

Cultural Memory

in the Present

MAX HORKHEIMER &
THEODOR W. ADORNO



DIALECTIC *of* ENLIGHTENMENT

Philosophical Fragments

Edited by GUNZELIN SCHMID NOERR

Translated by EDMUND JEPHCOTT

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[Cultural Memory in the Present](#)

Preface to the New Edition **(1969)**

Dialectic of Enlightenment was published in 1947 by Querido in Amsterdam. The book, which found readers only gradually, has been out of print for some time. We have been induced to reissue it after more than twenty years not only by requests from many sides but by the notion that not a few of the ideas in it are timely now and have largely determined our later theoretical writings. No one who was not involved in the writing could easily understand to what extent we both feel responsible for every sentence. We dictated long stretches together; the *Dialectic* derives its vital energy from the tension between the two intellectual temperaments which came together in writing it.

We do not stand by everything we said in the book in its original form. That would be incompatible with a theory which attributes a temporal core to truth instead of contrasting truth as something invariable to the movement of history. The book was written at a time when the end of the National Socialist terror was in sight. In not a few places, however, the formulation is no longer adequate to the reality of today. All the same, even at that time we did not underestimate the implications of the transition to the administered world.

In a period of political division into immense blocs driven by an objective tendency to collide, horror has been prolonged. The conflicts in the third world and the renewed growth of totalitarianism are not mere historical interludes any more than, according to the *Dialectic*, fascism was at that time. Critical thought, which does not call a halt before progress itself, requires us to take up the cause of the remnants of freedom, of tendencies toward real humanity, even though they seem powerless in face of

the great historical trend.

The development toward total integration identified in the book has been interrupted but not terminated; it threatens to be consummated by means of dictators and wars. Our prognosis regarding the associated lapse from enlightenment into positivism, into the myth of that which is the case, and finally of the identity of intelligence and hostility to mind, has been overwhelmingly confirmed. Our concept of history does not believe itself elevated above history, but it does not merely chase after information in the positivist manner. As a critique of philosophy it does not seek to abandon philosophy itself.

From America, where the book was written, we returned to Germany with the conviction that, theoretically and practically, we would be able to achieve more there than elsewhere. Together with Friedrich Pollock, to whom the book is dedicated on his seventy-fifth birthday as it was then on his fiftieth, we built up the Institut für Sozialforschung once again, with the idea of taking further the concepts formulated in *Dialectic*. In continuing to develop our theory, and in the common experiences connected with it, Gretel Adorno has given us the most valuable assistance, as she did with the first version.

We have made changes far more sparingly than is usual with re-editions of books dating back several decades. We did not want to retouch what we had written, not even the obviously inadequate passages. To bring the text fully up to date with the current situation would have amounted to nothing less than writing a new book. That what matters today is to preserve and disseminate freedom, rather than to accelerate, however indirectly, the advance toward the administered world, we have also argued in our later writings. We have confined ourselves here to correcting misprints and suchlike matters. This restraint has made the book a piece of documentation; we hope that it is also more.

Max Horkheimer Theodor W. Adorno

Frankfurt am Main, April 1969

Preface to the Italian Edition* **(1962/1966)**

The German text of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a fragment. Begun as early as 1942, during the Second World War, it was supposed to form the introduction to the theory of society and history we had sketched during the period of National Socialist rule. It is self-evident that, with regard to terminology and the scope of the questions investigated, the book is shaped by the social conditions in which it was written.

In keeping with its theme, our book demonstrates tendencies which turn cultural progress into its opposite. We attempted to do this on the basis of social phenomena of the 1930s and 1940s in America. However, to construct a systematic theory which would do justice to the present economic and political circumstances is a task which, for objective and subjective reasons, we are unable to perform today. We are therefore happy that the fragment is appearing in a series devoted predominantly to philosophical questions.

M.H. and T.W.A.

Frankfurt am Main, March 1966

Preface (1944 and 1947)

When* we began this work, the first samples of which we dedicate to Friedrich Pollock, we hoped to be able to present the whole book on his fiftieth birthday. But the further we proceeded with the task the more we became aware of the mismatch between it and our own capabilities. What we had set out to do was nothing less than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of * barbarism. We underestimated the difficulty of dealing with the subject because we still placed too much trust in contemporary consciousness. While we had noted for many years that, in the operations of modern science, the major discoveries are paid for with an increasing* decline of theoretical education, we nevertheless believed that we could follow those operations to the extent of limiting our work primarily to a critique or a continuation of specialist theories. Our work was to adhere, at least thematically, to the traditional disciplines: sociology, psychology, and epistemology.

The fragments we have collected here show, however, that we had to abandon that trust. While attentive cultivation and investigation of the scientific heritage—especially when positivist new brooms have swept it away as useless lumber—does represent one moment of knowledge, in the present collapse of bourgeois civilization not only the operations but the purpose of science have become dubious. The tireless self-destruction of enlightenment hypocritically celebrated by implacable fascists and implemented by pliable experts in humanity* compels thought to forbid itself its last remaining innocence regarding the habits and tendencies of the *Zeitgeist*. If public life has reached a state in which thought is being turned inescapably into a commodity and language into celebration of the commodity, the attempt to trace the sources of this degradation must refuse obedience to the

current linguistic and intellectual demands before it is rendered entirely futile by the consequence of those demands for world history.

If the only obstacles were those arising from the oblivious instrumentalization of science, thought about social questions could at least attach itself to tendencies opposed to official science. Those tendencies, too, however, are caught up in the general process of production. They have changed no less than the ideology they attacked. They suffer the fate which has always been reserved for triumphant thought. If it voluntarily leaves behind its critical element to become a mere means in the service of an existing order, it involuntarily tends to transform the positive cause it has espoused into something negative and destructive. The eighteenth-century philosophy which, defying the funeral pyres for books and people, put the fear of death into infamy, joined forces with it under Bonaparte. Finally, the apologetic school of Comte usurped the succession to the uncompromising *encyclopédistes*, extending the hand of friendship* to all those whom the latter had opposed. Such metamorphoses of critique into affirmation do not leave theoretical content untouched; its truth evaporates. Today, however, motorized history is rushing ahead of such intellectual developments, and the official spokesmen, who have other concerns, are liquidating the theory to which they owe their place in the sun* before it has time to prostitute itself completely.*

In reflecting on its own guilt, therefore, thought finds itself deprived not only of the affirmative reference to science and everyday phenomena but also of the conceptual language of opposition. No terms are available which do not tend toward complicity with the prevailing intellectual trends, and what threadbare language cannot achieve on its own is precisely made good by the social machinery. The censors voluntarily maintained by the film factories to avoid greater costs have their counterparts in all other departments. The process to which a literary text is subjected, if not in the automatic foresight of its producer then through the battery of readers, publishers, adapters, and ghost writers inside and outside the editorial office, outdoes any censor in its thoroughness. To render their function entirely superfluous

appears, despite all the benevolent reforms, to be the ambition of the educational system. In the belief that without strict limitation to the observation of facts and the calculation of probabilities the cognitive mind would be overreceptive to charlatanism and superstition, that system is preparing arid ground for the greedy acceptance of charlatanism and superstition. Just as prohibition has always ensured the admission of the poisonous product, the blocking of the theoretical imagination has paved the way for political delusion. Even when people have not already succumbed to such delusion, they are deprived by the mechanisms of censorship, both the external ones and those implanted within them, of the means of resisting it.

The aporia which faced us in our work thus proved to be the first matter we had to investigate: the self-destruction of enlightenment. We have no doubt—and herein lies our *petitio principii*—that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking. We believe we have perceived with equal clarity, however, that the very concept of that thinking, no less than the concrete historical forms, the institutions of society with which it is intertwined, already contains the germ of the regression* which is taking place everywhere today. If enlightenment does not assimilate reflection on this regressive moment, it seals its own fate. By leaving consideration of the destructive side of progress to its enemies, thought in its headlong* rush into pragmatism is forfeiting its sublating character, and therefore its relation to truth. In the mysterious willingness of the technologically educated masses to fall under the spell of any despotism, in its self-destructive affinity to nationalist paranoia, in all this uncomprehended senselessness the weakness of contemporary theoretical understanding is evident.

We believe that in these fragments we have contributed to such understanding by showing that the cause of enlightenment's relapse into mythology is to be sought not so much in the nationalist, pagan, or other modern mythologies concocted specifically to cause such a relapse as in the fear of truth which petrifies enlightenment itself. Both these terms, enlightenment and

truth, are to be understood as pertaining not merely to intellectual history but also to current reality. Just as enlightenment expresses the real movement of bourgeois society as a whole from the perspective of the idea embodied in its personalities and institutions, truth refers not merely to rational* consciousness but equally to the form it takes in reality. The loyal son of modern civilization's fear of departing from the facts, which even in their perception are turned into clichés by the prevailing usages in science, business, and politics, is exactly the same as the fear of social deviation. Those usages also define the concept of clarity in language and thought to which art, literature, and philosophy must conform today. By tabooing any thought which sets out negatively from the facts and from the prevailing modes of thought as obscure, convoluted, and preferably foreign, that concept holds mind captive in ever deeper blindness. It is in the nature of the calamitous situation existing today that even the most honorable reformer who recommends renewal in threadbare language reinforces the existing order he seeks to break by taking over its worn-out categorial apparatus and the pernicious power-philosophy lying behind it. False clarity is only another name for myth. Myth was always obscure and luminous at once. It has always been distinguished by its familiarity and its exemption from the work of concepts.

