

ADORNO AND HORKHEIMER: DIASPORIC PHILOSOPHY, NEGATIVE THEOLOGY,
AND COUNTER-EDUCATION

Ilan Gur-Ze'ev

From a contemporary perspective, the work of the Frankfurt School thinkers can be considered the last grand modern attempt to offer transcendence, meaning, and religiosity rather than "emancipation" and "truth." In the very first stage of their work, Adorno and Horkheimer interlaced the goals of Critical Theory with the Marxian revolutionary project. The development of their thought led them to criticize orthodox Marxism and ended in a complete break with that tradition, as they developed a quest for a unique kind religiosity connected with the Gnostic tradition and emanating, to a certain extent, from Judaism. This religiosity offers a reformulated Negative Theology within the framework of what I call "Diasporic philosophy." In his later work, Horkheimer explicitly presented Critical Theory as a new Jewish theology. Rearticulating Critical Theory is of vital importance today, both for understanding the current historical moment and for going beyond the oppressive dimensions of Critical Pedagogy. This article does not satisfy itself by offering a new reconstruction of Critical Theory; its goal is to offer a blueprint for a Diasporic counter-education that transcends Critical Pedagogy and goes beyond the emancipatory dimensions of Judaism itself.

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CRITICAL THEORY AS A MANIFESTATION OF DIASPORIC PHILOSOPHY

From today's perspective, the work of the Frankfurt School thinkers can be considered the last grand modern attempt to offer the possibility of transcendence, meaning, and religiosity, rather than "emancipation" and "truth." In the very first stage of their work, during the period before the Second World War and the Holocaust, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer interlaced the goals of Critical Theory with the Marxian revolutionary project. The development of their thought led them to criticize orthodox Marxism and ended in a complete break with that tradition, as they embarked on a quest for a religiosity of a unique kind, connected with the Gnostic tradition and emanating, to a certain extent, from Judaism.¹ This religiosity offers a reformulated Negative Theology within the framework of what I call "Diasporic philosophy."²

As I have tried to explain elsewhere, Diasporic philosophy represents a *nomadic* relation to the world, to thinking, and to existence.³ Its starting point is the presence of the *absence* of truth, God, and worthy hedonism. Diasporic philosophy is positioned against any secular and theistic philosophical, existential, and political projects that represent Positive Utopias and reflect "home-returning" quests. While thus rejecting all dogmas and other forms of closure and sameness, it also refuses all versions of nihilism and relativism. In my view, later Critical Theory was in its essence such a Diasporic philosophy, as an existential self-positioning and counter-educational erotic endeavor that opens for us the possibility of the kind of nonrepressive creation, happiness, responsibility, and worthy suffering most relevant to us today. This is especially so in the face of contemporary postmodern rhetoric and fundamentalist calls for worthy homelessness and a reestablished Garden of Eden.

The present constitution of the "risk society" and the McWorld that is being celebrated all over as part and parcel of capitalist globalization, its culture

1. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, *The Frankfurt School and the History of Pessimism* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996), 115.

2. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, *Destroying the Other's Collective Memory* (Peter Lang: New York, 2003). See also Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, *Toward Diasporic Education* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Reseling, 2004), 3.

3. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, "Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy and Diaspora Today: Toward a New Critical Language in Education," in *Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy Today: Toward a New Critical Language in Education*, ed. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (Haifa, Israel: University of Haifa, 2005), 7-34. See also Gur-Ze'ev, *Toward Diasporic Education*, 9.

industry, and its technologies and logics, also open new possibilities for Diasporic existence and counter-education. These material conditions and their ontological foundations create new venues for counter-education in the most concrete and specific terms and realizations. Improvisation, as one example, becomes an essential part of the nomadic existence of today's Diasporic human — and within the framework of counter-education, improvisation in its Diasporic-critical sense may be developed, thought, edified, and implemented as a new self-positioning and deterritorialization in the spirit of Adorno and Horkheimer's religiosity.

CRITICAL THEORY'S ANTIREVOLUTIONARY END

In establishing Critical Theory as a Diasporic philosophy, Adorno and Horkheimer articulated a unique interpretation not only of the Enlightenment and Marxism, but also of religion and monotheism more generally. Judaism was of special importance for them, as a manifestation of a nondogmatic and nonviolent existential and philosophical possibility. In this respect, they continued the interpretation of Jewish premonotheistic nature as developed by such thinkers as Theodor Lessing and Jakob Klatzkin, who brought into Jewish thought some of the central conceptions of Friedrich Nietzsche and Ludwig Klages.⁴

In their later work Adorno and Horkheimer came to regard Marx's project as a Positive Utopia, which both had by then rejected. Horkheimer explicitly compared this trend away from the Marxian thought to Arthur Schopenhauer's disaffection with the tradition of philosophical pessimism.⁵ By then, his thought was explicitly antirevolutionary. It is the nature of the revolutionary, every revolutionary, to become an oppressor. In his view, every revolution, especially a "successful" one, is a manifestation of power. And justice, when it becomes powerful, is realized only at the cost of its transformation into oppression.⁶ Adorno made very similar arguments, noting that "civilization itself produces anti-civilization and increasingly reinforces it." Adorno understood that "moral ideas...are directly derived from the existence of the suppressors." Likewise, he maintained that already the early conditions for mature independence, by which every free society is predetermined, are set by the powers and dynamics of the reality of the absence of freedom.⁷ In

4. Theodor Lessing, *Untergang der Erde am Geist (Europa und Asien)* [The Dawn of the Earth by the Spirit (Europe and Asia)] (Hannover: G. Meiner, 1924); Ya'akov Klatzkin, *Shekiat Hachaim* [The Dawn of Life] (Berlin: Eshkol, 1925) (in Hebrew); and Ludwig Klages, *Um Seele und Geist* [Soul and Spirit] (München: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, 1951).

5. Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* VII [Collected Writings, vol. 7] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 339–340.

6. *Ibid.*, 418, 341.

7. Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 191; Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1999), 184; and Theodor Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit* [Education for Maturity] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 135.

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contrast to the Marxian tradition, Critical Theorists conceived that, as long as even some remnants of freedom survive, violence will flourish.⁸

In the end, whatever hopes Marx did hold on behalf of true society, apparently they seem to be the wrong ones, if — and this issue is important to Critical Theory — freedom and justice are interrelated in mutual opposition. The more justice there is, freedom will diminish accordingly.⁹

For both thinkers this truth is ontologically and not historically grounded, and sometimes Adorno articulates it in the language of the Gnostic tradition: “space is nothing but absolute alienation.”¹⁰ For him, this is the framework for viewing the whole historical reality of advanced technological society, in which everything has become a commodity, and life, with all its layers and dimensions, is nothing but “a fetish of consumption.”¹¹ In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer were not satisfied with merely targeting the capitalistic logic and its realization in itself, or representations of totalitarianism such as National Socialism and Stalinism. Ultimately, they aimed for the essence of *culture* itself:

Culture has developed with the protection of the executioner.... All work and pleasure are protected by the hangman. To contradict this fact is to deny all science and logic. It is impossible to abolish...terror and retain civilization. Even the lessening of terror implies a beginning of the process of dissolution.¹²

The conception of revolution offered by Critical Theory is conceived within a double-layered philosophy of history: one layer linear, the other circular. From the viewpoint of the circular conception of time, there is no room for progress in the Kantian, Hegelian, or Marxian sense, and there is certainly no room for a genuine revolution.

