mediation, myth, ambivalence, purposelessness, human drives, a critique of the political sphere as being too rational, and a critique of disengagement from nature. All of these themes can be traced back to Early German Romanticism. Ultimately, I argue that Adorno's work can be better understood when considering its Early German Romantic *ethos*.

To understand the German Romantic movement, this paper will focus on the thought of Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) and Friedrich von Hardenberg, more commonly known as Novalis (1772–1801). Both Schiller and Novalis were born almost 150 years before Adorno. Therefore, one might wonder what these thinkers have in common. The commonality is found in the fact that all of these thinkers, belonging to the German Romantic movement and the Frankfurt School, represented a current of thought notable for their criticism of the Enlightenment. The common denominator for Schiller, Novalis, and Adorno is the form and content in which their criticism is presented. This paper includes a comparative conceptual analysis of Schiller and Adorno's work. For Schiller, there will be a focus on *The Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters,* in which Schiller sets out his philosophical thinking, written and published between 1794 and 1795, following the Reign of Terror. For Adorno, the focus will be on his book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which he co-wrote with his intellectual companion, Max Horkheimer, in 1944 and was published in 1947, just after the end of the Holocaust. Throughout this paper, it is essential to remember that these historical conditions, both the Reign of Terror and the Holocaust, are direct motivations for the critique of these authors. In both Schiller's and Adorno's writings, we find a clear indication of their philosophical critique directed at the material reality of their time. The critique of instrumental reason, which stems from Enlightenment thinking, is the core of this philosophical response, according to which it is the cause that led to the atrocities. While we consider the philosophical arguments by Schiller and Adorno, Novalis's work will help define the anti-Enlightenment attitude. Novalis's poetry and philosophy suggest a sensuous approach to experiencing the world. The form we find in Novalis's poem is similar to Adorno's. This aligns with the critique of instrumental reason by Schiller and Adorno, who, through an emphasis on sensibility, aim to reconcile our thinking with nature and, reciprocally, to integrate nature into our thinking, rather than distinguishing it from nature as Enlightenment thinkers proposed. According to these authors, if this reconciliation is successful, then human cruelty will be reduced. As will be presented, Novalis's form and Schiller's content are found in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

This paper will be structured as follows: first, a presentation will be made of how Novalis defines the Early Romantic *ethos*, focusing on the form of the critique. Second, there will be a presentation of Schiller's *Letters*, focusing on the content of the critique and how this critique is the theoretical foundation

of the Early Romantic *ethos*. Third, we will assess how this *ethos* helps us better understand Adorno's position in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

The *Ethos* of Early German Romanticism

I live in the daytime
In faith and in might:
And in holy rapture
I die every night.
–Novalis, *Hymns to the Night*

The fragment of Novalis's *Hymns to the Night* is a prime example of German Romantic poetry. A few concepts can be recognised within this fragment. In the poem, we find an intense use of antagonistic concepts, such as pain and pleasure, rest and moment, and, as presented here, life and death, and day and night. These antagonistic concepts are precisely what defines the *ethos* of German Romanticism. They evoke ambivalence through their contradictions, all of which are present in the small fragment from Novalis's long poem. To understand this fragment, it is essential to grasp the intellectual influence of Novalis. Novalis was greatly inspired by J. G. Fichte (1762–1814), as he wrote extensively on Fichte's novel philosophy in his *Fichte Studies*, which date from 1795 and 1796 (Cahen-Maurel 2019, 142). The reader of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* must bear in mind that Adorno's arguments do not rely on strict argumentative processes; rather, through the contradiction and ambivalence of his arguments, the reader will understand that his arguments present themselves naturally through their internal movement. This movement is determined by the 'I,' an idea first formulated by Fichte.