The enslavement to nature of people today cannot be separated from social progress. The increase in economic productivity which creates the conditions for a more just world also affords the technical apparatus and the social groups controlling it a disproportionate advantage over the rest of the population. The individual is entirely nullified in face of the economic powers. These powers are taking society's domination over nature to unimagined heights. While individuals as such are vanishing before the apparatus they serve, they are provided for by that apparatus and better than ever before. In the unjust state of society the powerlessness and pliability of the masses increase* with the quantity of goods allocated to them. The materially considerable and socially paltry rise in the standard of living of the lower classes is reflected in the hypocritical propagation of

intellect. Intellect's true concern is a negation of reification. It must perish when it is solidified into a cultural asset and handed out for consumption purposes. The flood of precise information and brand-new amusements make people smarter and more stupid at once.

What is at issue here is not culture as a value, as understood by critics of civilization such as Huxley, Jaspers, and Ortega y Gasset, but the necessity for enlightenment to reflect on itself if humanity is not to be totally betrayed. What is at stake is not conservation of the past but the fulfillment of past hopes. Today, however,* the past is being continued as destruction of the past. If, up to the nineteenth century, respectable education was a privilege paid for by the increased sufferings* of the uneducated, in the twentieth the hygienic factory is bought with the melting down of all cultural entities in the gigantic crucible.* That might not even be so high a price as those defenders of culture believe if the bargain sale of culture did not contribute to converting economic achievements into their opposite.

Under the given circumstances the gifts of fortune themselves become elements of misfortune. If, in the absence of the social subject, the volume of goods took the form of so-called overproduction in domestic economic crises in the preceding period, today, thanks to the enthronement of powerful groups as that social subject, it is producing the international threat of fascism: progress is reverting to regression. That the hygienic factory and everything pertaining to it, Volkswagen* and the sports palace, are obtusely liquidating metaphysics does not matter in itself, but that these things are themselves becoming metaphysics, an ideological curtain,* within the social whole, behind which real doom is gathering, does matter. That is the basic premise of our fragments.

The first essay, the theoretical basis of those which follow, seeks to gain greater understanding of the intertwinement of rationality and social reality, as well as of the intertwinement, inseparable from the former, of nature and the mastery of nature. The critique of enlightenment given in this section is intended to

prepare a positive concept of enlightenment which liberates it from its entanglement in blind domination.

The critical part of the first essay can be broadly summed up in two theses: Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology. These theses are worked out in relation to specific subjects in the two excurses. The first traces the dialectic of myth and enlightenment in the *Odyssey*, as one of the earliest representative documents of bourgeois Western civilization. It focuses primarily on the concepts of sacrifice and renunciation, through which both the difference between and the unity of mythical nature and enlightened mastery of nature become apparent. The second excursus is concerned with Kant, Sade, and Nietzsche, whose works represent the implacable consummation of enlightenment. This section shows how the subjugation of everything natural to the sovereign subject culminates in the domination of what is blindly objective and natural. This tendency levels all the antitheses of bourgeois thought, especially that between moral rigor and absolute amorality.

The section "The Culture Industry" shows the regression of enlightenment to ideology which is graphically expressed in film and radio. Here, enlightenment consists primarily in the calculation of effects and in the technology of production and dissemination; the specific content of the ideology is exhausted in the idolization of the existing order and of the power by which the technology is controlled. In the discussion of this contradiction the culture industry is taken more seriously than it might itself wish to be. But because its appeal to its own commercial character, its confession of its diminished truth, has long since become an excuse with which it evades responsibility for its lies, our analysis is directed at the claim objectively contained in its products to be aesthetic formations and thus representations of truth. It demonstrates* the dire state of society by the invalidity of that claim. Still more than the others, the section on the culture industry is fragmentary.*

The discussion, in the form of theses, of "Elements of Anti-Semitism" deals with the reversion of enlightened civilization to

barbarism in reality. The not merely theoretical but practical tendency toward self-destruction has been inherent in rationality from the first, not only in the present phase when it is emerging nakedly. For this reason a philosophical prehistory of anti-Semitism is sketched. Its "irrationalism" derives from the nature of the dominant reason and of the world corresponding to its image. The "elements" are directly related to empirical research by the Institute of Social Research,* the foundation set up and kept alive by Felix Weil, without which not only our studies but the good part of the theoretical work of German emigrants carried forward despite Hitler would not have been possible. We wrote the first three theses jointly with Leo Löwenthal, with whom we have collaborated on many scholarly questions since the first years in Frankfurt.

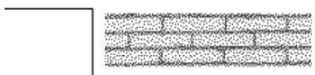
In the last section we publish notes and sketches which, in part, form part of the ideas in the preceding sections, without having found a place in them, and in part deal provisionally with problems of future work. Most of them relate to a dialectical anthropology.*

Los Angeles, California, May 1944

The book contains no essential changes to the text completed during the war. Only the last thesis of "Elements of Anti-Semitism" was added subsequently.

Max Horkheimer Theodor W. Adorno

June 1947



The Concept* of Enlightenment

Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world.* It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge. Bacon, "the father of experimental philosophy,"¹ brought these motifs together. He despised the exponents of tradition, who substituted belief for knowledge and were as unwilling to doubt as they were reckless in supplying answers. All this, he said, stood in the way of "the happy match between the mind of man and the nature of things," with the result that humanity was unable to use its knowledge for the betterment of its condition. Such inventions as had been made—Bacon cites printing, artillery, and the compass—had been arrived at more by chance than by systematic enquiry into nature. Knowledge obtained through such enquiry would not only be exempt from the influence of wealth and power but would establish man as the master of nature:

Therefore, no doubt, the sovereignty of man lieth hid in knowledge; wherein many things are reserved, which kings with their treasure cannot buy, nor with their force command; their spials and intelligencers can give no news of them, their seamen and discoverers cannot sail where they grow: now we govern nature in opinions, but we are thrall unto her in necessity: but if we

would be led by her in invention, we should command her by action.²

Although not a mathematician, Bacon well understood the scientific temper which was to come after him. The “happy match” between human understanding and the nature of things that he envisaged is a patriarchal one: the mind, conquering superstition, is to rule over disenchanted nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no limits, either in its enslavement * of creation or in its deference to worldly masters. Just as it serves all the purposes of the bourgeois economy both in factories and on the battlefield, it is at the disposal of entrepreneurs regardless of their origins. Kings control technology no more directly than do merchants: it is as democratic as the economic system* with which it evolved. Technology is the essence of this knowledge. It aims to produce neither concepts nor images, nor the joy of understanding, but method, exploitation of the labor of others,* capital. The “many things” which, according to Bacon, knowledge still held in store are themselves mere instruments: the radio as a sublimated printing press, the dive bomber as a more effective form of artillery, remote control as a more reliable compass. What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts. Ruthless toward itself, the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness. Only thought which does violence to itself is hard enough to shatter myths. Faced by the present triumph of the factual mentality, Bacon’s nominalist credo would have smacked of metaphysics and would have been convicted of the same vanity for which he criticized scholasticism. Power and knowledge are synonymous.³ For Bacon as for Luther, “knowledge that tendeth but to satisfaction, is but as a courtesan, which is for pleasure, and not for fruit or generation.” Its concern is not “satisfaction, which men call truth,” but “operation,” the effective procedure. The “true end, scope or office of knowledge” does not consist in “any plausible, delectable, reverend or admired discourse, or any satisfactory arguments, but in effecting and working, and in discovery of particulars not revealed before, for the better endowment and help of man’s life.”⁴ There shall be

neither mystery nor any desire to reveal mystery.

The disenchantment of the world means the extirpation of animism. Xenophanes mocked the multiplicity of gods because they resembled their creators, men, in all their idiosyncrasies and faults, and the latest logic denounces the words of language, which bear the stamp of impressions, as counterfeit coin that would be better replaced by neutral counters. The world becomes chaos, and synthesis salvation. No difference is said to exist between the totemic animal, the dreams of the spirit-seer,* and the absolute Idea. On their way toward modern science human beings have discarded meaning. The concept is replaced by the formula, the cause by rules and probability. Causality was only the last philosophical concept on which scientific criticism tested its strength, because it alone of the old ideas still stood in the way of such criticism, the latest secular form of the creative principle. To define substance and quality, activity and suffering, being and existence in terms appropriate to the time has been a concern of philosophy since Bacon; but science could manage without such categories. They were left behind as *idola theatri* of the old metaphysics and even in their time were monuments to entities and powers from prehistory. In that distant time life and death had been interpreted and interwoven in myths. The categories by which Western philosophy defined its timeless order of nature marked out the positions which had once been occupied by Ocnus and Persephone, Ariadne and Nereus. The moment of transition is recorded in the pre-Socratic cosmologies. The moist, the undivided, the air and fire which they take to be the primal stuff of nature are early rationalizations precipitated from the mythical vision. Just as the images of generation from water and earth, that had come to the Greeks from the Nile, were converted by these cosmologies into Hylozoic principles and elements, the whole ambiguous profusion of mythical demons was intellectualized to become the pure form of ontological entities. Even the patriarchal gods of Olympus were finally assimilated by the philosophical *logos* as the Platonic Forms. But the Enlightenment discerned the old powers in the Platonic and Aristotelian heritage of metaphysics and suppressed the universal categories' claims to truth as

superstition. In the authority of universal concepts the Enlightenment detected a fear of the demons through whose effigies human beings had tried to influence nature in magic rituals. From now on matter was finally to be controlled without the illusion of immanent powers or hidden properties. For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion. Once the movement is able to develop unhampered by external oppression, there is no holding it back. Its own ideas of human rights then fare no better than the older universals. Any intellectual resistance it encounters merely increases its strength.⁵ The reason is that enlightenment also recognizes itself in the old myths. No matter which myths are invoked against it, by being used as arguments they are made to acknowledge the very principle of corrosive rationality of which enlightenment stands accused. Enlightenment is totalitarian.