According to Walter Benjamin, there is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of a barbarity.¹³ For Adorno and Horkheimer, all substantive levels of “progress” manifest an oppressive regression. In this sense “adaptation to the power of progress involves the regression of power. Each time anew ‘progress’ brings about those degenerations. They manifest not the unsuccessful but successful progress to be its contrary.”¹⁴ On the other level of “progress” — the explicitly historical linear one — unless an unpredictable interference occurs, the good intentions and progressive talents of educators devoted to revolutionary education are of little use in halting the enhancement and sophistication of barbarism, and, actually, they are its manifestation. In such a reality there is no room for

8. Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* XIII [Collected Writings, vol. 13] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 247.

9. *Ibid.*, 340.

10. Theodor Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* X [Collected Writings, vol. 10] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 205.

11. Theodor Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* III [Collected Writings, vol. 3] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 243.

12. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Negative Dialectics* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1988), 255.

13. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1.2 [Collected Writings, vol. 1.2] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 696.

14. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Negative Dialectics*, 42.

nonrepressive “progressive,” positive utopianism, or for an objective, justifiable education and praxis for resisting and overcoming the present reality.¹⁵ Adorno warns us against the drive of emancipatory education to culminate in an anti-mature human positioning of the kind that current Critical Pedagogy all too often takes on in the name of “emancipation,” “critique,” and “the victim’s justified counter-violence.”¹⁶

Adorno and Horkheimer gave up the Marxist conception of progress and, along with it, their optimism as to a social revolutionary change, including the goal, and to a certain degree also the means, of critique. But they did not abandon Utopia and the essential imperatives of Critical Theory as a counter-education and *political emancipatory praxis*. However, their definition of emancipation and the stance of realization of intellectual autonomy as praxis changed dramatically, so that they came to view emancipation in terms of its early Jewish eschatological sources in the Qumran sect and other Jewish and Christian adherents of the messianic tradition.

In Horkheimer’s work, the change from a Marxian Critical Theory to a Diasporic philosophy is paralleled by an articulation of Critical Theory as a new, Jewish Negative Theology. Adorno’s Negative Dialectics follows the same path, attempting to present what I call “counter-education” as a worthy means of addressing the present absence of the quest for transcendence and meaning, and as a Diasporic form of self-education as a readiness to be called upon. It is a central dimension of “counter-education” within the framework of present-day Diasporic philosophy: while refusing any dogma, it reintroduces the exiled seriousness toward that which is called “redemption” in Christian theology.¹⁷ As Adorno observed, “‘It is even part of my good fortune not to be a house-owner,’ Nietzsche already wrote in the *Gay Science*. Today we should have to add: it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.”¹⁸

This is where the Diasporic dimension is so central to the mature thinking of Adorno and Horkheimer. The refusal to dwell in peace in the present order of things, the negation of the “facts” of the actuality, are merely manifestations of the rejection of metaphysical violence and of all kinds of “homes,” dogmas, and self-satisfaction in a world of pain, injustice, ugliness, and betrayed love. Since they refused a Positive Utopia, their mature thought could not promise a better world as a justification for resistance to normalizing education and the quest for pleasure, “success,” and hegemony. Homelessness and the moral importance of suffering are here grounded ontologically and become a religious way of life. They followed Benjamin’s lead in devising a kind of religiosity that is messianism without a Messiah.¹⁹ As a counter-education, it offers no promise of salvation or of

15. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 26.

16. Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*, 147. For more on this problem with critical pedagogy, see Ilan Gur-Ze’ev, “Toward a Nonrepressive Critical Pedagogy,” *Educational Theory* 48, no. 4 (1998): 484.

17. Gur-Ze’ev, “Toward a Nonrepressive Critical Pedagogy,” 484.

18. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 39.

19. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1.2, 203.

redemption. But it might offer a messianic moment that will overcome the violence of the governing "now-time" and open the gate to an alternative way of life, an alternative thinking in which challenging Spirit is reclaimed and the dehumanization of humans by the manipulations of the system is resisted in an effort to regenerate Life and redeem it from the all-celebrated triumph of "Spirit" and its cannibalistic offspring such as Instrumental Rationality.²⁰

In this counter-education, love becomes possible once again, in contrast to the codes, passions, and ideals that are set by the omnipotence of the ruling culture industry. Within the framework of this counter-education, the otherness in the self is reclaimed, and the otherness of the Other becomes not only legitimate but an indispensable element in a new kind of Life. In this Life nomadism is realized at the intellectual and social levels, and it is paralleled by infinite responsibility, given that there is no God, dogma, or party central committee to guide the individual toward "the good." "The totally other" bursts in — or does not — and refutes the consensus, unveils the accepted truths, values, passions, and all other manifestations of self-evidence. It is a Diasporic, ecstatic, dangerous way of life within which new possibilities are opened but no guarantees are available; there is no optimism, no room for certainty about overcoming the swelling power of human beings' self-forgetfulness. This does not mean that the human is consigned to a predetermined passivity. Even if the actuality of "the totally other" is not guaranteed and it is never an object of manipulation, there is still so much to do in order to prepare one's ears to listen to the unfamiliar music of the presence of "the totally other." The Diasporic philosophy of Adorno and Horkheimer is highly relevant to this self-preparation, self-edification, self-reflection, responsibility, and creativity within the framework of a present-day Diasporic counter-education.

AGAINST EDUCATIONAL OPTIMISM

While the first stage of Critical Theory (the revolutionary-optimistic stage) became the foundation of today's Critical Pedagogy, the second stage is, to my mind, a brilliant manifestation of *counter-education* in its commitment not only to criticize but also to overcome all versions of normalizing education. Adorno and Horkheimer's later work offers a framework for counter-educational praxis whose religiosity is fertilized by the alarming recognition of the impossibility of realizing the human imperative of a homecoming to God, or of domesticating absolute Spirit or Reason; the establishment of a genuine "home" or "homecoming" to the advancing true knowledge of genuine human interests and realization of their potentials is here a constitutive element of philosophy and politics. The current work of Slavoj Žižek, who writes that "the paradox of self-consciousness is that it is possible only against the background of its own impossibility," is very close to the later work of Horkheimer and Adorno.²¹ In this sense the later Critical Theory

20. Walter Benjamin, *Zur Kritik der Gewalt und Andere Ausaetze* [To the Critique of Power and Other Writings] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 701.

21. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarring with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 15.

writings, which I consider essentially Diasporic in the sense that they try to overcome the quest for “homecoming” in all its manifestations, became prima facie counter-educational, even if the word “education” is rarely mentioned and schooling is hardly tackled at all.