Furthermore, in Fichte's philosophy, the concept of *Imagination* plays a key role. One of the characteristics of this philosophy is the synthesis of opposites, as seen in the fragment of Novalis's poem. In his *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge* (1794–1795), Fichte outlined a philosophy that centred on 'creative imagination.' This 'creative imagination' "is the power of our I that allows us to integrate and synthesise two opposing elements into our knowledge and cognition" (Cahen-Maurel 2019, 142). For Fichte, these opposing components are the 'I' and the 'Not-I,' the ideal and the real. The principle defining the core process of the 'creative imagination' is what Fichte calls reciprocal action. The following quote from the *Foundations*, cited by Cahen-Maurel, characterises the Romantic project and its reliance on a Fichtean understanding of the imagination, which Novalis was to embark on later:

> This power [imagination] is almost always misunderstood, but it is the power that combines into a unity, things constantly posited in opposition to each other, the power that intervenes between moments that would have to mutually annul each other and retains both. … The task was to unite two terms posited in opposition to each other, the I and the Not-I. They can be completely united by the power of imagination, which unites items posited in opposition to each other. (Cahen-Maurel 2019, 142)

For Novalis, Fichte's use of the word 'creative imagination' was not radical enough because it did not succeed in synthesising poetry and philosophy (Wulf 2023, 206). The Romantic project aimed to synthesise this aspect of Fichte's philosophy. The word 'romantic' was coined in the first edition of *Athenaeum* by Novalis and Schlegel (Wulf 2023, 203). *Athenaeum* was primarily a collaboration between Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829); their collaboration became known as the Jena Circle. Schlegel was a pivotal figure within the German Romantic movement. Schlegel founded a specific term for their collective efforts: *Symphilosophie*. *Symphilosophie* "is the true name of our connection," is what Schlegel wrote to Novalis in 1797 (Wulf 2023, 208). It was a concept based on the idea that two (or more) minds could achieve their full potential together (Wulf 2023, 208). As will appear later, the *Symphilosophical* form becomes important for Adorno's writing process of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For Novalis and Adorno, philosophising together

becomes an important aspect to overcome problematic dichotomies. If two self-determined 'I's' work together, the contradictions of their thought will present themselves through the reciprocal engagement.

For Novalis and Schlegel, romanticising meant approaching a totality in which everything connected. It connects life and the arts, individuals and society, humanity and nature. Novalis writes: "By giving the commonplace a deeper meaning, making the ordinary seem mysterious, granting the known the dignity of the unknown and giving the finite a touch of infinity, I romanticise" (Wulf 2023, 204). In this quote from his *Fragments*, an ambivalent attitude is noticeable—a vital characteristic of the Romantic way of seeing things. In 1800, Schlegel published a crucial essay in the journal *Athenaeum,* which elaborated on the notion of Romanticism. In *Gespräch über die Poesie*, he explicitly stated that '*das romantische*' cannot be expressed in terms of some genre. Alternatively, he affirms that the Romantic "is not a 'kind', but: an 'element' of literature" (Beiser 2006, 15). The foundations of their circle were built on the Greek conception of poetry (*poiētikós*), meaning 'creative' or 'productive,' which the Jena Circle transformed into an attitude to possess (Beiser 2006, 16). This attitude is an important 'element' within the Jena Circle. For the Romantics, possessing *poiētikós* means not merely a literal creative production, but a permanent, holistic approach to life and the world. If one possesses this attitude, subsequently, the literary production will consist of the Romantic element. The romantic attitude implies a different approach to the subject-object 'problem' of the Enlightenment thinker; however, the Romantics do not conceive of such a problem, as they aimed to integrate nature into their existence. Through *poiētikós*, they approached nature as something 'creative' while they were 'producing' this specific nature, thus nullifying the subject-object dichotomy. In Adorno, we also find this poetic attitude, as the romantic element in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is reflected in the lenient approach of his arguments. Adorno does not instrumentalise his thought; in that case, when reading his book, we should remind ourselves of the romantic elements, i.e., the productive force of the book.