Enlightenment has always regarded anthropomorphism, the projection of subjective properties onto nature, as the basis of myth.⁶ The supernatural, spirits and demons, are taken to be reflections of human beings who allow themselves to be frightened by natural phenomena. According to enlightened thinking, the multiplicity of mythical figures can be reduced to a single common denominator, the subject. Oedipus's answer to the riddle of the Sphinx—"That being is man"—is repeated indiscriminately as enlightenment's stereotyped message, whether in response to a piece of objective meaning, a schematic order, a fear of evil powers, or a hope of salvation. For the Enlightenment, only what can be encompassed by unity has the status of an existent or an event; its ideal is the system from which everything and anything follows. Its rationalist and empiricist versions do not differ on that point. Although the various schools may have interpreted its axioms differently, the structure of unitary science has always been the same. Despite the pluralism of the different fields of research, Bacon's postulate of *una scientia universalis*⁷ is as hostile to anything which cannot be connected as Leibniz's *mathesis universalis* is to discontinuity. The multiplicity of forms is reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to

matter. For Bacon, too, there was a clear logical connection, through degrees of generality, linking the highest principles to propositions based on observation. De Maistre mocks him for harboring this “idolized ladder.”⁸ Formal logic was the high school of unification. It offered Enlightenment thinkers a schema for making the world calculable. The mythologizing equation of Forms with numbers in Plato’s last writings expresses the longing of all demythologizing: number became enlightenment’s canon. The same equations govern bourgeois justice and commodity exchange. “Is not the rule, ‘*Si inaequalibus aequalia addas, omnia erunt inaequalia*,’ [If you add like to unlike you will always end up with unlike] an axiom of justice as well as of mathematics? And is there not a true coincidence between commutative and distributive justice, and arithmetical and geometrical proportion?”⁹ Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them to abstract quantities. For the Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion; modern positivism consigns it to poetry. Unity remains the watchword from Parmenides to Russell. All gods and qualities must be destroyed.

But the myths which fell victim to the Enlightenment were themselves its products. The scientific calculation of events annuls the account of them which thought had once given in myth. Myth sought to report, to name, to tell of origins—but therefore also to narrate, record, explain. This tendency was reinforced by the recording and collecting of myths. From a record, they soon became a teaching. Each ritual contains a representation of how things happen and of the specific process which is to be influenced by magic. In the earliest popular epics this theoretical element of ritual became autonomous. The myths which the tragic dramatists drew on were already marked by the discipline and power which Bacon celebrated as the goal. The local spirits and demons had been replaced by heaven and its hierarchy, the incantatory practices of the magician by the carefully graduated sacrifice and the labor of enslaved men mediated by command. The Olympian deities are no longer directly identical with elements, but signify them. In Homer Zeus controls the daytime

sky, Apollo guides the sun; Helios and Eos are already passing over into allegory. The gods detach themselves from substances to become their quintessence. From now on, being is split between *logos*—which, with the advance of philosophy, contracts to a monad, a mere reference point—and the mass of things and creatures in the external world. The single distinction between man's own existence and reality swallows up all others. Without regard for differences, the world is made subject to man. In this the Jewish story of creation and the Olympian religion are at one: ". . . and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."¹⁰ "O Zeus, Father Zeus, yours is the dominion of the heavens; you oversee the works of men, both the wicked and the just, and the unruly animals, you who uphold righteousness."¹¹ "It is so ordained that one atones at once, another later; but even should one escape the doom threatened by the gods, it will surely come to pass one day, and innocents shall expiate his deed, whether his children or a later generation."¹² Only those who subject themselves utterly pass muster with the gods. The awakening of the subject is bought with the recognition of power as the principle of all relationships. In face of the unity of such reason the distinction between God and man is reduced to an irrelevance, as reason has steadfastly indicated since the earliest critique of Homer. In their mastery of nature, the creative God and the ordering mind are alike. Man's likeness to God consists in sovereignty over existence, in the lordly gaze, in the command.

Myth becomes enlightenment and nature mere objectivity. Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things to the extent that he can make them. Their "in-itself" becomes "for him." In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate of domination. This identity constitutes the unity of nature. Neither it nor the unity of the subject was presupposed by magical

incantation. The rites of the shaman were directed at the wind, the rain, the snake outside or the demon inside the sick person, not at materials or specimens. The spirit which practiced magic was not single or identical; it changed with the cult masks which represented the multiplicity of spirits. Magic is bloody untruth, but in its domination is not yet disclaimed by transforming itself into a pure truth underlying the world which it enslaves. The magician imitates demons; to frighten or placate them he makes intimidating or appeasing gestures. Although his task was impersonation he did not claim to be made in the image of the invisible power, as does civilized man, whose modest hunting ground then shrinks to the unified cosmos, in which nothing exists but prey. Only when made in such an image does man attain the identity of the self which cannot be lost in identification with the other but takes possession of itself once and for all as an impenetrable mask. It is the identity of mind and its correlative, the unity of nature, which subdues the abundance of qualities. Nature, stripped of qualities, becomes the chaotic stuff of mere classification, and the all-powerful self becomes a mere having, an abstract identity. Magic implies specific representation. What is done to the spear, the hair, the name of the enemy, is also to befall his person; the sacrificial animal is slain in place of the god. The substitution which takes place in sacrifice marks a step toward discursive logic. Even though the hind which was offered up for the daughter, the lamb for the firstborn, necessarily still had qualities of its own, it already represented the genus. It manifested the arbitrariness of the specimen. But the sanctity of the *hic et nunc*, the uniqueness of the chosen victim which coincides with its representative status, distinguishes it radically, makes it non-exchangeable even in the exchange. Science puts an end to this. In it there is no specific representation: something which is a sacrificial animal cannot be a god. Representation gives way to universal fungibility. An atom is smashed not as a representative but as a specimen of matter, and the rabbit suffering the torment of the laboratory is seen not as a representative but, mistakenly, as a mere exemplar. Because in functional science the differences are so fluid that everything is submerged in one and the same matter, the scientific object is petrified, whereas the rigid ritual of former times appears supple in

its substitution of one thing for another. The world of magic still retained differences whose traces have vanished even in linguistic forms.¹³ The manifold affinities between existing things are supplanted by the single relationship between the subject who confers meaning and the meaningless object, between rational significance and its accidental bearer. At the magical stage dream and image were not regarded as mere signs of things but were linked to them by resemblance or name. The relationship was not one of intention but of kinship. Magic like science is concerned with ends, but it pursues them through mimesis, not through an increasing distance from the object. It certainly is not founded on the “omnipotence of thought,” which the primitive is supposed to impute to himself like the neurotic;¹⁴ there can be no “over-valuation of psychical acts” in relation to reality where thought and reality are not radically distinguished. The “unshakable confidence in the possibility of controlling the world”¹⁵ which Freud anachronistically attributes to magic applies only to the more realistic form of world domination achieved by the greater astuteness of science. The autonomy of thought in relation to objects, as manifested in the reality-adequacy of the Ego, was a prerequisite for the replacement of the localized practices of the medicine man by all-embracing industrial technology.*