The big challenge for the critical mind and for humanist education is not so much the fruit of alienation but the disappearance of (the consciousness of) alienation within the totality, which is governed by Instrumental Rationality. This quest for alienation and the challenges posed by the exile of critical Spirit and Love of Life mark the difference between the standard critique of orthodox Marxist ideology and Horkheimer and Adorno’s conceptions. Governing Instrumental Rationality leaves no room for inefficient and nonpragmatic considerations; drives out the concepts, ideals, and traditions that allowed speculation and critique of the self-evident; and offers transcendence from the oppressive practices of all master signifiers. Instrumental Rationality is responsible for the current reality, in which the more effective the processes of dehumanization become, the more efficient becomes the concealment of the oppression by the contemporary culture industry.²² The exile of Spirit and Love of Life, and the bridging of the abyss between substance and subject, existence and meaning, creation/work and aim, Diasporic self-positioning and quests for “homecoming,” are trivialized, and Spirit is again presented as relevant and vivid, but only as a commodity form — a commodity form that has lost its connection to its use value and functions primarily as a violent symbolic interchange, as part of what I call “the pleasure machine” that normalizing education is so quick to celebrate as “reality.”²³ Reified consciousness, which is fabricated with ever fewer antagonistic dimensions by the culture industry, reaffirms “spirituality” and “spiritual education” as opposed to Love of Life, and occultists are celebrating their victory all over Western culture.²⁴

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, there is no anchor or stable ground in which to anchor optimism or even the very premises of Critical Theory, and a philosopher worthy of the name must become what I call “a Diasporic human being.” The seeming political freedom, free opinion, and tolerance within contemporary Western society conceal and actually further the process of totalistic dehumanization:

Not only does the mind mould itself for the sake of its marketability, and thus reproduce the socially prevalent categories. Rather, it grows to resemble ever more closely the status quo as its “home” even where it subjectively refrains from making a commodity of itself. The network of the whole is drawn ever tighter.... It leaves the individual consciousness less and less room for evasion, performs it more and more thoroughly, cuts it off as it were from the possibility of differentiating itself as all difference degenerates to a nuance in the monotony of supply.²⁵

22. Theodor Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O’Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 233.

23. Gur-Ze’ev, *Destroying the Other’s Collective Memory*, 2.

24. Adorno, *Critical Models*, 200, 244.

25. Theodor Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. O’Connor, 198.

The critique of traditional Marxist ideology cannot be of much use since culture itself "has become ideological": "Today," Adorno asserted, "ideology means society as appearance."²⁶ However, since ideology is no longer conceived as a socially necessary appearance that veils the "facts," critique of ideology can no longer offer an emancipatory deciphering of "reality" and cannot claim to empower humanist resistance to social oppression and to manipulative representations of histories, identities, and realities. The view Adorno offered does not allow this kind of optimism: "Ideology today is society itself insofar as its integral power and inevitability, its overwhelming existence-in-itself, surrogates the meaning which that existence has exterminated."²⁷

During the same period, Horkheimer was on the verge of acknowledging that there is no longer any justification for a Critical Theory. In a personal letter to Adorno, he said that nowadays "reflection [has become] senseless. Actually the world to which we saw ourselves as belonging is destroyed."²⁸ Elsewhere he wrote that serious talk itself has become senseless and that those who refuse to listen to the attempts to rescue meaning are not totally wrong.²⁹ Truth in this context is not absent; rather, it is reviled in, and swallowed by, the present reality. It can offer only technological and scientific advance — not meaning, direction, or responsibility to resist injustice. The issue at stake here is not solely truth or justice but the very *quest* for truth and the commitment to justice, or, in other words, the possibility of transcendence from meaninglessness and from "sameness" (what Emmanuel Levinas called the Same), from the mere thingness of Being.³⁰ Addressing the absence of any foundation for the quest for transcendence, and thus facing its infinity as Negative Utopia, is an ontological sign of Diaspora that Critical Theory offers as an impetus for a possible present-day counter-education.

In the later work of Adorno and Horkheimer, two very different conceptions of truth emerge. One view is that truth is the hegemony based on the existing world of facts, which ultimately represents "power." In this conception, human existence in its essence is revealed at its full price: practical involvement, within which ideals transform into oppression.³¹ This view implicitly (and mercilessly) negates the potential effectiveness of any optimistic, positive, emancipatory educational project of the kind that standard Critical Pedagogy is presently actualizing.

Within the framework of Critical Theory, Adorno offered an alternative. He positioned his philosophy against the fundamental assumption of all Positive

26. *Ibid.*, 206.

27. *Ibid.*, 207.

28. Max Horkheimer, *Archive VI*, 13, 511.

29. Max Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 129.

30. Theodor Adorno, "Meditations on Metaphysics: After Auschwitz," in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. O'Connor, 85; Theodor Adorno, "Negative Dialectics and the Possibility of Philosophy," in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. O'Connor, 65; Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," 236; and Emmanuel Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1987), 55.

31. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Negative Dialectics*, 236.

Utopias and all “homecoming” projects: the idea that the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real.³² In his alternative conception of truth, Adorno connected homelessness and Diasporic existence to his central concepts, most particularly those of dialectics, nonidentity, negation, and reflection:

The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a reminder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy....It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.³³

In light of the central role the concept of nonidentity plays in Adorno’s later thought, it is of vital importance to state that for him what I call “Diaspora” is not a merely epistemological dimension. It is even much more than a way of life, and it is certainly not a temporary punishment of humans by God that will ultimately be overcome by a redemptive “homecoming” to cosmic harmony and nonalienated human existence. As in the Gnostic tradition, Adorno’s rearticulated “exiled good God” is present as an *absence* in the reality of the evil God of historical existence and creative reality. This is why, for him, while dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity, it also precludes the possibility of *any* stable ground for “standpoint” — not only the “wrong standpoint.”³⁴ The aims of Adorno’s Diasporic philosophy are Diasporic self-reflection and self-overcoming, which will make possible a form of transcendence with no ground, ultimate end, appeasing nihilistic pleasure, rational conclusion, totalizing synthesis, or any other kind of “home” or redemption.

In an imaginary conversation between the philosopher — an implicit reference to the masters of Critical Theory themselves — and the practical man, the philosopher is the one on the defensive, not his practical interlocutor. The genuine philosopher is introduced by Adorno and Horkheimer, not as a promising educator, but as a neurotic who manifests his refusal to be cured by insisting on continuing his project of curing normal, “realistic,” sane people.³⁵ When faced with these conclusions, one should ask what justification there is, or if there can be any justification at all, for Critical Theory and for Critical Pedagogy as emancipatory education in action, under conditions in which “serious philosophy has come to its end”?³⁶ One may ask whether there is a secure, or insecure yet worthy, nonreligious “home” even for counter-education, if Adorno is right in claiming, “Whatever wants nothing to do with the trajectory of history belongs all the more truly to it. History promises no salvation and offers the possibility of hope only to the concept whose movements follow history’s path to the very extreme.”³⁷

32. Theodor Adorno, “The Actuality of Philosophy,” in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. O’Connor, 24.

33. Adorno, “Negative Dialectics and the Possibility of Philosophy,” 57.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Negative Dialectics*, 255.

36. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* VII, 404.

37. Adorno, *Critical Models*, 17.

CRITICAL THEORY AS A JEWISH NEGATIVE THEOLOGY

The later Horkheimer presented mature Critical Theory as a Jewish Negative Theology. This change carries major educational implications. Following Benjamin, Horkheimer considered it vitally important that Judaism not present God as a positive absolute. The negativity of this utopianism comprises two elements: The first is a rejection in principle of the possibility of a positive realization of any Utopia. Horkheimer refused to imagine a positive picture of future society prior to its realization.³⁸ The second is his commitment to confront Critical Theory with its own negativity and its own impossibility. This challenge is worthy of a Diasporic philosophy that cannot satisfy itself in a concluding synthesis, not even in its essential homelessness or negativity. It is this challenge that opens the gate to counter-education; indeed, in many respects, it is the gate itself. In Adorno's words,

The plain contradiction of this challenge is that of philosophy itself, which is thereby qualified as dialectics before getting entangled in its individual contradictions. The work of philosophical self-reflection consists in unraveling that paradox. Everything else is signification, secondhand.³⁹