Furthermore, the Romantic movement was a self-conscious antithesis to the Enlightenment ideals of the 18th century. Novalis's transcendental philosophy was an attempt to break away from the attitude which prioritises rational utility over sensible experience, which had been a core aspect of Enlightenment thought.[1] The answer to this division was the Romantic *Naturphilosophie,* which rested on the premise that the logical disjunctions of Kant's system were problematic. Novalis referred to his philosophy as 'magical idealism.' According to Cahen-Maurel, Novalis's magical idealism "is a serious reflection on the interweaving and positive intersection of the empirical and the rational, the sensible and the supersensible, sensibility and reality. In other words, […] magical idealism sees itself as a continuation of a program within the tradition of transcendental philosophy that attempts to reconcile or synthesise apparent opposites" (Cahen-Maurel 2019, 146). Within this program, Novalis sought to transcend the strong classifications and dichotomies established by the Enlightenment. Subsequently, the conception of nature had become explicitly disentangled from what was human. The opposition between Kant and the Jena circle was felt on both sides of the divide. As Beiser writes: "Probably no other aspect of Romantic *Naturphilosophie* has aroused the wrath of its neo-Kantian critics more than its organic concept of nature" (Beiser 2006, 154). According to the Romantics, Kant had been unable to produce a theory of the interaction between nature and freedom. On the other hand, authors like Schelling, who was also part of the Jena circle, wanted to "show that the constitutive status of the idea of an organism is the necessary condition of the possibility of experience" (Beiser 2006, 154). In other words, Schelling and other *Naturphilosophen* demonstrated that the nature of our mind is already integrated into the nature of the Universe, as in the 'objective' world (Ruiter and Ziche 2022,

[1] We find the Enlightenment *ethos* already in the preface of *The Great Instauration* (1620) by Francis Bacon: "It appears to me that men know not either their acquirements or their powers. Hence it arises that, either estimating the arts they have become acquainted with at an absurd value, they require nothing more, or forming too low an opinion of themselves, they waste their powers on trivial objects, without attempting any thing to the purpose." Bacon's emphasis on human power to utilise it for a *purpose* instead of making art, which he calls trivial objects, is a statement Novalis sought to reverse.

15–16). They claimed that Nature and mind are the same. Schelling explains that Nature should be encountered as an organism which evolves within nature.

As a consequence, there is no difference between a particular kind in this organic whole, only between certain stages such as subject and object (Beiser 2006, 168). For Schelling, the subject and object are only one part of a big unity. This unity manifests itself in various forms. Its concrete expression is in the form of equilibria in which antagonistic forces, just like the subject and the object, are realised. However, the Romantic attempt to overcome the dualisms was, of course, not without problems. The Romantics tried to emphasise the importance of the relationship between humankind and nature. To emphasise this, the Jena Circle aspired to give art a central role in German culture. It was mainly the Romantic Movement's growing social and political consciousness in the wake of the French Revolution that led them to develop a way of integrating art into social and political reform. Schlegel echoes this goal in *Athenaeum*: "[The French Revolution] prepared the German people for the high ideals of a republic by giving them moral, political and aesthetic education" (Beiser 2006, 49). Aesthetic education, in other words, was a necessary condition for societal reform. Schiller had written about this form of education a couple of years earlier, in his *Letters,* as we will see later. As Beiser comments: "In assigning such importance to art, the young Romantics proved themselves to be the disciples of Schiller" (Beiser 2006, 50). In the next section, we will see how Schiller's philosophy shaped the foundations of the presented Romantic *ethos* in Novalis and his *Symphilosophical* companions of the Jena Circle. As we will see, Schiller's philosophy especially emphasises that a culture which forms itself through aesthetic experience can oppose the instrumental attitude. This instrumental attitude is also identified by Adorno, who describes how political bodies utilise reason to dominate other humans.