As a totality set out in language and laying claim to a truth which suppressed the older mythical faith of popular religion, the solar, patriarchal myth was itself an enlightenment, fully comparable on that level to the philosophical one. But now it paid the price. Mythology itself set in motion the endless process of enlightenment by which, with ineluctable necessity, every definite theoretical view is subjected to the annihilating criticism that it is only a belief, until even the concepts of mind, truth, and, indeed, enlightenment itself have been reduced to animistic magic. The principle of the fated necessity which caused the downfall of the mythical hero, and finally evolved as the logical conclusion from the oracular utterance, not only predominates, refined to the cogency of formal logic, in every rationalistic system of Western philosophy but also presides over the succession of systems which begins with the hierarchy of the gods and, in a permanent

twilight of the idols, hands down a single identical content: wrath against those of insufficient righteousness.* Just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology. Receiving all its subject matter from myths, in order to destroy them, it falls as judge under the spell of myth. It seeks to escape the trial of fate and retribution by itself exacting retribution on that trial. In myths, everything that happens must atone for the fact of having happened. It is no different in enlightenment: no sooner has a fact been established than it is rendered insignificant. The doctrine that action equals reaction continued to maintain the power of repetition over existence long after humankind had shed the illusion that, by repetition, it could identify itself with repeated existence and so escape its power. But the more the illusion of magic vanishes, the more implacably repetition, in the guise of regularity, imprisons human beings in the cycle now objectified in the laws of nature, to which they believe they owe their security as free subjects. The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination, is that of myth itself. The arid wisdom which acknowledges nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have been played out, all the great thoughts have been thought, all possible discoveries can be construed in advance, and human beings are defined by self-preservation through adaptation—this barren wisdom merely reproduces the fantastic doctrine it rejects: the sanction of fate which, through retribution, incessantly reinstates what always was. Whatever might be different is made the same. That is the verdict which critically sets the boundaries to possible experience. The identity of everything with everything is bought at the cost that nothing can at the same time be identical to itself. Enlightenment dissolves away the injustice of the old inequality of unmediated mastery, but at the same time perpetuates it in universal mediation, by relating every existing thing to every other. It brings about the situation for which Kierkegaard praised his Protestant ethic and which, in the legend-cycle of Hercules, constitutes one of the primal images of mythical violence: it amputates the incommensurable. Not merely are qualities dissolved in thought,

but human beings are forced into real conformity. The blessing that the market does not ask about birth is paid for in the exchange society by the fact that the possibilities conferred by birth are molded to fit the production of goods that can be bought on the market. Each human being has been endowed with a self of his or her own, different from all others, so that it could all the more surely be made the same. But because that self never quite fitted the mold, enlightenment throughout the liberalistic period has always sympathized with social coercion. The unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual and in the scorn poured on the type of society which could make people into individuals. The horde, a term which doubtless* is to be found in the Hitler Youth organization, is not a relapse into the old barbarism but the triumph of repressive *égalité*, the degeneration of the equality of rights into the wrong inflicted by equals. The fake myth of fascism reveals itself as the genuine myth of prehistory, in that the genuine myth beheld retribution while the false one wreaks it blindly on its victims. Any attempt to break the compulsion of nature by breaking nature only succumbs more deeply to that compulsion. That has been the trajectory of European civilization. Abstraction, the instrument of enlightenment, stands in the same relationship to its objects as fate, whose concept it eradicates: as liquidation. Under the leveling rule of abstraction, which makes everything in nature repeatable, and of industry, for which abstraction prepared the way, the liberated finally themselves become the "herd" (*Trupp*), which Hegel¹⁶ identified as the outcome of enlightenment.

The distance of subject from object, the presupposition of abstraction, is founded on the distance from things which the ruler attains by means of the ruled. The songs of Homer and the hymns of the *Rig Veda* date from the time of territorial dominion and its strongholds, when a warlike race of overlords imposed itself on the defeated indigenous population.¹⁷ The supreme god among gods came into being with this civil world in which the king, as leader of the arms-bearing nobility, tied the subjugated people* to the land while doctors, soothsayers, artisans, and traders took care of circulation. With the end of nomadism the social order is

established on the basis of fixed property. Power and labor diverge. A property owner like Odysseus “controls from a distance a numerous, finely graded personnel of ox herds, shepherds, swineherds, and servants. In the evening, having looked out from his castle to see the countryside lit up by a thousand fires, he can go to his rest in peace. He knows that his loyal servants are watching to keep away wild animals and to drive away thieves from the enclosures which they are there to protect.”¹⁸ The generality of the ideas developed by discursive logic, power in the sphere of the concept, is built on the foundation of power in reality. The superseding of the old diffuse notions of the magical heritage by conceptual unity expresses a condition of life defined by the freeborn citizen and articulated by command. The self which learned about order and subordination through the subjugation of the world soon equated truth in general with classifying thought, without whose fixed distinctions it cannot exist. Along with mimetic magic it tabooed the knowledge which really apprehends the object. Its hatred is directed at the image of the vanquished primeval world and its imaginary happiness. The dark, chthonic gods of the original inhabitants are banished to the hell into which the earth is transformed under the religions of Indra and Zeus, with their worship of sun and light.

But heaven and hell were linked. The name Zeus was applied both to a god of the underworld and to a god of light in cults which did not exclude each other,¹⁹ and the Olympian gods maintained all kinds of commerce with the chthonic deities. In the same way, the good and evil powers, the holy and the unholy, were not unambiguously distinguished. They were bound together like genesis and decline, life and death, summer and winter. The murky, undivided entity worshipped as the principle of *mana* at the earliest known stages of humanity lived on in the bright world of the Greek religion. Primal and undifferentiated, it is everything unknown and alien; it is that which transcends the bounds of experience, the part of things which is more than their immediately perceived existence. What the primitive experiences as supernatural is not a spiritual substance in contradistinction to the material world but the complex concatenation of nature in contrast

to its individual link.* The cry of terror called forth by the unfamiliar becomes its name. It fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known, permanently linking horror to holiness. The doubling of nature into appearance and essence, effect and force, made possible by myth no less than by science, springs from human fear, the expression of which becomes its explanation. This does not mean that the soul is transposed into nature, as psychologism would have us believe; *mana*, the moving spirit, is not a projection but the echo of the real preponderance of nature in the weak psyches of primitive people. The split between animate and inanimate, the assigning of demons and deities to certain specific places, arises from this preanimism. Even the division of subject and object is prefigured in it. If the tree is addressed no longer as simply a tree but as evidence of something else, a location of *mana*, language expresses the contradiction that it is at the same time itself and something other than itself, identical and not identical.²⁰ Through the deity speech is transformed from tautology into language. The concept, usually defined as the unity of the features of what it subsumes, was rather, from the first, a product of dialectical thinking, in which each thing is what it is only by becoming what it is not. This was the primal form of the objectifying definition, in which concept and thing became separate, the same definition which was already far advanced in the Homeric epic and trips over its own excesses in modern positive science. But this dialectic remains powerless as long as it emerges from the cry of terror, which is the doubling, the mere tautology of terror itself. The gods cannot take away fear from human beings, the petrified cries of whom they bear as their names. Humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown. This has determined the path of demythologization, of enlightenment, which equates the living with the nonliving as myth had equated the nonliving with the living. Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is nothing other than a form of universal taboo. Nothing is allowed to remain outside, since the mere idea of the "outside" is the real source of fear. If the revenge of primitive people for a murder committed on a member of their

family could sometimes be assuaged by admitting the murderer into that family,²¹ both the murder and its remedy mean the absorption of alien blood into one's own, the establishment of immanence. The mythical dualism does not lead outside the circle of existence. The world controlled by *mana*, and even the worlds of Indian and Greek myth, are issueless and eternally the same. All birth is paid for with death, all fortune with misfortune. While men and gods may attempt in their short span to assess their fates by a measure other than blind destiny, existence triumphs over them in the end. Even their justice, wrested from calamity, bears its features; it corresponds to the way in which human beings, primitives no less than Greeks and barbarians, looked upon their world from within a society of oppression and poverty. Hence, for both mythical and enlightened justice, guilt and atonement, happiness and misfortune, are seen as the two sides of an equation. Justice gives way to law. The shaman wards off a danger with its likeness. Equivalence is his instrument; and equivalence regulates punishment and reward within civilization. The imagery of myths, too, can be traced back without exception to natural conditions. Just as the constellation Gemini, like all the other symbols of duality, refers to the inescapable cycle of nature; just as this cycle itself has its primeval sign in the symbol of the egg from which those later symbols are sprung, the Scales (Libra) held by Zeus, which symbolize the justice of the entire patriarchal world, point back to mere nature. The step from chaos to civilization, in which natural conditions exert their power no longer directly but through the consciousness of human beings, changed nothing in the principle of equivalence. Indeed, human beings atoned for this very step by worshipping that to which previously, like all other creatures, they had been merely subjected. Earlier, fetishes had been subject to the law of equivalence. Now equivalence itself becomes a fetish. The blindfold over the eyes of Justitia means not only that justice brooks no interference but that it does not originate in freedom.

The teachings of the priests were symbolic in the sense that in them sign and image coincided. As the hieroglyphs attest, the

word originally also had a pictorial function. This function was transferred to myths. They, like magic rites, refer to the repetitive cycle of nature. Nature as self-repetition is the core of the symbolic: an entity or a process which is conceived as eternal because it is reenacted again and again in the guise of the symbol. Inexhaustibility, endless renewal, and the permanence of what they signify are not only attributes of all symbols but their true content. Contrary to the Jewish *Genesis*, the representations of creation in which the world emerges from the primal mother, the cow or the egg, are symbolic. The scorn of the ancients for their all-too-human gods left their core untouched. The essence of the gods is not exhausted by individuality. They still had about them a quality of *mana*; they embodied nature as a universal power. With their preanimistic traits they intrude into the enlightenment. Beneath the modest veil of the Olympian *chronique scandaleuse* the doctrine of the commingling and colliding of elements had evolved; establishing itself at once as science, it turned the myths into figments of fantasy. With the clean separation between science and poetry the division of labor which science had helped to establish was extended to language. For science the word is first of all a sign; it is then distributed among the various arts as sound, image, or word proper, but its unity can never be restored by the addition of these arts, by synaesthesia or total art.* As sign, language must resign itself to being calculation and, to know nature, must renounce the claim to resemble it. As image it must resign itself to being a likeness and, to be entirely nature, must renounce the claim to know it. With advancing enlightenment, only authentic works of art have been able to avoid the mere imitation of what already is. The prevailing antithesis between art and science, which rends the two apart as areas of culture in order to make them jointly manageable as areas of culture, finally causes them, through their internal tendencies as exact opposites, to converge. Science, in its neopositivist interpretation, becomes aestheticism, a system of isolated signs devoid of any intention transcending the system; it becomes the game which mathematicians have long since proudly declared their activity to be. Meanwhile, art as integral replication has pledged itself to positivist science, even in its specific techniques. It becomes,

indeed, the world over again, an ideological doubling, a compliant reproduction. The separation of sign and image is inescapable. But if, with heedless complacency, it is hypostatized over again, then each of the isolated principles tends toward the destruction of truth.