As genuine Diasporic philosophers, both Adorno and Horkheimer refused any philosophy that leads to consensus, synthesis, and the end of dialectics and worthy suffering. Yet, at the same time, they refused to abandon the quest for the Messiah or for human emancipation. The *quest*, as a messianic tension, is central here, not its "successful" fulfillment; too often this quest is woven into a positive Diasporic philosophy that makes possible the institutionalization of both religion and normalizing, repressive religious education, which challenges genuine religiosity and authentic Diasporic existence. Adorno and Horkheimer were careful to position at the center of their counter-education a Diasporic attitude different from positive messianism, naïve reflection, and nondialogical transcendence. In his *Minima Moralia*, Adorno concluded that

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.⁴⁰

That is why Judaism was so important for Horkheimer. He saw in it "a non-positive religion...a hope for the coming of the Messiah."⁴¹ Judaism, within this framework, is not a reality but a symbol for the nonviolent solidarity of the powerless. As a Jewish Negative Theology, Critical Theory expresses, in his view, "a refusal to recognize power as an argument for truth."⁴² Horkheimer's contribution to the Diasporic perspective is crystal clear when he identifies "Judaism," as a "non-positive religion," with Critical Theory. Adorno too understood the refusal of power,

38. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* VII, 382.

39. Adorno, "Negative Dialectics and the Possibility of Philosophy," 60.

40. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 247.

41. Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* XIV [Collected Writings, vol. 14] [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985], 331.

42. *Ibid.*, 140, 139.

effectiveness, and domestication in the "Same" of the world of facts as a precondition for a genuine counter-education capable of challenging the present reality.⁴³

The conception of being in the continuum of *ontological Diaspora* was vital for presenting late Critical Theory as a Jewish Negative Theology. The uniqueness of Judaism lies in its permanent demand for justice, emerging out of a hope with no real historical anchor: "Jewry was not a powerful state, but the hope for justice at the end of the world."⁴⁴ The idea that the demand for justice essentially cannot obtain power, and that justice can be realized only at the cost of its transformation into its opposite — injustice — is central to the educational implications of this version of Critical Theory.

On my reading, it implies that counter-education must not attempt to transcend negativism; it is committed to antidogmatism, and it must resist any manifestation of the self-evident, even that of the oppressed and the persecuted. It must resist popularization and political victories. At the same time, its messianism is directed toward resisting actual injustices in the present reality; such resistance is seen as the only manifestation of the quest for truth and justice. This version of Negative Theology as a mature Critical Theory in Horkheimer's thought accords with Adorno's concept of Negative Dialectics.

It was not in opposition to the view of the philosopher as a neurotic who refuses to be cured, but in compliance with this vision that Adorno articulated the "categorical imperative of philosophy": "it does not hold the key to salvation, but allows some hope only to the moment of concept followed by the intellect wherever the path may lead."⁴⁵ Yet Adorno's Diasporic philosophy is not consistent enough with itself, given that Adorno actually did present Critical Theory as a path to salvation after all. This, however, is within a negative framework that leaves no room for any Positive Utopia or actual salvation in the sense that traditional Positive Utopias or optimistic Critical Pedagogy can promise their disciples. In most of his educational texts Horkheimer also fell short of consistent adherence to Diasporic philosophy. For example, he offered optimism on the possibility of instituting a worthier education, but this hope came at the expense of counter-education, which, if genuine, must be truly Diasporic and must refuse any optimistic version of normalizing education. The explicitly philosophical texts of these thinkers in their second stage of development represent a much more consistent Diasporic philosophy.

Regardless of its situation, according to Adorno, philosophy has not concluded its mission. However, it does not have any foundation, self-evidence, social strata, or pain on which to establish its critical education: "Philosophy offers no place from which theory as such might be concretely convicted of the anachronisms it is suspected of, now, as before."⁴⁶ Adorno, like Benjamin and Horkheimer,

43. Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*, 147.

44. Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, 206.

45. Theodor Adorno, "Why Philosophy?" in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. O'Connor, 53.

46. Adorno, "Negative Dialectics and the Possibility of Philosophy," 55.

presented another kind of dialectic that stands in contrast to the orthodox Marxist concept of dialectics and its version of ideology critique (as an emancipatory overcoming of alienation and false consciousness, and as a precondition for a revolutionary praxis). As a genuine counter-educator, he rejected any concept of dialectics that promises victory, emancipation, or peace.

According to Adorno's ontology, humanity's homelessness is neither a temporary situation nor a punishment; rather, it is rooted in the infinite rootlessness, in what Gilles Deleuze called "becoming" or "the rhizomatic," that opens the gate to nomadic existence.⁴⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer were united in refusing any manifestations of the absolute, the totality, the truth, or a positive justice on earth.

Adorno was very aware of the contradictions at the heart of his project. His Diasporic project rests here, on these contradictions precisely, as a way of overcoming meaninglessness and self-evidence of various kinds, including the revolutionary kind: "The work of philosophical self-reflection consists in unraveling that paradox. Everything else is signification, secondhand construction, pre-philosophical activity."⁴⁸ What then remains for philosophy to do? Is there still a mission to which it can devote itself — without transforming itself into its negative — in order to become a new, sophisticated version of normalizing education?

Adorno, like Horkheimer, based his utopian thought on his philosophical pessimism, so that Negative Dialectics becomes the last means to preserve the struggle to challenge the self-evident and to transcend meaninglessness:

To change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of Negative Dialectics. Insight into the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept would end the compulsive identification, which the concept brings unless halted by such reflection. Reflection upon its own meaning is the way out of the concept's seeming being-in-itself as a unit of meaning.⁴⁹

In this sense, and solely in this sense, "philosophy can make it after all."⁵⁰ His Diasporic philosophy in this respect becomes the only way to defend against the destruction of the autonomy of the human subject.⁵¹ It becomes the only means to resist being overwhelmed by the one-dimensional functionality and thingness of the system and its deceptive message of freedom in accordance with the laws of the market and the current world of facts.⁵² As such, within its negativity, it incubates an alternative to the hegemonic educational message propagated by the culture industry: it offers nomadic, creative, religious existence and love via the possibility of refusing to submit to the present process of subjectification, of resisting the reality of the systemic construction of dehumanized agents. Thus Diasporic philosophy

47. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 294.

48. Adorno, "Negative Dialectics and the Possibility of Philosophy," 60.

49. *Ibid.*, 63.

50. *Ibid.*, 60.

51. Adorno, *Critical Models*, 5.

52. See Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," 234; and Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," 198.

represents a kind of thinking that offers hope for efforts to overcome the current educational reality, and an important example of such an effort is today's Critical Pedagogy.⁵³

Diasporic philosophy enabled Adorno and Horkheimer not only to effect a radical critical reconstruction of the present historical moment but to go further in offering an existential-philosophical counter-educational refusal of all manifestations of power in culture and society. The Diasporic philosophy they constructed was actually a nonpositivistic and anti-optimistic alternative; as in the Gnostic tradition, it was a call to overcome the omnipotence of the presence of "the evil God." Such an alternative opened up when they insisted on transcendence, and (against the deceptive call for relativism, nihilism, or pragmatism) on forms of love, meaning, responsibility, and creativity rather than merely echoing the hegemonic power games of the totally administered world.

Critical Theory here becomes an introduction to a renewal of *poiesis* and ecstatic religiosity without becoming a new dogmatic religious, philosophical, or political "home." At the same time, however, dogmatic and institutionalized religion comes to have special relevance for the Frankfurt School thinkers: they struggled for the very possibility of Diasporic sensitivity to the pursuit of "the totally other." Only within this Diasporic philosophy and its counter-educational alternatives can we understand its refusal to abandon the imperative of responsibility to yet unrealized human potentials. To this imperative, like to the presence of hope out of suffering, they offered only one possible course: that of religious negation.