Friedrich Schiller and Instrumental Reason

According to Schiller, Kant still adhered to nature as a causal-relational mechanism. Nature was only explained on theoretical grounds; in contrast to Novalis or Schelling, we, as humans, were not regarded as part of nature, which, according to them, is shown by experience. Instead, our dominant attitude towards the inquiry of nature displayed our arrogance. Consequently, this shaped our reason as an instrument which aimed to control this dominance over nature. Therefore, according to Schiller, the Enlightenment had only proven itself to be a 'theoretical culture'—an aesthetic component for "the actual barbarians" (Safranski 2016, 41). The task of the philosopher was to transform this 'theoretical culture' into a culture in which humanity is genuinely free. Schiller argued that the aesthetic world is not only a playground for the refinement of sense perception (*aísthēsis*), but that the aesthetic realm brings humanity to its essence. Schiller calls this essence the *homo ludens* (the human being who plays). If *homo ludens* does not fulfil its essential potential, society may be at risk. Schiller would argue that, due to our play drive (*Spieltrieb*), our 'animalistic satisfactions' will become subject to sublimation, helping our animalistic side to dignify and become human, while at the same time allowing our drives to constitute us as humans. Furthermore, according to Schiller, art will unveil our 'barbaric lawless drifts,' or those aspects of ourselves that Schiller calls 'drives.' When unveiled, we can direct these drives for the better.

For Schiller, the drives dehumanise our society, but we can overcome them if we educate ourselves and society through the arts. Later, for Adorno, this would become vital for his understanding of the socio-behavioural patterns of the masses as influenced by the culture industry, which, according to Adorno, numbed and mechanised human behaviour. Nonetheless, with his presented aesthetic theory, Schiller suggested that through play, humanity would eventually acquire its humanness: one feels the feeling, enjoys the enjoyment, and loves the loving. These duplications are exactly what, later in 1798, with the founding of *Athenaeum*, inspired the Jena Romantics. Through these duplications, Schiller criticises the increasing

instrumentality found within reason. Post-French Revolution society and *Aufklärung*-driven systems of thought are both subjugated to the laws of utility and justification. For Schiller, this instrumental type of reason becomes a social machine, what he calls a "steel cage" (Safranski 2016, 43). Schiller writes:

> *Utility* is the great idol of the age, to which all powers are in thrall and all talent must pay homage. […] The spirit of philosophical inquiry strips the power of imagination one province after another; the borders of art shrink as science extends its bounds (Schiller 2016, 5–6).

As we see, Schiller's concept of utility is closely aligned with the conditions of his time; the purposiveness of thinking often neglects philosophical contemplation. This aspect is also prominent in Adorno's thinking, as he identifies a problematic commodification of artistic expression that dulls the masses. Eventually, according to Adorno, even cultural expressions become a means for political ends. In Schiller, we already find the need for a culture which does not seek to find purpose in cultural expressions. As for Schiller, no systematic explanatory justifications are needed for being, feeling, loving, and caring. These aspects of life have no goals in themselves; they are not inherently meaningful because they do not serve as a means to another end. They are meaningful because they are genuine for what they are. Schiller also describes art in this sense. Art, like religion, serves society; if it wants to serve society, in a certain sense, it must come naturally and without intention (Safranski 2016, 45). For Schiller, art is, therefore, first and foremost a kind of drive for play, second, a means in *itself*, and lastly, the compensation for social deformation. This coincides with the Romantic *Naturphilosophie,* which also tried to overcome these problems of instrumentalization, as Beiser emphasised that "Schelling, Hegel, Schlegel, and Novalis did not wish to retain or revive the old metaphysical notion of providence, according to which everything in nature follows a plan. Rather, they believed that their teleology is completely intrinsic, limited to the ends of nature itself" (2006, 161). Thus, nature's laws are not applied; they are inherent to nature itself.

Furthermore, Schiller writes: "The antagonism of the powers is the great instrument of culture" (2016, 22). Schiller understood that through these antagonisms, society leaned towards the dialectics of the *Aufklärung*, which, through its logic, reasoned everything within a mathematical or mechanistic framework. This made any form of humanness abstruse. Schiller sought to confront precisely this complexity. With his introduction of playing human, we can attain, through art, a better self and a better society—a truly liberated humankind. For Schiller, with Robespierre as its figurehead, the French Revolution had become a 'theoretical culture,' identical to his description of the *Aufklärung*. Its terror, atrocities, and aggression are realised by what Schiller calls the "terror of reason" (Safranski 2016, 45). To understand how Schiller's aesthetic philosophy anticipates critiques of reason later taken up by Adorno, we must look more closely at his *Letters*. In the Second letter, Schiller writes, after his claims on *Utility* as "the great idol of the age," as earlier presented:

> The gaze of both philosophers and man of the world is now fixed expectantly on the political domain, where the very fate of humanity is argued out; or so it is thought. Does not any failure to join with this argument betray a culpable indifference to the welfare of society? (Schiller 2016, 6)

The 'idol of his age' has to do with the political bodies dominating society, as reflected in the second letter. Just as Adorno, Schiller's problems with politics stem from the political urge to rationalise and instrumentalise all societal expression; therefore, the politician does not leave any space for non-purposive aesthetic expression. This is more evident when Schiller turns his attention to the political climate of his day. For Schiller, the increasing rationalisation of political processes obscures the self-determining nature of humans. The Political bodies that decide upon the 'fate' of humans tend to mould society into a rational system. However, for Schiller, the systematisation of society is what leads to division, which strays away

from the natural ways in which humans organise themselves. Schiller further notes this in the Third letter, writing:

> This natural state (as any political body derives its original existence from forces and not from laws can be called) does stand in contradiction to moral man, for whom the only law should be to act in conformity with the law; but it is sufficient for physical man, who gives himself laws only so that he might come to terms with forces. (Schiller 2016, 8)

The law-giving nature of humans lies in the fact that we express ourselves aesthetically, which forms our morality. Thus, according to Schiller, aesthetic experience leads us to a more moral culture. For Adorno, this also becomes an important topic; the increasing commodification of the culture industry negates the creative and productive expressions of the human spirit, which would have educated the individual in becoming a moral being. Instead, the culture industry, like a machine, expresses pre-established forms of culture and expressions, which deform our aesthetic experience into a machine-like mechanism. Adorno claims that the political bodies determine the logic of these expressions. Schiller already identified this as stemming from Enlightenment rationality, which corrupted the political economy of his time. In the Fifth letter, Schiller writes:

> The enlightenment of understanding that the finer ranks not unjustly praise has, on the whole, had so little refining influence on resolve that it has instead tended to reinforce corruption through principle. (Schiller 2016, 15)

This corruptive *ethos* of thinking based on principles obscures the aesthetic experience. Therefore, according to Schiller, the political bodies of Schiller's epoch should educate the masses on sensible experience. In the final letters, Schiller makes an anthropological argument for the need of aesthetic education, i.e., "the emancipation of man from nature in the artwork which preserves us as sensuous beings" (Schmidt 2016, xxix–xxx). As Schiller writes in the Twenty-sixth letter:

> The emancipating aesthetic mood has to be a gift of nature; only the favour of chance can loosen the fetters of the original physical condition and lead the savage to beauty. (Schiller 2016, 99)

Schiller's historical conditions gave rise to his critique of the increasingly significant instrumental reason within the society and politics of his time. This critique is found within his concepts of 'utility' and 'terror of reason.' Schiller's aesthetic education aims to overcome the problematic inclinations that plague his epoch. This epoch is characterised by an increasing rational understanding of nature and political bodies that determine people's lives. Concerning these two problematic developments, we will see that Adorno expresses a similar critique.

Dialectic of Enlightenment: An Excavation

Now we will examine how the *ethos,* as presented in Schiller and Novalis, is reflected in Adorno's thinking. The eclectic character of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* makes the contents enigmatic. Adorno employs methods from history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and literary criticism to investigate the concept of Enlightenment and its emphasis on positivism and reason. Apart from the interdisciplinary research within the content itself, the contents are also written in a literary style, as Rose writes: "It is impossible to understand Adorno's ideas without understanding how he presents them, that is his style" (Rose 2014, 14). The book bases its style and philosophy on the notion of dialectic. This can be traced to Novalis's fragment of *Hymns to the Night*, where Novalis conveys the contradictions inherent in our thinking. The book itself does not present any instrumentality, as Adorno is not concerned with persuasion, but instead formally presents how our thinking has been shaped.