Philosophy has perceived the chasm opened by this separation as the relationship between intuition and concept and repeatedly but vainly has attempted to close it; indeed, philosophy is defined by that attempt. Usually, however, it has sided with the tendency to which it owes its name. Plato banished poetry with the same severity with which positivism dismissed the doctrine of Forms. Homer, Plato argued, had procured neither public nor private reforms through his much-vaunted art, had neither won a war nor made an invention. We did not know, he said, of any numerous followers who had honored or loved him. Art had to demonstrate its usefulness. ²² The making of images was proscribed by Plato as it was by the Jews. Both reason and religion outlaw the principle of magic. Even in its resigned detachment from existence, as art, it remains dishonorable; those who practice it become vagrants, latter-day nomads, who find no domicile among the settled. Nature is no longer to be influenced by likeness but mastered through work. Art has in common with magic the postulation of a special, self-contained sphere removed from the context of profane existence. Within it special laws prevail. Just as the sorcerer begins the ceremony by marking out from all its surroundings the place in which the sacred forces are to come into play, each work of art is closed off from reality by its own circumference. The very renunciation of external effects by which art is distinguished from magical sympathy binds art only more deeply to the heritage of magic. This renunciation places the pure image in opposition to corporeal existence, the elements of which the image sub-lates within itself. It is in the nature of the work of art, of aesthetic illusion, to be what was experienced as a new and terrible event in the magic of primitives: the appearance of the whole in the particular. The work of art constantly reenacts the duplication by which the thing appeared as something spiritual, a manifestation of *mana*. That constitutes its aura. As an expression

of totality art claims the dignity of the absolute. This has occasionally led philosophy to rank it higher than conceptual knowledge. According to Schelling, art begins where knowledge leaves humans in the lurch. For him art is “the model of science, and wherever art is, there science must go.”²³ According to his theory the separation of image and sign “is entirely abolished by each single representation of art.”²⁴ The bourgeois world was rarely amenable to such confidence in art. Where it restricted knowledge, it generally did so to make room for faith, not art. It was through faith that the militant religiosity of the modern age, of Torquemada, Luther, and Mohammed, sought to reconcile spirit and existence. But faith is a privative concept: it is abolished as faith if it does not continuously assert either its opposition to knowledge or its agreement with it. In being dependent on the limits set to knowledge, it is itself limited. The attempt made by faith under Protestantism to locate the principle of truth, which transcends faith and without which faith cannot exist, directly in the word itself, as in primeval times, and to restore the symbolic power of the word, was paid for by obedience to the word, but not in its sacred form. Because faith is unavoidably tied to knowledge as its friend or its foe, faith perpetuates the split in the struggle to overcome knowledge: its fanaticism is the mark of its untruth, the objective admission that anyone who *only* believes for that reason no longer believes. Bad conscience is second nature to it. The secret awareness of this necessary, inherent flaw, the immanent contradiction that lies in making a profession of reconciliation, is the reason why honesty in believers has always been a sensitive and dangerous affair. The horrors of fire and sword, of counterReformation and Reformation, were perpetrated not as an exaggeration but as a realization of the principle of faith. Faith repeatedly shows itself of the same stamp as the world history it would like to command; indeed, in the modern period it has become that history’s preferred means, its special ruse. Not only is the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century inexorable, as Hegel confirmed; so, too, as none knew better than he, is the movement of thought itself. The lowest insight, like the highest, contains the knowledge of its distance from the truth, which makes

the apologist a liar. The paradox of faith degenerates finally into fraud, the myth of the twentieth century* and faith's irrationality into rational organization in the hands of the utterly enlightened as they steer society toward barbarism.

When language first entered history its masters were already priests and sorcerers. Anyone who affronted the symbols fell prey in the name of the unearthly powers to the earthly ones, represented by these appointed organs of society. What preceded that stage is shrouded in darkness. Wherever it is found in ethnology, the terror from which *mana* was born was already sanctioned, at least by the tribal elders. Unidentical, fluid *mana* was solidified, violently materialized by men. Soon the sorcerers had populated every place with its emanations and coordinated the multiplicity of sacred realms with that of sacred rites. With the spirit-world and its peculiarities they extended their esoteric knowledge and their power. The sacred essence was transferred to the sorcerers who managed it. In the first stages of nomadism the members of the tribe still played an independent part in influencing the course of nature. The men tracked prey while the women performed tasks which did not require rigid commands. How much violence preceded the habituation to even so simple an order cannot be known. In that order the world was already divided into zones of power and of the profane. The course of natural events as an emanation of *mana* had already been elevated to a norm demanding submission. But if the nomadic savage, despite his subjection, could still participate in the magic which defined the limits of that world, and could disguise himself as his quarry in order to stalk it, in later periods the intercourse with spirits and the subjection were assigned to different classes of humanity: power to one side, obedience to the other. The recurring, never-changing natural processes were drummed into the subjects, either by other tribes or by their own cliques, as the rhythm of work, to the beat of the club and the rod, which reechoed in every barbaric drum, in each monotonous ritual. The symbols take on the expression of the fetish. The repetition of nature which they signify always manifests itself in later times as the permanence of social compulsion, which the symbols

represent. The dread objectified in the fixed image becomes a sign of the consolidated power of the privileged.* But general concepts continued to symbolize that power even when they had shed all pictorial traits. Even the deductive form of science mirrors hierarchy and compulsion. Just as the first categories represented the organized tribe and its power over the individual, the entire logical order, with its chains of inference and dependence, the superordination and coordination of concepts, is founded on the corresponding conditions in social reality, that is, on the division of labor.²⁵ Of course, this social character of intellectual forms is not, as Durkheim argues, an expression of social solidarity but evidence of the impenetrable unity of society and power. Power confers increased cohesion and strength on the social whole in which it is established. The division of labor, through which power manifests itself socially, serves the self-preservation of the dominated whole. But this necessarily turns the whole, as a whole, and the operation of its immanent reason, into a means of enforcing the particular interest. Power confronts the individual as the universal, as the reason which informs reality. The power of all the members of society, to whom as individuals no other way is open, is constantly summated, through the division of labor imposed on them, in the realization of the whole, whose rationality is thereby multiplied over again. What is done to all by the few always takes the form of the subduing of individuals by the many: the oppression of society always bears the features of oppression by a collective. It is this unity of collectivity and power, and not the immediate social universal, solidarity, which is precipitated in intellectual forms. Through their claim to universal validity, the philosophical concepts with which Plato and Aristotle represented the world elevated the conditions which those concepts justified to the status of true reality. They originated, as Vico put it,²⁶ in the marketplace of Athens; they reflected with the same fidelity the laws of physics, the equality of freeborn citizens, and the inferiority of women, children, and slaves. Language itself endowed what it expressed, the conditions of domination, with the universality it had acquired as the means of intercourse in civil society. The metaphysical emphasis, the sanction by ideas and norms, was no

more than a hypostatization of the rigidity and exclusivity which concepts have necessarily taken on wherever language has consolidated the community of the rulers for the enforcement of commands. As a means of reinforcing the social power of language, ideas became more superfluous the more that power increased, and the language of science put an end to them altogether. Conscious justification lacked the suggestive power which springs from dread of the fetish. The unity of collectivity and power now revealed itself in the generality which faulty content necessarily takes on in language, whether metaphysical or scientific. The metaphysical apologia at least betrayed the injustice of the established order through the incongruence of concept and reality. The impartiality of scientific language deprived what was powerless of the strength to make itself heard and merely provided the existing order with a neutral sign for itself. Such neutrality is more metaphysical than metaphysics. Enlightenment finally devoured not only symbols but also their successors, universal concepts, and left nothing of metaphysics behind except the abstract fear of the collective from which it had sprung. Concepts in face of enlightenment are like those living on unearned income in face of industrial trusts:* none can feel secure. If logical positivism still allowed some latitude for probability, ethnological positivism already equates probability with essence. "Our vague ideas of chance and quintessence are pale relics of that far richer notion,"²⁷ that is, of the magical substance.