This message has its origins in the Jewish messianic impulse: it entails the commitment to transcendence from any consensus and from any manifestation of the self-evident and the Same. It is a call for us to struggle to overcome meaninglessness in a Godless world. In this sense, any possible educational "implication" of this message should be negative, if it is to be true to itself. At the same time, as genuine counter-education, it is a manifestation of love and a concrete realization of joy and creativity, *tikun olam*.⁵⁴ These ideas characteristic of the later thinking of Adorno and Horkheimer are vitally important to any attempt to keep alive the quest and the actual appearance of counter-education as a concrete Utopia of reclaiming love in a postmodern condition:

For Adorno and Horkheimer, the transcendental dimension and the concept of the horizon as a limit that does not have the last word determine the frame of struggle which constitutes the "genuine" human — a position that comes close to mystic tradition. According to Adorno, and here he is very close to Heidegger, from whom he and Horkheimer were so concerned to distance themselves, "What is waiting in the objects themselves needs such intervention to come to speak, with the perspective that the forces mobilized outside."⁵⁵

53. Adorno, "Culture Industry Reconsidered," 238.

54. Gur-Ze'ev, *Toward Diasporic Education*, 9. In Hebrew, *tikun olam* means "restoring the perfection of the world."

55. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, "Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy and the Possibility of Counter-Education," in *Critical Theory and the Human Condition*, eds. Michael Peters, Colin Lankshear, and Mark Olssen (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 29.

This dimension is made especially clear in Horkheimer's unpublished works: "In every single thing," he wrote in a private note, "a higher aim dwells, which is channeled to external infinity, which transcends it." The Negative Utopia of Diasporic philosophy is expressed, on the one hand, by the deeds of the genuine philosopher, which manifest openness and a readiness to be called upon, geared toward a total negation of the given reality as the actuality of "truth, beauty, and goodness."⁵⁶ Horkheimer's starting point, however, includes the acknowledgment that these dimensions reflect the absolute, which will forever remain concealed, unreachable, and misconceived. One must clarify the status of this yearning, a clarification that Horkheimer himself avoided and Adorno did only very little to address. Here we come up against the limits of their mature Critical Theory even when it becomes an implicit rich Diasporic philosophy.

For Horkheimer, as for Adorno and Benjamin, the struggle to transcend the boundaries of the hegemonic reality transforms this praxis into prayer, a holy deed. This type of holiness is not conditioned and determined by the level of its "success" but by openness and possibility. Regarding prayer, Franz Rosenzweig observes that

The question is not asked here whether the prayer will be answered and fulfilled. The context of the prayer is its fulfillment. The soul prays...for the capability of prayer...[T]his ability to pray is the highest gift given to the soul in revelation. This gift is nothing but the capability of prayer. But by being superior it already passes the boundaries of the realm of capability. For, with the ability of prayer given, the necessity for prayer is also included.⁵⁷

In prayer, the yearning for a dialogue between the human, as an infinite challenge to his or her finitude, and "God," as a representation of infinity, is realized. The central force here, in my opinion, lies not in the establishment of an unproblematic meeting with "God" but in the Diasporic facing of his absence and in confronting the existential moment where Sisyphean overcoming of mere (pleasurable/painless/"successful") human life becomes the aim of human life. A self-contained, domesticated human subject cannot be a true human, since true humans are essentially Diasporic; the true human is conditioned by transcendence and by *challenging the totality of the immanence*. The traditional concept of prayer represented this idea in a manner that is still valid, especially in the face of the absence of God.⁵⁸ As happens so often with love, happiness, and creativity, prayer, when instrumentalized and institutionalized, negates its own essence and becomes a devoted slave of the reality it is committed to transcend.

In attempting to realize the idea of the autonomous subject, the human is overwhelmed by inhumanity: a desire for power — a desire for "home" in the swallowing presence of the absolute immanence. Unless the Diasporic counter-education is offered, no emancipation or redemption awaits, but we are instead faced with nihilism and the disintegration of human culture. Within counter-education,

56. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* XIV, 162.

57. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1970), 215.

58. Samuel H. Dresner, *Prayer, Humility, and Compassion* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1970), 24.

the Diasporic community enriches itself through the presence of the absence of the absolute, which constitutes the longing for it. This negative presence might reconnect us with the essence of religiosity that is so often misrepresented by the institutionalized religions that conceive the false quest for Diasporic existence as a prelude to "homecoming" to the lost Garden of Eden, Nirvana, ultimate pleasure, or other positive utopian versions of human's self-forgetfulness. Counter-education, as opposed to the hegemonic Critical Pedagogy and the other manifestations of normalizing education, does not call for "effectiveness," "success," or "homecoming." It identifies and challenges the Instrumental Rationality in Critical Pedagogy, radical feminist pedagogies, and all other critical optimisms that see emancipatory potential in the cyberspace, radical democratic, and postcolonial alternatives advocated by such critical educational theorists as Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Douglas Kellner, and Patti Lather. As an alternative it can only offer prayer. This kind of prayer, however, is articulated as a concrete way of Diasporic life where the eternal-improviser actualizes his or her relation to the otherness of the Other in all dimensions and levels of Life. Here counter-education makes *nomadism* possible and enables the posing of new philosophical questions, a lust that has in the past given power to martyrs at the stake, to monks confronting ancient parchments as absent truths, and to women confronting the systematic oppression inflicted upon them by the ever-growing sophistication of Western phallogocentrism.⁵⁹ The desire for "the totally other" as an impetus toward love and authentic creativity makes possible the reality in the system while at the same time challenging it. It also allows transformation, transgression, and border-crossing from one system of self-evidence, and one type of "homecoming" project, to a different one. This desire has not only been co-opted for the reproduction of the order of things; it has also served as a power of *change* and has altered systems on the existential level of every individual as well as on the level of the rise and fall of entire cultures.

CRITICAL THEORY AS A PRAYER IN A GODLESS WORLD

As an expression of Diasporic yearning for "the totally other," prayer has also traditionally served as a gate to the infinite Other, a gate to overcoming its quest for a positive "home," a gate to the absolute. As such it has made possible the birth of young ears capable of responding to the wordless invitation to Diasporic existence. Prayer, when true to itself, incubates the religious quest, the existential readiness, for such an openness to infinity. Prayer also assumes a type of special knowledge, and it already represents, in this world, a genuine remnant of the moment of creation. As Rabbi Moshe Sofer (Hatam Sofer) said, "The lamentation over the destruction is itself the building."⁶⁰ This knowledge with which we are dealing is close to Gnostic knowledge — or, rather, the struggle for knowledge in the Gnostic sense of the word.⁶¹

59. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, "Cyberfeminism and Education in the Era of the Exile of Spirit," *Educational Theory* 49, no. 4 (1999): 452.

60. Rabbi Moshe Sofer, quoted in Gur-Ze'ev, *The Frankfurt School and the History of Pessimism*, 259.

61. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 32.