The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* originated from the *Symphilosophical* efforts of three people. The conversations of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Gretel Adorno were carefully transcribed into texts and reassessed by the three (Van Nieuwstadt 2021, 277). The process of thinking, writing, and working was motivated, as Novalis and Schlegel described, by the idea that two (or more) minds could reach a greater potential. In 1941, Adorno asked Horkheimer: "When will we be sitting in the garden while dictating, erasing, and carrion-eating (*lämmergeiern*)?" (Van Nieuwstadt 2021, 277). *Lämmergeiern* means to strip off a text just like a vulture would strip off a carcass. Their *Lämmergeiern*, in particular, exemplifies the extreme nature of their *Symphilosophie*. Gretel's contribution here was of much importance; Adorno writes in Minima Moralia: "It [Gretel's dictations] enables the writer to manoeuvre himself into the position of a critic at the earliest stage of the production process" (Van Nieuwstadt 2021, 278). In this production process, the three were preoccupied with specific themes and concepts to be implemented in their work, such as the notion of dialectics, the subject-object dichotomy, science as an apparatus of power, and the human urge to dominate nature. The form and content of Adorno's book resonate with the Early German Romantic *ethos*.

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* it is claimed that our reason can rationalise any form of instrumentality; thus, also the systematic killing of a group of people can be rationalised if the political body propagates that this is useful for a greater good. For Adorno, the Holocaust is proof that rationality had failed, because how is it possible that through centuries of scientific and philosophical development humankind eventually, through political organisation, killed 6 million people? He argued that the fact that we want to systematise thinking and reflect this systematisation into institutions and political control has shaped our reason as a tool. This tool eventually led to the atrocity of the Holocaust. Adorno's analysis of the holocaust strongly resonates with Schiller's account of the political bodies which decide upon human fate.

This made Adorno echo that "Enlightenment is totalitarian" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 6). Apart from political instrumentality, the ever-evolving sciences are also guilty of utilising humans and nature. Positivists, the heirs of the mechanistic philosopher of the Enlightenment, were the 19th and 20th-century vanguards of using mathematical calculations to justify scrutiny of nature. Adorno and Horkheimer's critical attitude towards this contemporary current of thought is very prominent. With their critique of positivism, they, just like Schiller, call on a resurrection of artistic endeavour, which in their day has been neglected. For Adorno and Horkheimer, art "still has something in common with enchantment: it posits its own", and to "which special laws apply" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 18). The reverse is presented in the following quote, where Adorno and Horkheimer attack their current-day culture, which increasingly tries to integrate art into science:

> With the progress of the Enlightenment, only authentic works of art were able to avoid the mere imitation of that which already is. The practicable antithesis of art and science, which tears them apart as separate areas of culture in order to make them both manageable as areas of culture, ultimately allows them, by dint of their own tendencies, to blend with one another even as exact contraries. (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 18)

As Novalis tried, Adorno propagates the dissolution of strict opposites; for him, art can become science, and science can become art. In that sense, Adorno looks at these expressions as two categories of a unified whole, just as the Jena Romantics argued. On the contrary, the systemising of the world has led to strong dichotomies whereby nothing is connected as a whole. These dichotomies were also firmly rejected by the Romantic movement and its *Naturphilosophie*. For Adorno and the Romantics, the world is not a system; as experience always flows, so does the world. Therefore, you cannot grasp it in a system. A page later, Adorno and Horkheimer formulate a rare praise to none other than Schelling and his notions on art and nature, writing:

> According to Schelling, art comes into play where knowledge forsakes humankind. For him, it is 'the prototype of science, and only where there is art may science enter in'. In his theory, the separation of image and sign is 'wholly cancelled by every single artistic representation'. The bourgeois world was but rarely open to such confidence in art. (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 19)