Enlightenment as a nominalist tendency stops short before the *nomen*, the non-extensive, restricted concept, the proper name. Although²⁸ it cannot be established with certainty whether proper names were originally generic names, as some maintain, the former have not yet shared the fate of the latter. The substantial ego repudiated by Hume and Mach is not the same thing as the name. In the Jewish religion, in which the idea of the patriarchy is heightened to the point of annihilating myth, the link between name and essence is still acknowledged in the prohibition on uttering the name of God. The disenchanting world of Judaism propitiates magic by negating it in the idea of God. The Jewish religion brooks no word which might bring solace to the despair of

all mortality. It places all hope in the prohibition on invoking falsity as God, the finite as the infinite, the lie as truth. The pledge of salvation lies in the rejection of any faith which claims to depict it, knowledge in the denunciation of illusion. Negation, however, is not abstract. The indiscriminate denial of anything positive, the stereotyped formula of nothingness as used by Buddhism, ignores the ban on calling the absolute by its name no less than its opposite, pantheism, or the latter's caricature, bourgeois skepticism. Explanations of the world as nothingness or as the entire cosmos are mythologies, and the guaranteed paths to redemption sublimated magical practices. The self-satisfaction of knowing in advance, and the transfiguration of negativity as redemption, are untrue forms of the resistance to deception. The right of the image is rescued in the faithful observance of its prohibition. Such observance, "determinate negation,"²⁹ is not exempted from the enticements of intuition by the sovereignty of the abstract concept, as is skepticism, for which falsehood and truth are equally void. Unlike rigorism, determinate negation does not simply reject imperfect representations of the absolute, idols, by confronting them with the idea they are unable to match. Rather, dialectic discloses each image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth. Language thereby becomes more than a mere system of signs. With the concept of determinate negation Hegel gave prominence to an element which distinguishes enlightenment from the positivist decay to which he consigned it. However, by finally postulating the known result of the whole process of negation, totality in the system and in history, as the absolute, he violated the prohibition and himself succumbed to mythology.

That fate befell not only his philosophy, as the apotheosis of advancing thought, but enlightenment itself, in the form of the sober matter-of-factness by which it purported to distinguish itself from Hegel and from metaphysics in general. For enlightenment is totalitarian as only a system can be. Its untruth does not lie in the analytical method, the reduction to elements, the decomposition through reflection, as its Romantic enemies had maintained from

the first, but in its assumption that the trial is prejudged. When in mathematics the unknown becomes the unknown quantity in an equation, it is made into something long familiar before any value* has been assigned. Nature, before and after quantum theory, is what can be registered mathematically; even what cannot be assimilated, the insoluble and irrational, is fenced in by mathematical theorems. In the preemptive identification of the thoroughly mathematized world with truth, enlightenment believes itself safe from the return of the mythical. It equates thought with mathematics. The latter is thereby cut loose, as it were, turned into an absolute authority. “An infinite world, in this case a world of idealities, is conceived as one in which objects are not accessible individually to our cognition in an imperfect and accidental way but are attained by a rational, systematically unified method which finally apprehends each object—in an infinite progression—fully as its own in-itself.... In Galileo’s mathematization of nature, *nature itself* is idealized on the model of the new mathematics. In modern terms, it becomes a mathematical manifold.”³⁰ Thought is reified as an autonomous, automatic process, aping the machine it has itself produced, so that it can finally be replaced by the machine. Enlightenment³¹ pushed aside the classical demand to “think thinking”—Fichte’s philosophy is its radical fulfillment—because it distracted philosophers from the command to control praxis, which Fichte himself had wanted to enforce. Mathematical procedure became a kind of ritual of thought. Despite its axiomatic self-limitation, it installed itself as necessary and objective: mathematics made thought into a thing—a tool, to use its own term. Through this mimesis, however, in which thought makes the world resemble itself, the actual has become so much the only concern that even the denial of God falls under the same judgment as metaphysics. For positivism, which has assumed the judicial office of enlightened reason, to speculate about intelligible worlds is no longer merely forbidden but senseless prattle. Positivism—fortunately for it—does not need to be atheistic, since objectified thought cannot even pose the question of the existence of God. The positivist sensor turns a blind eye to official worship, as a special, knowledge-free zone of social activity, just as

willingly as to art—but never to denial, even when it has a claim to be knowledge. For the scientific temper, any deviation of thought from the business of manipulating the actual, any stepping outside the jurisdiction of existence, is no less senseless and self-destructive than it would be for the magician to step outside the magic circle drawn for his incantation; and in both cases violation of the taboo carries a heavy price for the offender. The mastery of nature draws the circle in which the critique of pure reason holds thought spellbound. Kant combined the doctrine of thought's restlessly toilsome progress toward infinity with insistence on its insufficiency and eternal limitation. The wisdom he imparted is oracular: There is no being in the world that knowledge cannot penetrate, but what can be penetrated by knowledge is not being. Philosophical judgment, according to Kant, aims at the new yet recognizes nothing new, since it always merely repeats what reason has placed into objects beforehand. However, this thought, protected within the departments of science from the dreams of a spirit-seer,* has to pay the price: world domination over nature turns against the thinking subject itself; nothing is left of it except that ever-unchanging "I think," which must accompany all my conceptions. Both subject and object are nullified. The abstract self, which alone confers the legal right to record and systematize, is confronted by nothing but abstract material, which has no other property than to be the substrate of that right. The equation of mind and world is finally resolved, but only in the sense that both sides cancel out. The reduction of thought to a mathematical apparatus condemns the world to be its own measure. What appears as the triumph of subjectivity, the subjection of all existing things to logical formalism, is bought with the obedient subordination of reason to what is immediately at hand. To grasp existing things as such, not merely to note their abstract spatial-temporal relationships, by which they can then be seized, but, on the contrary, to think of them as surface, as mediated conceptual moments which are only fulfilled by revealing their social, historical, and human meaning—this whole aspiration of knowledge is abandoned. Knowledge does not consist in mere perception, classification, and calculation but precisely in the determining negation of whatever is directly at hand. Instead of

such negation, mathematical formalism, whose medium, number, is the most abstract form of the immediate, arrests thought at mere immediacy. The actual is validated, knowledge confines itself to repeating it, thought makes itself mere tautology. The more completely the machinery of thought subjugates existence, the more blindly it is satisfied with reproducing it. Enlightenment thereby regresses to the mythology it has never been able to escape. For mythology had reflected in its forms the essence of the existing order—cyclical motion, fate, domination of the world as truth—and had renounced hope. In the terseness of the mythical image, as in the clarity of the scientific formula, the eternity of the actual is confirmed and mere existence is pronounced as the meaning it obstructs. The world as a gigantic analytical judgment, the only surviving dream of science, is of the same kind as the cosmic myth which linked the alternation of spring and autumn to the abduction of Persephone. The uniqueness of the mythical event, which was intended to legitimize the factual one, is a deception. Originally, the rape of the goddess was directly equated with the dying of nature. It was repeated each autumn, and even the repetition was not a succession of separate events, but the same one each time. With the consolidation of temporal consciousness the process was fixed as a unique event in the past, and ritual assuagement of the terror of death in each new cycle of seasons was sought in the recourse to the distant past. But such separation is powerless. The postulation of the single past event endows the cycle with a quality of inevitability, and the terror radiating from the ancient event spreads over the whole process as its mere repetition. The subsumption of the actual, whether under mythical prehistory or under mathematical formalism, the symbolic relating of the present to the mythical event in the rite or to the abstract category in science, makes the new appear as something predetermined which therefore is really the old. It is not existence that is without hope, but knowledge which appropriates and perpetuates existence as a schema in the pictorial or mathematical symbol.

In the enlightened world, mythology has permeated the sphere of the profane. Existence, thoroughly cleansed of demons and

their conceptual descendants, takes on, in its gleaming naturalness, the numinous character which former ages attributed to demons. Justified in the guise of brutal facts as something eternally immune to intervention, the social injustice from which those facts arise is as sacrosanct today as the medicine man once was under the protection of his gods. Not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects, but the relationships of human beings, including the relationship of individuals to themselves, have themselves been bewitched by the objectification of mind. Individuals shrink to the nodal points of conventional reactions and the modes of operation objectively expected of them. Animism had endowed things with souls; industrialism makes souls into things.* On its own account, even in advance of total planning, the economic apparatus endows commodities with the values which decide the behavior of people. Since, with the ending of free exchange, commodities have forfeited all economic qualities except their fetish character, this character has spread like a cataract across the life of society in all its aspects. The countless agencies of mass production and its culture* impress standardized behavior on the individual as the only natural, decent, and rational one. Individuals define themselves now only as things, statistical elements, successes or failures. Their criterion is self-preservation, successful or unsuccessful adaptation to the objectivity of their function and the schemata assigned to it. Everything which is different, from the idea to criminality, is exposed to the force of the collective, which keeps watch from the classroom to the trade union. Yet even the threatening collective is merely a part of the deceptive surface, beneath which are concealed the powers which manipulate the collective as an agent of violence. Its brutality, which keeps the individual up to the mark, no more represents the true quality of people than value* represents that of commodities. The demonically distorted form which things and human beings have taken on in the clear light of unprejudiced knowledge points back to domination, to the principle which already imparted the qualities of *mana* to spirits and deities and trapped the human gaze in the fakery of sorcerers and medicine men. The fatalism by which incomprehensible death was sanctioned in primeval times has

now passed over into utterly comprehensible life. The noonday panic fear in which nature suddenly appeared to humans as an all-encompassing power has found its counterpart in the panic which is ready to break out at any moment today: human beings expect the world, which is without issue, to be set ablaze by a universal power which they themselves are and over which they are powerless.