Gnosis is the struggle for the knowledge of "the good exiled God," the understanding of which is unattainable, hence its noble Diasporic position. Adorno and Horkheimer viewed the "understanding" of the given reality as stipulated in connection with the absolute — that is, they saw it as an affinity that represents a certain type of knowledge, or that is conditioned within a specific type of knowledge, different from that which is reproduced in the hegemonic realm of self-evidence. Thus, even they, in their Diasporic philosophy, sought after metaphysical knowledge, which can be defined as the "knowledge of the secrets of the universe." Only in this sense can a human being hope to achieve salvation.⁶² Within the framework of Critical Theory, salvation is the quest for the secrets of the universe, inasmuch as it is a human universe.

Horkheimer's Negative Utopianism as prayer and as Diasporic existence has three aspects. The first is the advent of an ideal Diasporic, anti-ethnocentric community in which one can attempt to see levels of religion (or an established cult with a special jargon, rituals, and gestures), common enemies, similar social backgrounds, and so on within this Diasporic philosophy. Negative Utopianism is also an invitation to the Diasporic community as a sort of "praying congregation" (an idea discussed in Rosenzweig's work), as well as the method of establishing this community. To a certain degree, this type of community already exists.

The second aspect is the establishment of the religious ecstatic dimension of this Diasporic philosophy in relation to the absence of the absolute. According to Abraham Heschel, the purpose of prayer in Jewish mysticism is to recall God to the world and to establish in it his kingdom.⁶³ In this respect, prayer is the pathway toward the perfection over the horizon. For Horkheimer, the resting point on this path is the Diasporic existence and the awareness of the absence of the absolute: "The longing for heaven, where he will never enter," relies on the existence of the absolute and supersedes it; at the same time, this longing constitutes the absolute.⁶⁴ Horkheimer's endeavor understood as prayer plays a role similar to that of the *Kabbalah* in the relation between mystical prayer and divinity.

According to Moshe Idel, one of the *Kabbalah* texts that illustrates this relation belongs to Rabbi Elazar of Worms:

Let there be the sound of prayer of Israel — for prayer travels upward towards the heavens above their heads and travels and rests on the head of the Almighty and becomes for him a crown...for prayer rests like a crown...Human prayers are transformed by their relation that they are transcended and become part of the divine escort: Divine Presence, a wreath on the head of God, and "like the crown."⁶⁵

Idel sees the composition of a "wreath" by means of prayer as a "crowning of a king." He continues along this line in maintaining that "one can see the *Kabbalah* not only as caring for the garden but also caring for the gardener himself."⁶⁶

62. *Ibid.*, 284.

63. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God* (New York: Scribner's, 1954), 61.

64. Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, 212.

65. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 372.

66. *Ibid.*, 197.

Adorno and Horkheimer's Diasporic projects are not very far from the essence of kabbalistic yearning: the yearning of the homeless for something "totally other" than the totality of the immanence of the present reality as the manifestation of Being; the yearning for what Levinas called "the infinite Other," which is both a condition for prayer and, at the same time, its fruits. With regard to its affinity with the absolute, the Diasporic project itself appears as the prayer of an eternal nomad who refuses any positive God, refuses any of the Positive Utopias and other kinds of "homecoming" journeys to the lost Garden of Eden or to its submundane realization. Given this, there is no place in it for prayer as a separate activity — a position that is rooted in the Gnostic view of true prayer: "prayer as a type of higher communication with supreme reality must be quietness."⁶⁷

The third aspect of this Diasporic philosophy is the establishment of the "genuine individual" in the ideal Diasporic community. The ability of the true individual (the philosopher) to invite others to engage in the critical conversation — where the possibility for the struggle for salvation of the soul lies — is the moral duty that Horkheimer imposed on the Diasporic philosopher, and maybe on himself:

Both prayer and romantic love have a common past. Today both are fading, and there is no better manifestation of it than the propaganda taking place in their name...the praise and the condemnation, the sanctions against the skeptic. If he remains purely negative, he contributes to the validity of regression. To be devoted one to another as man intended, in the past, to do with the assistance of prayer, even though the impotence of prayer and the insignificance of man became a well-known thing; to transform into much love...to drive aside the skepticism whenever the social and psychological conditions were exposed and understood and from awareness to them: to drive aside the skepticism without forgetting what these skeptical matters brought about — this is the only resistance the individual can offer in face of the vain progress. It will not cease the decline; it will, however, bear witness to the right thing during the period of darkness.⁶⁸

This responsibility of the Diasporic, religious human, who has no dogma, no sense of belonging to a collectivity, no pleasure, no "truth," no "revolution," no Garden of Eden or God to enslave himself to, is born out of an the existential decision — similar to the Kierkegaardian "Either-Or" — that promotes unlearning and manifests Love of Life. Adorno and Horkheimer's anthropology understands existence as dependent upon that which is beyond it, hence the erotic commitment to transcendence above any given reality or above life as the ecstatic aim of life.

THE DIASPORIC PHILOSOPHY OF ADORNO AND HORKHEIMER

When we elaborate on the religious aspects of Adorno and Horkheimer's Diasporic philosophy, it is appropriate to distinguish among three terms: religion, religiousness, and theology. The relation between Critical Theory and theology is very clear, especially in Adorno and Horkheimer's later work. First, many of their foremost peers were declared theologians. Second, they presented theology as a basis for a moral alternative and for a critique of the present as a whole, and they also treated theology as a form of historical research and philosophical judgment

67. Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986), 37.

68. Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, 206.

regarding the connection to a God in different religions. Third, they used a good bit of theological jargon, including "martyr," "the rising of the dead," "original sin," and "the burning bush." Fourth, Horkheimer defined both his Critical Theory and that of Adorno as "Negative Theology." Fifth, their work fits the theological category, at least according to the definition of theology endorsed by members of the "radical theology" group. And sixth, their work became important to many theologians, including those who did not consider themselves "radicals" and those who saw the texts of Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, and even Habermas not only as resources to enrich their own theological ruminations but as theological work per se.⁶⁹

Much more problematic is the definition of religion. It is difficult to assess whether Adorno and Horkheimer's projects were religious. Notes Horkheimer prepared for personal use (not for publication) in March 1969 provide a clue: he referred to his project as a bona fide religious undertaking, and he sketched out plans for a series of essays designed to illuminate various aspects of new religiousness. Horkheimer wished to express four ideas in these works: solidarity, the love of the Other as representative of the integration of theology and science, the basis of fanaticism, and the need for a nonviolent solidarity. He summed up his goal for this project by noting that "These four ideas must be formulated in such a manner that they will lead to [the advent] of a new praxis which unifies science and religion."⁷⁰

Since the concept of religion seems to us problematic, and the connection between Critical Theory and religion should not be decided on the basis of such an intricate problem — a problem that neither Adorno nor Horkheimer seriously attempted to clarify — we shall concentrate on a different kind of problematic: religiousness.

The Diasporic religiousness, which I credit to Adorno and Horkheimer, is similar to the existential religiousness in Søren Kierkegaard's work — a connection Adorno explicitly recognized when speaking of Kierkegaard. Adorno and Horkheimer's religiousness is nothing but an interpretation of reality which becomes an ecstatic way of life that not only transcends the historical reality but even transforms the historical moment in the sense that it reveals its self-negation when confronted with the infinite Diasporic essence of Being itself.

As a way of life Diasporic philosophy is a type of religiousness based not on the fear of life but on the affirmation of life in the face of meaninglessness, suffering, and the rejection of all other calls for "homecoming." This refusal makes *nomadism* possible as a religious way of life. It gives life justification, not through purposefulness of the kind that constitutes the concept of oppression; instead, this

69. Edmund Arens, *Kommunikative Handlungen — Die Paradigmatische Bedeutung der Geschichte Jesu für eine Handlungstheorie* [Communicative Actions — The Paradigmatic Meaning of the History of Jesus for an Action Theory] (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1982), 379.