This confidence in art is a significant feature of the Romantic period. Schiller and Novalis had already emphasised the importance of artistic expression in regaining a sense-dominated attitude towards nature, rather than a senseless one. As Schiller emphasised, this senseless attitude became obvious in society, where humans are abstracted from their nature and subject to their self-preserving drifts, without any prospect of overcoming them. For Schiller, this led to political institutions arguing about humanity's fate. Adorno and Horkheimer repeat this, writing:

> However, the more the process of self-preservation is affected by the bourgeois division of labour, the more it requires the self-alienation of the individuals who must model their body and soul according to the technical apparatus. […] in the end the transcendental subject of cognition is apparently abandoned as the last reminiscence of subjectivity. (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 30)

This division of labour has made humankind follow the mechanical laws that the Enlightenment formulated. Even humans become cogs in a wheel, their existence becomes a mere means to utilise the ends of the political body. Everything becomes a rational web of construction; in that sense, spontaneous expression becomes impossible. Adorno and Horkheimer were very well aware of this Romantic *ethos*, writing: "As the organ of this kind of adaptation, as a mere construction of means, the Enlightenment is as destructive as its Romantic enemies accuse it of being" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 42). This destruction became apparent with the historical conditions which embedded both currents of thought. During the *Reign* of the brutal revolutionaries and of the Nazis, the terror with which they handled society was rationalised as a sacrifice for the greater good, followed by 'blind' citizens. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, ideology pollutes our reason and alienates humankind from nature.

For the National Socialists, their German 'home' (*Heimat*) with its heritage was the opposite of a nomadic culture like that of Jews, who are not at home anywhere. The Nazi propagandist utilised many forms of mythification for the cause for which young men should sacrifice their life. For Adorno and Horkheimer, home is nature itself. To emphasise this very notion of homelessness, Adorno and Horkheimer quote Novalis, writing: "Novalis's definition, according to which 'all philosophy is homesickness', holds only if this longing is not dissolved into phantasm of a lost remote antiquity, but represents the homeland, nature itself, as wrested from myth" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 78). For Adorno and Horkheimer, the myth that needs to be wrested is the instrumentality with which the Nazi's justify their atrocities. For Novalis, it is the philosopher who, due to his arrogant thinking, becomes too far removed from his natural home.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, myth is interchangeable with Enlightenment; their famous quote, which, according to them, summarises the first essay, echoes: "Myth is already Enlightenment and Enlightenment reverts to mythology" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, xvi). In the anonymous manifesto *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism* (1796/97), we find the Romantics criticising the significantly increasing demystifying nature of rational thought, which resonates with Adorno's notion that mythical thinking becomes rational. Rationality, as in the practice of their current day prestigious philosophers, i.e. the Enlightened philosopher, has made 'thought' something which can acquire absolute knowledge. For the Romantics, knowledge is, of course, ambivalent and dialectical, something which constantly changes. However, mythology should not become something which retracts society's interest in philosophical thought. The dialectics of mythology, as the Romantics write in the manifesto, should launch the ever-fluid Romantic attitude as found in their conception of *poiētikós*:

> Before we make ideas aesthetic, i.e. mythological, they will have no interest for the people. Conversely, before mythology is rational, the philosopher must be ashamed of it. Hence, finally, the enlightened and unenlightened must shake hands: mythology must become philosophical to make people rational, and philosophy must become mythological to make philosophers sensuous. (Anon 1996, 5)

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

> The principle of idealistic aesthetics – purposefulness without a purpose – reverses the scheme of things to which bourgeois art conforms socially: purposelessness for the purposes declared by the market. (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 158)

As we see, Adorno adheres to the Early Romantic notion that in experience, things come as they are. Adorno's novel and groundbreaking analysis in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are formed by a certain ambivalence towards reason, just as presented in Schiller and Novalis, because Adorno's dialectics seeks mediation, the perfect equilibrium of sense and reason, in the hope that it integrates itself into nature. This equilibrium is at best formulated in the last essay, which marks the entire book, quoting at length:

> Between the true object and the undisputed data of the senses, between within and without, there is a gulf which the subject must bridge at his own risk. In order to reflect the thing as it is, the subject must return to it more than he receives from it. The subject creates the world outside himself from the traces which it leaves in his senses: the unity of the thin in its manifold characteristics and states; and therefore, constitutes the "I" retrospectively by learning to grant a synthetic unity not only to the external impressions but to the internal impressions which gradually separate off from them. The real ego is the most recent constant product of projection. In a process which could only be completed historically with the developed powers of the human physiological constitution, it developed as a unified and, at the same time, eccentric function. Even as an independently objectified ego, it is only equivalent to the significance of the world of object for it. The inner depth of the subject consists in nothing other than delicacy and wealth of the external world of perceptions. (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 188–189)

Additionally, Adorno's attitude strongly resonates with this perspective, especially in his discussion relating to idealism and positivism: the attitude of *poiētikós* aligns with his positioning concerning the dichotomies; he neither positions himself as an idealist nor as a positivist but instead aims to overcome them. Thus, how does he overcome these dichotomies? Similar to Fichte, he argues that the constant dynamics between the realisation of the 'I' and the world will liberate our nature. In the consecutive passage, Adorno and Horkheimer explain this phenomenon through mediation. Adorno's (and Horkheimer's) Romanticism is evident after he formulates the mediation between the dichotomies:

> If it proceeds positivistically, merely recording given facts without giving any in return, it shrinks to a point. If it idealistically creates the world from its own groundless basis, it plays itself out in dull repetition. In both cases it gives up the spirit. Only in that mediation by which meaningless sensations brings a thought to the full productivity of which it is capable, while on the other hand thought abandons itself without reservation to the predominant impression, is that pathological loneliness which characterises the whole of nature overcome. The possibilities of reconciliation appears not in certainty unaffected by thought, in the preconceptual unity of perception and object but in their considered opposition. The distinction is made in the subject, which has the external world in its own consciousness and yet recognises it as something other. Therefore, the life of reason, takes place as conscious projection. (Adorno and Horkheimer 2016, 188–189)

Adorno and Horkheimer summarise their relationship to reason and nature in this extended quote. Humankind must not merely positivistically conceive the world, as this neglects the human subject. The same holds for the idealistic approach, as it places humanity in a circularity of its sense impressions. Only in

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

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Adorno's critical thinking can be understood more coherently if the Romantic *ethos* is taken into consideration. His fragmentary structure and ambivalent argumentation often create a stumbling block. By understanding his intellectual tendencies, we can come closer to reconstructing Adorno's thinking. This research reconstructed his thinking through two essential exponents of the German Romantic movement: Schiller and Novalis.

The romantic qualities presented by Novalis's poetic fragment are assigned to Adorno as they are found in the form and content of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. First, the fragment from *Hymns to the Night* conveyed a strong ambivalent attitude through its paradoxical notions. The notions can be found in Adorno's ambivalent attitude toward idealism and positivism. Second, like F. Schlegel and Novalis, Adorno operates through *Symphilosophical* methods. This is illustrated in what Adorno calls *lämmergeiern*. Third, within the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno fiercely criticises Enlightenment thinking, which is also part of the theoretical foundations of German romanticism. Moreover, ultimately, like the *Naturphilosophen*, Adorno reflects on the interconnection of our thinking and nature, proposing an integration of our thinking into nature and vice versa. As mentioned, this way of thinking was first proposed by Schiller's aesthetic education. Schiller's thinking was embedded in a critique of barbaric acts motivated by the French Revolution, just as Adorno's thinking was embedded in a critique of Fascism. Schiller is one of the first to recognise the increasing dominance of instrumental reason. Schiller called this the 'terror of reason'. Through his analysis, he conceived a society where utility is the 'idol of his age'; in Adorno's time, this 'idol' led to a systematic genocide. Suppose humanity does not want to succumb to monstrosities led by senseless thinking. In that case, we must, like Schiller, Novalis, and Adorno, integrate a more ambivalent and humble attitude towards the nature of reason.

If we consider these aspects when reading the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we can understand Adorno's positions much better.

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