Enlightenment's mythic terror springs from a horror of myth. It detects myth not only in semantically unclarified concepts and words, as linguistic criticism imagines, but in any human utterance which has no place in the functional context of self-preservation. Spinoza's proposition: "the endeavor of preserving oneself is the first and only basis of virtue,"³² contains the true maxim of all Western civilization, in which the religious and philosophical differences of the bourgeoisie are laid to rest. The self which, after the methodical extirpation of all natural traces as mythological, was no longer supposed to be either a body or blood or a soul or even a natural ego but was sublimated into a transcendental or logical subject, formed the reference point of reason, the legislating authority of action. In the judgment of enlightenment as of Protestantism, those who entrust themselves directly to life, without any rational reference to self-preservation, revert to the realm of prehistory. Impulse as such, according to this view, is as mythical as superstition, and worship of any God not postulated by the self, as aberrant as drunkenness. For both—worship and self-immersion in immediate natural existence—progress holds the same fate in store. It has anathematized the self-forgetfulness both of thought and of pleasure. In the bourgeois economy the social work of each individual is mediated by the principle of the self; for some this labor is supposed to yield increased capital, for others the strength for extra work. But the more heavily the process of self-preservation is based on the bourgeois division of labor, the more it enforces the self-alienation of individuals, who must mold themselves to the technical apparatus body and soul. Enlightened thinking has an answer for this, too: finally, the transcendental subject of knowledge, as the last reminder of

subjectivity, is itself seemingly abolished and replaced by the operations of the automatic mechanisms of order, which therefore run all the more smoothly. Subjectivity has volatilized itself into the logic of supposedly optional rules, to gain more absolute control. Positivism, which finally did not shrink from laying hands on the idlest fancy of all, thought itself, eliminated the last intervening agency between individual action and the social norm. The technical process, to which the subject has been reified after the eradication of that process from consciousness, is as free from the ambiguous meanings of mythical thought as from meaning altogether, since reason itself has become merely an aid to the all-encompassing economic apparatus.* Reason serves as a universal tool for the fabrication of all other tools, rigidly purpose-directed and as calamitous as the precisely calculated operations of material production, the results of which for human beings escape all calculation. Reason's old ambition to be purely an instrument of purposes has finally been fulfilled. The exclusivity of logical laws stems from this obdurate adherence to function and ultimately from the compulsive character of self-preservation. The latter is constantly magnified into the choice between survival and doom, a choice which is reflected even in the principle that, of two contradictory propositions, only one can be true and the other false. The formalism of this principle and the entire logic established around it stem from the opacity and entanglement of interests in a society in which the maintenance of forms and the preservation of individuals only fortuitously coincide. The expulsion of thought from logic ratifies in the lecture hall the reification of human beings in factory and office. In this way the taboo encroaches on the power imposing it, enlightenment on mind, which it itself is. But nature as true self-preservation is thereby unleashed, in the individual as in the collective fate of crisis and war, by the process which promised to extirpate it. If unitary knowledge* is the only norm which theory has left, praxis must be handed over to the unfettered operations of world history. The self, entirely encompassed by civilization, is dissolved in an element composed of the very inhumanity which civilization has sought from the first to escape. The oldest fear, that of losing one's own name, is being fulfilled. For civilization, purely natural

existence, both animal and vegetative, was the absolute danger. Mimetic, mythical, and metaphysical forms of behavior were successively regarded as stages of world history which had been left behind, and the idea of reverting to them held the terror that the self would be changed back into the mere nature from which it had extricated itself with unspeakable exertions and which for that reason filled it with unspeakable dread. Over the millennia the living memory of prehistory, of its nomadic period and even more of the truly prepatriarchal stages, has been expunged from human consciousness with the most terrible punishments. The enlightened spirit replaced fire and the wheel by the stigma it attached to all irrationality, which led to perdition. Its hedonism was moderate, extremes being no less repugnant to enlightenment than to Aristotle. The bourgeois ideal of naturalness is based not on amorphous nature but on the virtue of the middle way. For this ideal, promiscuity and asceticism, superfluity and hunger, although opposites, are directly identical as powers of disintegration. By subordinating life in its entirety to the requirements of its preservation, the controlling minority guarantees, with its own security, the continuation of the whole. From Homer to modernity the ruling spirit has sought to steer between the Scylla of relapse into simple reproduction and the Charybdis of unfettered fulfillment; from the first it has mistrusted any guiding star other than the lesser evil. The German neopagans and administrators of war fever want to reinstate pleasure.* But since, under the work-pressure of the millennium now ending, pleasure has learned to hate itself, in its totalitarian emancipation it remains mean and mutilated through self-contempt. * It is still in the grip of the self-preservation inculcated in it by the reason which has now been deposed. At the turning points of Western civilization, whenever new peoples and classes have more heavily repressed myth, from the beginnings of the Olympian religion to the Renaissance, the Reformation, and bourgeois atheism, the fear of unsubdued, threatening nature—a fear resulting from nature's very materialization and objectification—has been belittled as animist superstition, and the control of internal and external nature has been made the absolute purpose of life. Now that self-preservation has been finally automated,

reason is dismissed by those who, as controllers of production, have taken over its inheritance and fear it in the disinherited. The essence of enlightenment is the choice between alternatives, and the inescapability of this choice is that of power. Human beings have always had to choose between their subjugation to nature and its subjugation to the self. With the spread of the bourgeois commodity economy the dark horizon of myth is illuminated by the sun of calculating reason, beneath whose icy rays the seeds of the new barbarism are germinating. Under the compulsion of power, human labor has always led away from myth and, under power, has always fallen back under its spell.

The intertwining of myth, power, and labor is preserved in one of the tales of Homer. Book XII of the *Odyssey* tells how Odysseus sailed past the Sirens. Their allurements are that of losing oneself in the past. But the hero exposed to it has come of age in suffering. In the multitude of mortal dangers which he has had to endure, the unity of his own life, the identity of the person, have been hardened. The realms of time have been separated for him like water, earth, and air. The tide of what has been has receded from the rock of the present, and the future lies veiled in cloud on the horizon. What Odysseus has left behind him has passed into the world of shades: so close is the self to the primeval myth from whose embrace it has wrested itself that its own lived past becomes a mythical prehistory. It seeks to combat this by a fixed order of time. The tripartite division is intended to liberate the present moment from the power of the past by banishing the latter beyond the absolute boundary of the irrecoverable and placing it, as usable knowledge, in the service of the present. The urge to rescue the past as something living, instead of using it as the material of progress, has been satisfied only in art, in which even history, as a representation of past life, is included. As long as art does not insist on being treated as knowledge, and thus exclude itself from praxis, it is tolerated by social praxis in the same way as pleasure. But the Sirens' song has not yet been deprived of power as art. They have knowledge "of all that has ever happened on this fruitful earth"³³ and especially of what has befallen Odysseus himself: "For we know all that the Argives and the

Trojans suffered on the broad plain of Troy by the will of the gods.”³⁴ By directly invoking the recent past, and with the irresistible promise of pleasure which their song contains, the Sirens threaten the patriarchal order, which gives each person back their life only in exchange for their full measure of time. When only unfailing presence of mind wrests survival from nature, anyone who follows the Sirens’ phantasmagoria is lost. If the Sirens know everything that has happened, they demand the future as its price, and their promise of a happy homecoming is the deception by which the past entraps a humanity filled with longing. Odysseus has been warned by Circe, the divinity of regression to animal form, whom he has withstood and who therefore gives him the strength to withstand other powers of dissolution. But the lure of the Sirens remains overpowering. No one who hears their song can escape. Humanity had to inflict terrible injuries on itself before the self—the identical, purpose-directed, masculine character of human beings—was created, and something of this process is repeated in every childhood. The effort to hold itself together attends the ego at all its stages, and the temptation to be rid of the ego has always gone hand-in-hand with the blind determination to preserve it. Narcotic intoxication, in which the euphoric suspension of the self is expiated by deathlike sleep, is one of the oldest social transactions mediating between self-preservation and self-annihilation, an attempt by the self to survive itself. The fear of losing the self, and suspending with it the boundary between oneself and other life, the aversion to death and destruction, is twinned with a promise of joy which has threatened civilization at every moment. The way of civilization has been that of obedience and work, over which fulfillment shines everlastingly as mere illusion, as beauty deprived of power. Odysseus’s idea, equally inimical to his death and to his happiness, shows awareness of this. He knows only two possibilities of escape. One he prescribes to his comrades. He plugs their ears with wax and orders them to row with all their might. Anyone who wishes to survive must not listen to the temptation of the irrecoverable, and is unable to listen only if he is unable to hear. Society has always made sure that this was the

case. Workers must look ahead with alert concentration and ignore anything which lies to one side. The urge toward distraction must be grimly sublimated in redoubled exertions. Thus the workers are made practical. The other possibility Odysseus chooses for himself, the landowner, who has others to work for him. He listens, but does so while bound helplessly to the mast, and the stronger the allurements grow the more tightly he has himself bound, just as later the bourgeois denied themselves happiness the closer it drew to them with the increase in their own power. What he hears has no consequences for him; he can signal to his men to untie him only by movements of his head, but it is too late. His comrades, who themselves cannot hear, know only of the danger of the song, not of its beauty, and leave him tied to the mast to save both him and themselves. They reproduce the life of the oppressor as a part of their own, while he cannot step outside his social role. The bonds by which he has irrevocably fettered himself to praxis at the same time keep the Sirens at a distance from praxis: their lure is neutralized as a mere object of contemplation, as art. The fettered man listens to a concert, as immobilized as audiences later, and his enthusiastic call for liberation goes unheard as applause. In this way the enjoyment of art and manual work diverge as the primeval world is left behind. The epic already contains the correct theory. Between the cultural heritage and enforced work there is a precise correlation, and both are founded on the inescapable compulsion toward the social control of nature.