70. Horkheimer, "Nachgelassene Notizen 1949–1969" [Postmortem Notes 1949–1969], in *Gesammelte Schriften* XIV, 140. These four ideas were supposed to be elaborated in the following essays: "Our Homeland — The Planet"; "He — Like You" (a distortion of the Hebrew usually rendered as "Love your neighbor as you would yourself"); "On Output"; and an additional untitled essay (planned but never written) that was supposedly inspired by the condition of Jews in the Diaspora.

justification is a manifestation of a Love of Life — a Sisyphean one, in the sense of an eternal recurrence, an ongoing and insoluble struggle. The Diasporic human, then, like the Nietzschean superhuman, may be truly happy (as opposed to experiencing only the superficial satisfaction attained through the sating of phony, manufactured needs). The Greek hero, Nietzsche's superhuman, and Horkheimer's philosopher all affirm life not despite their suffering and meaninglessness but, rather, in response to meaninglessness, suffering, and the absolute absence of the Other.

The Diasporic identification of the possibilities for transcendence from the tyranny of the facts of the current reality is also present in Nietzsche's Dionysianism. While opposed to conventional religion, this, nevertheless, is "the road towards life" that is essentially "religious," a tragic "holy" struggle, and an "aim" that overcomes "God" and redeems Life and "earth."⁷¹ Horkheimer, for all his criticism of Nietzsche, saw him as a thinker who symbolized a will and a way to salvation.⁷² The Diasporic religiousness to which I am referring is not stopped by the awareness of the "death of God"; on the contrary, this is its starting point. This point calls to mind what Victor Nuovo said about radical theology: "a new liberty is formed from the recognition of the death of man and the death of God. It is radical theology which opens the way to this new liberty."⁷³

Adorno and Horkheimer's Diasporic philosophy does not lack a belief in the deity: it makes the overcoming of the belief in all forms of "God," the absolute or the positive, into the starting point of a rearticulated Gnostic counter-education for love. As such, it accords well with the views of modern critical theologians who express true religious tension, which is dependent upon "waiving the concept of God as the basis for work."⁷⁴ This disbelief is close to the religiousness of Karl Barth, who stated that in modern society "[true] religiousness is disbelief."⁷⁵ Even so, the denial of belief should not be seen as a forgoing of the absolute. It is precisely this denial of dogmatic belief that makes possible a burst of vital, absolute belief that wills a life of wandering upon the skeptic. The holy deeds of the skeptic form the totality of his or her existence and the permanence of his or her Diasporic community. Historically, this is the difference between weak-spirited skepticism, which is pragmatic and carries the suffix "post," and skeptical religiousness, which enriches that same major religion — one that usually produces power and at the same time promises new eroticism. This Diasporic skepticism is the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses.⁷⁶ The call out of the burning bush will never be easy to identify as other than the echo of the governing power games and an

71. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Götzen-Dämmerung," *Werke II* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1965), 978.

72. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften XIII*, 258.

73. Victor Nuovo, "Some Critical Remarks on Radical Theology," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 22, no. 1 (1966): 25.

74. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung* [Resistance and Submission] (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1965), 191.

75. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik I* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1932), 327.

76. Exodus 3:4.

effect of the immanence of the symbolic exchange. It will never be totally deciphered, classified, or evaluated; it will always remain beyond, other, an abyss, as understood by the deep religiousness of Moses, Pascal, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Levinas.

The idea of "the bush that is never consumed" should be understood in its connection to utopian tradition as well. Adorno and Horkheimer's Diasporic religiousness is closer to the Gnostic tradition than to atheism. In light of the loss of the relevance of the traditional religions as a manifestation of how the bad God has overcome Life, or the primordial, exiled God, they sought to give "theism a new meaning...from within atheism itself." Their goal was to preserve the "Judeo-Christian" Utopia of the "unification of truth, love and justice, as expressed in the Messianic idea."⁷⁷

Central to Adorno and Horkheimer's Diasporic philosophy is Negative Utopianism, which emphasizes the human struggle to realize its potential to be different from and, in a sense, more than a product of the system. Negative Utopianism does not stress the attainment of power but instead the Diasporic acknowledgment of the impotence of justice and of the human who challenges injustice.

Adorno and Horkheimer's Diasporic religiousness calls for "unification of religion and philosophy in the realm of true solidarity."⁷⁸ This type of solidarity is supposed to include science as a central element, even though it perceives science as a threatening enemy. This is not the concept of utopian science that we find in Herbert Marcuse's "principle of the new reality," whose optimal utopian version is supposed to be realized in the future society.

Within the framework of Adorno and Horkheimer's Diasporic philosophy, the given reality does not reside within the realm of "the absolute." Both thinkers came out against "dogmatic atheism," on the one hand, and against dogmatic theism, on the other.⁷⁹

Utopianism is vital for all versions of Diasporic philosophy, and Negative Utopianism is quintessential to Adorno and Horkheimer's thinking. They stressed it with special clarity when referring to the implicit predecessors of Diasporic philosophy. This is why Horkheimer so sharply criticized "Schopenhauer's dogmatic atheism," in which, Horkheimer maintained, the idea of "the nil" is no less subjective than the idea of "God."

Horkheimer made a crucial decision, and because of this refused to give up the utopian desire. The only argument in support of this stance is a moralistic one: a refusal to acknowledge the triumph of evil. In this context he explicitly spoke of "belief" — a type of belief capable of unifying in a moralistic manner the community that holds that the terrible reality in the world will not have the last word. In other words, in some respects this is a yearning for "true" reality, or reality

77. Horkheimer, "Religion und Philosophie" [Religion and Philosophy], *Gesammelte Schriften* VII, 186.

78. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* III, 223.

79. *Ibid.*, 238.

as conceived by the utopian tradition and the tradition of religious salvation. Thus, despite their important contribution to the history of Diasporic philosophy, Horkheimer and Adorno were not consistent in their own Diasporic philosophy even in the second stage of their work.

In contrast to this element in their thought, it is important to stress that, from a consistent Diasporic point of view, the Diasporic essence of Being — that is, humanity's essential homelessness — when true to itself, is the only possible arena for dancing with the immanence of the absolute. Only by attempting to overcome the limits of their own work might Adorno and Horkheimer have been able to offer us such a transcendent dance — that is, a religious counter-education that insists on transcendence from mere contingent power relations and meaninglessness. This counter-education stands within the framework of Negative Dialectics and nomadism as a way of life — a mode of existence that develops special relations with the Jewish concept of an absent God and traditional Jewish antidogmatism and with the rejection of any call to establish a national, intellectual, or moral "home." This is the only way to overcome Jewish messianism and all other forms of monotheism.⁸⁰ This refusal of any attempts at domestication and normalization is the ground in which the negation of the present reality is anchored. Eternal and infinite Diaspora as the manifestation of the absolute makes possible "the grand refusal" and empowers one to overcome the call to reconcile with reality and thus to avoid being swallowed by the historical moment. But what is the non-contingent framework for "the last truth" or for the negation of its production? Horkheimer's answer is "the religion."⁸¹ For him, the struggle for the salvation of religiousness appears to be synonymous with the struggle for realizing the essence or the aim of Western culture.

DIASPORIC EXISTENCE, JUDAISM, AND COUNTER-EDUCATION

Even if only implicitly, Adorno and Horkheimer accepted the Diasporic essence of Being and human life as a starting point for their mature, religiously inflected Critical Theory.⁸² This enables them to insist on their critique and subsequent reconstruction of the omnipotence of power and meaninglessness (namely, the apparatuses that produce meanings, values, and aims) in current life, on the one hand, while insisting on transcendence from the present reality and on the primacy of creativity and moral responsibility, on the other:

We must all be unified by the yearning which takes place in this world, injustice and horror will not be the final word, what was the other...what is called religion...the idea of infinity, which was developed by religion — we must need it and not give up on it. Clearly, we must not turn it into an example.⁸³

80. Gur-Ze'ev, *Toward Diasporic Education*, 200.

81. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* III, 238–289.

82. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* X, 137.

83. Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* VIII [Collected Writings, vol. 8] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 343.

The second idea comes to light in their commandment that the Jewish religion not present a positive description of God, an idea diametrically opposed to the Marcusean Utopia as a whole and one that actualizes the Jewish commandment, "Thou shall not make a statue or mask."⁸⁴ These tenets provide the foundation for the Diasporic "great refusal," which is based on the same type of special knowledge that Adorno and Horkheimer criticize in relation to the laws of prayer — that is, a privileged knowledge, an erotic response to the burst of "the totally other."

Already, the first phase of Adorno and Horkheimer's contemplation includes a Diasporic recognition that one must not base values and goals on objective truths, as it is impossible to prove them in an unproblematic manner. Already, they have made the decision to believe and have concluded that the counter-educational project can only derive from the act of deciding to believe. The criticism that positions this decision as an experiment to save the moral still must explain in a rational manner how it is possible to see this move as preferable to remaining in relativism or subjectivism or to replacing a specific belief system with one of its rivals. The absurd aspect of Adorno and Horkheimer's decision is that, because it is impossible to validate their decision rationally, the project takes place in the realm of struggle for the salvation of enlightenment — a struggle that they criticize sharply elsewhere as an expression of power and oppression. Their decision exists within the realm of their own religiousness, and only it can be used as a systematic base, just as it provides a utopian purpose as well. But *is it a decision, an act of free choice — or a reaction to the persuasive power of the arbitrariness of the voice of "the totally other" that forced itself on them* and made possible their free choice to believe? And in what sense is this arbitrariness and power essentially different from the deceiving power of present-day Sirens that counter-education directs us to overcome?

The explicit purpose of Adorno and Horkheimer's Diasporic religiousness in the second phase of their thought is no longer a revolution but, rather, a struggle for "the autonomy of the individual."⁸⁵ In the struggle for salvation, Horkheimer's *animal symbolicum* overpowers mere reality and continues along the path of the Kabbalists. He saw himself as furthering the position staked out by Schopenhauer, according to which reality is essentially not absolute, and Life is not governed by or reduced to "facts" but is instead the product of the mind, symbols and allegories, and objects disposed to infinite creative interpretations:

Each thing which turns into a symbol has the ability to bring us down into a gutter which cannot be described, to the aspect of nil. In all things and every phrase in the world a concealed brilliance of hidden life manifests itself for the Cabalist, infinite life glows inward...It is possible to say that the whole world and all acts of genesis are nothing but style of speaking, as a symbolic expression of that layer of what the thought cannot afford, from it a post or a corner of each building which can be achieved by thought.⁸⁶

84. Ibid.; and Herbert Marcuse, "Marx, Freud und der Monotheismus," *Herbert Marcuse Archiv*, 241.00, 11.

85. Marcuse, "Marx, Freud und der Monotheismus," 341.

86. Ibid., 227.

The place of *Diasporic hope* in Horkheimer's thought is in line with how theologians of salvation understand its role within genuine religiosity: salvation is, first and foremost, a *promise* that "its realization might remain no more than a hope."⁸⁷ His "practical optimism" is not attuned to cosmic salvation. It is not even expressed in response to a utopian invitation to an ideal dialogue; within the Diasporic project, on the basis of the hope it generates, "practical optimism" is the purpose and the end result of counter-education. In other words, the "optimism" spoken of is found in the context of, and expresses a dimension of, its action; it is not a force or external condition that establishes this religiousness, which, in the long run, is devoted to an existential decision that molds a way of life which, in the eyes of the believers, is moralistic. Adorno and Horkheimer's Diasporic project expresses first and foremost a yearning and belief that do not require approval and that cannot be negated by the present reality and its logic.

Adorno and Horkheimer's work is an important manifestation of counter-education in the Gnostic sense: it manifests a Diasporic philosophy that refuses all calls for "homecoming," whether to God, to the Garden of Eden, to nation, to truth, or to mere pleasure and practical nihilism. Adorno and Horkheimer's Negative Theology, while addressing the relevance of traditional Jewish antidogmatism and anti-collectivism, offers us today, more than ever before, a goal, meaning, and love without being swallowed by any "pleasure machine," "truth," or "we." As Diasporic humans we are called upon by their counter-education to insist on transcendence, to actualize love in creativity and in a kind of togetherness that is dialogical and refuses any collectivism and all dogmas. In other words, this is the moment of birth of the eternal-improvisor. Improvisation is to be thought, cultivated, and actualized in all spheres of public life as well as in individual life experiences.⁸⁸

In this context, the later work of Adorno and Horkheimer makes a genuine contribution to conceptualizing the kind of counter-education so desperately needed in the face of the violence of postmodern global capitalism, which develops new destructions and a distorted creative Eros governed by the logic of Thanatos. Counter-education makes possible an *active cosmopolitanism*, a cosmopolitanism that transforms the Gnostic and messianic traditions in response to postmodern, premodern fundamentalist, and postcolonial alternatives. The messianic moment, even as a potential, is normally distorted, misused, or forgotten. But in the face of cultural, economic, political, and, ultimately, existential crisis, it comes alive. When and if activated, it can become an impetus for counter-education to oppose the exile of Spirit, the instrumentalization of reason, and the reification of human relations. In opposition to the optimists who establish great hopes for "the chosen ones," or even all humanity, in cyberspace, or on the grounds of globalizing capitalism,⁸⁹ I am offering a dialectical reconstruction of our historical moment: the same

87. Ibid., 244.

88. Gur-Ze'ev, "Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy and Diaspora Today."

89. Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage, 1992), 234–235.

globalizing capitalism that rationally sends entire populations into a "flexible job economy," rationalized starvation, structurally guaranteed poor health, and loss of self-respect in the margins of world affluence also opens the door for making suffering visible, for meeting universal needs and values, and for realizing new possibilities for counter-education and a Diasporic way of life that transcends ethnocentric solidarity, political borders, and contextual pragmatism and cynicism.⁹⁰

One of the first steps of current counter-education should be to synthesize Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of Western society and the logic of capitalism with present-day analyses of capitalist globalization processes within the framework of a "risk society" that, paradoxically, opens new possibilities for Diasporic existence and the type of nomadism that a rearticulated Gnosis might make relevant. Such a counter-education should not abandon the critical tradition, yet it should insist on love. It should develop new connections between the aesthetic and the ethical, the intellectual and the physical, the political and the religious dimensions of the life of a nondogmatic creator. How ironic it is that global capitalism, while exiling human spirit and enhancing the omnipotence of the creative "bad God," also opens possibilities for new forms of Gnosis and for new Diasporic individuals and communities.

90. Gur-Ze'ev, *Toward Diasporic Education*, 179–202. See also Gur-Ze'ev, "Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy and Diaspora Today."

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