Measures like those taken on Odysseus's ship in face of the Sirens are a prescient allegory of the dialectic of enlightenment. Just as the capacity to be represented is the measure of power, the mightiest person being the one who can be represented in the most functions, so it is also the vehicle of both progress and regression. Under the given conditions, exclusion from work means mutilation, not only for the unemployed but also for people at the opposite social pole. Those at the top experience the existence with which they no longer need to concern themselves as a mere substrate, and are wholly ossified as the self which issues commands. Primitive man experienced the natural thing

only as the fugitive object of desire, “but the lord, who has interposed the bondsman between it and himself, takes to himself only the dependent aspect of the thing and has the pure enjoyment of it. The aspect of its independence he leaves to the bondsman, who works on it.”³⁵ Odysseus is represented in the sphere of work. Just as he cannot give way to the lure of self-abandonment, as owner he also forfeits participation in work and finally even control over it, while his companions, despite their closeness to things, cannot enjoy their work because it is performed under compulsion, in despair, with their senses forcibly stopped. The servant is subjugated in body and soul, the master regresses. No system of domination has so far been able to escape this price, and the circularity of history in its progress is explained in part by this debilitation, which is the concomitant of power. Humanity, whose skills and knowledge become differentiated with the division of labor, is thereby forced back to more primitive anthropological stages, since, with the technical facilitation of existence, the continuance of domination demands the fixation of instincts by greater repression. Fantasy withers. The calamity is not that individuals have fallen behind society or its material production. Where the development of the machine has become that of the machinery of control, so that technical and social tendencies, always intertwined, converge in the total encompassing of human beings, those who have lagged behind represent not only untruth. Adaptation to the power of progress furthers the progress of power, constantly renewing the degenerations which prove successful progress, not failed progress, to be its own antithesis. The curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression.

This regression is not confined to the experience of the sensuous world, an experience tied to physical proximity, but also affects the autocratic intellect, which detaches itself from sensuous experience in order to subjugate it. The standardization of the intellectual function through which the mastery of the senses is accomplished, the acquiescence of thought to the production of unanimity, implies an impoverishment of thought no less than of experience; the separation of the two realms leaves

both damaged. A consequence of the restriction of thought to organization and administration, rehearsed by the those in charge from artful Odysseus to artless chairmen of the board, is the stupidity which afflicts the great as soon as they have to perform tasks other than the manipulation of the small. Mind becomes in reality the instrument of power and self-mastery for which bourgeois philosophy has always mistaken it. The deafness which has continued to afflict the submissive proletarians since the myth is matched by the immobility of those in command. The over-ripeness of society lives on the immaturity of the ruled. The more complex and sensitive the social, economic, and scientific mechanism, to the operation of which the system of production has long since attuned the body, the more impoverished are the experiences of which the body is capable. The elimination of qualities, their conversion into functions, is transferred by rationalized modes of work to the human capacity for experience, which tends to revert to that of amphibians. The regression of the masses today lies in their inability to hear with their own ears what has not already been heard, to touch with their hands what has not previously been grasped; it is the new form of blindness which supersedes that of vanquished myth. Through the mediation of the total society, which encompasses all relationships and impulses, human beings are being turned back into precisely what the developmental law of society, the principle of the self, had opposed: mere examples of the species, identical to one another through isolation within the compulsively controlled collectivity. The rowers, unable to speak to one another, are all harnessed to the same rhythms, like modern workers in factories, cinemas, and the collective. It is the concrete conditions of work in society* which enforce conformism—not the conscious influences which additionally render the oppressed stupid and deflect them from the truth. The powerlessness of the workers is not merely a ruse of the rulers but the logical consequence of industrial society, into which the efforts to escape it have finally transformed the ancient concept of fate.

This logical necessity, however, is not conclusive. It remains tied to domination, as both its reflection and its tool. Its truth,

therefore, is no less questionable than its evidence is inescapable. Thought, however, has always been equal to the task of concretely demonstrating its own equivocal nature. It is the servant which the master cannot control at will. Domination, in becoming reified as law and organization, first when humans formed settlements and later in the commodity economy, has had to limit itself. The instrument is becoming autonomous: independently of the will of the rulers,* the mediating agency of mind moderates the immediacy of economic injustice.* The instruments of power—language, weapons, and finally machines—which are intended to hold everyone in their grasp, must in their turn be grasped by everyone. In this way, the moment of rationality in domination also asserts itself as something different from it. The thing-like quality of the means, which makes the means universally available, its “objective validity” for everyone, itself implies a criticism of the domination from which thought has arisen as its means. On the way from mythology to logistics, thought has lost the element of reflection on itself, and machinery mutilates people today, even if it also feeds them. In the form of machines, however, alienated reason is moving toward a society which reconciles thought, in its solidification as an apparatus both material and intellectual, with a liberated living element, and relates it to society itself as its true subject. The particularist origin and the universal perspective of thought have always been inseparable. Today, with the transformation of the world into industry, the perspective of the universal, the social realization of thought, is so fully open to view that thought is repudiated by the rulers themselves as mere ideology. It is a telltale manifestation of the bad conscience of the cliques in whom economic necessity is finally embodied* that its revelations, from the “intuitions” of the *Führer* to the “dynamic worldview,” no longer acknowledge their own atrocities as necessary consequences of logical regularities, in resolute contrast to earlier bourgeois apologetics. The mythological lies about “mission” and “fate”* which they use instead do not even express a complete untruth: it is no longer the objective laws of the market which govern the actions of industrialists and drive humanity toward catastrophe. Rather, the conscious decisions of the company chairmen* execute

capitalism's old law of value, and thus its fate, as resultants no less compulsive than the blindest price mechanisms. The rulers themselves do not believe in objective necessity, even if they sometimes call their machinations by that name. They posture as engineers of world history. Only their subjects accept the existing development, which renders them a degree more powerless with each prescribed increase in their standard of living, as inviolably necessary. Now that the livelihood of those still* needed to operate the machines can be provided with a minimal part of the working time which the masters of society have at their disposal, the superfluous remainder, the overwhelming mass of the population, are trained as additional guards of the system, so that they can be used today and tomorrow as material for its grand designs. They are kept alive as an army of unemployed. Their reduction to mere objects of administration, which preforms every department of modern life right down to language and perception, conjures up an illusion of objective necessity before which they believe themselves powerless. Poverty* as the antithesis between power and impotence is growing beyond measure, together with the capacity permanently to abolish poverty. From the commanding heights of the economy* to the latest professional rackets,* the tangled mass of cliques and institutions which ensures the indefinite continuation of the status quo is impenetrable to each individual. Even for a union boss, to say nothing of a manager, a proletarian is no more than a superfluous specimen, should he catch his notice at all, while the union boss in turn must live in terror of his own liquidation.

The absurdity of a state of affairs in which the power of the system over human beings increases with every step they take away from the power of nature denounces the reason of the reasonable* society as obsolete. That reason's necessity is illusion, no less than the freedom of the industrialists, which reveals its ultimately compulsive nature in their inescapable struggles and pacts. This* illusion, in which utterly enlightened humanity is losing itself, cannot be dispelled by a thinking which, as an instrument of power, has to choose between command and obedience. Although unable to escape the entanglement in which

it was trapped in prehistory, that thinking* is nevertheless capable of recognizing the logic of either/or, of consequence and antinomy, by means of which it emancipated itself radically from nature, as that same nature, unreconciled and self-estranged. Precisely by virtue of its irresistible logic, thought, in whose compulsive mechanism nature is reflected and perpetuated, also reflects itself as a nature oblivious of itself, as a mechanism of compulsion. Of course, mental representation is only an instrument. In thought, human beings distance themselves from nature in order to arrange it in such a way that it can be mastered. Like the material tool which, as a thing, is held fast as that thing in different situations and thereby separates the world, as something chaotic, multiple, and disparate, from that which is known, single, and identical, so the concept is the idea-tool which fits into things at the very point from which one can take hold of them. Thought thus becomes illusory whenever it seeks to deny its function of separating, distancing, and objectifying. All mystical union remains a deception, the impotently inward trace of the forfeited revolution. But while enlightenment is right in opposing any hypostatization of utopia and in dispassionately denouncing power as division, the split between subject and object, which it will not allow to be bridged, becomes the index of the untruth both of itself and of truth.* The proscribing of superstition has always signified not only the progress of domination but its exposure. Enlightenment is more than enlightenment, it is nature made audible in its estrangement. In mind's self-recognition as nature divided from itself, nature, as in prehistory, is calling to itself, but no longer directly by its supposed name, which, in the guise of *mana*, means omnipotence, but as something blind and mutilated. In the mastery of nature, without which mind does not exist, enslavement to nature persists. By modestly confessing itself to be power and thus being taken back into nature, mind rids itself of the very claim to mastery which had enslaved it to nature. Although humanity may be unable to interrupt its flight away from necessity and into progress and civilization without forfeiting knowledge itself, at least it no longer mistakes the ramparts it has constructed against necessity, the institutions and practices of domination which have always rebounded against society from the