

Idealistic identity and dialectical Mimesis in Adorno's negative aesthetics¹

Identidade idealista e Mimesis dialética na estética negativa de Adorno

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Abstract

Adorno points out the philosophical transcendence of art but –against Hegel– he does it on the base of the convergence of art and philosophy. That convergence is founded on the dialectic of mimesis discovered in the aesthetic experience. Adorno incorporates to philosophy the aesthetic element of mimesis, which is what permits philosophical reason, in the first place, to surpass the identity imposed by hegelian idealism; and in the second place, to constitute itself in dialectic to think what cannot be thought, that is, the concrete.

Key words: Adorno, Hegel, identity, dialectics, mimesis, art, philosophy.

Resumo

Adorno realça a relevância filosófica da arte, mas –contra Hegel– ele a pensa sobre a base da convergência entre arte e filosofia. Essa convergência é fundamentada sobre a dialética da mimesis descoberta na experiência estética. Adorno incorpora na filosofia o elemento estético da mimesis, que é ele que permite à razão filosófica, primeiro, superar a identidade imposta pelo idealismo hegeliano e, segundo, converter-se em dialética para pensar o que não pode pensar-se, o concreto.

Palavras-chave: Adorno, Hegel, identidade, dialética, mimesis, arte, filosofia.

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The contemporary radical art as mimesis, critic and hope

The totalitarian logic of dominion, and with it horror, injustice and desperation, seem to have been taken possession of the humanity's historical life. The situation is ugly, black³. The disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) – a term that Adorno picks up from M. Weber (Adorno, 1969, p. 86) – and/or the blackening of the historical world are very patent. For Adorno and Horkheimer the humanist enlightened project does not represent a sufficient alternative that allows us to harbour well founded hopes. In Weber himself, Adorno has learned that the disenchantment process (blackening) coincides with the rationalization process. The enlightened critical reason, far from liberating, has become a dominance instrument, condemning the humanity, that supposedly would be liberated, to black darkness. This is the “dialectics of enlightenment” discovered by Adorno and Horkheimer: the process of necessary metamorphosis (*Verwandlung*) of the pure idea (freedom, justice...) in dominion (Adorno, 1947, p. 239-240, 254-255). The dominion is practiced by means of the identification (annulment and forgetfulness) of the differences in the whole of the social system. Adorno holds that the enlightenment defines knowledge acquisition relative to the concept of identification. But identification in the enlightenment takes a particular form for Adorno: the Subject makes the Object like himself (Sherratt, 2002, p. 171). For that reason, the idealistic philosophy of Hegel, centred in the “identity thinking (*Identitätsdenken*)” (Adorno, 1962, p. 506)⁴, represents for Adorno the highest philosophical expression of the dominion. Auschwitz will be then the supreme realization of this metaphysics of the identity, the most horrible form of the individual's homogeneity: “Genocide is the absolute integration. It is on its way wherever men are leveled off [...] until one exterminates them literally, as deviations from the concept of their total nullity” (Adorno, 1966, p. 355). For Adorno, Auschwitz confirmed that pure identity is death. The identity of the whole, imposed by the dominion system, finishes being imposed to the enlightened ideal of liberation of the differences. The homogeneity of the individuals in the society of the total dominion, the administered world (*verwaltete Welt*), that is to say, the identity *a priori* imposed between reality and reason, it is what Adorno calls the “system of horror (*System des Grauens*)” (Adorno, 1944, p. 126), the world in which the individuals are captured and annulled, *des-individualized*.

Adorno warns us again about the dominion in its philosophical and social form, and this is the nucleus of his negative dialectics and his aesthetic theory. In fact, the pain, the individual, is the negative, the difference, what cannot be said or integrated by the system, something inexpressible, incomprehensible. “The whole, Adorno writes down, is the false (*Das Ganze ist das Unwahre*)” (Adorno, 1944, p. 55). The concrete, suffering and bloody of the historical reality escapes to the concept; it is black, opaque. The concept cannot say that because it tends to sense, to project the logical, to identify it to itself, while the reality is black, unspeakable, illogical. Idealism ‘has told’ pain, but “suffering (*Leiden*) conceptualized remains mute and inconsequential” (Adorno, 1969, p. 35). To say it or to understand it in idealistic terms is equal to identify it, to project a sense to it, and that is to deny it,

³ Adorno's attention to the ugly, deployed as a technique of resistance, negation and hope, gives substance to the power of his negative aesthetics (Leach, 2007, p. 263-277).

⁴ Adorno writes that “Heidegger gets as far as the borderline of dialectical insight into the non-identity within identity [...] Whatever can be thought of under the concept of Being mocks the identity of a concept and the object ‘meant’ by it; but Heidegger treats it as identity, as pure Being itself, devoid of its otherness” (Adorno, 1966, p. 110). For Adorno, Heidegger is also centred in the ‘thought of the identity’ (cf. Macdonald, 2007, p. 6-21).

to forget it, to conceal it, to repress it. The pain is silenced, it fades; it is translated, transubstantiated (masked) in sense. For Adorno, what the Hegelian positive dialectics and the current social system intend -to translate the pain into concept, to understand it and to rationalize it-, is an injustice. After the horrors of history and mainly "after Auschwitz, our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached out of the victims' fate" (Adorno, 1966, p. 354). The price of the sense is the forgetfulness of the innocents' pain, the individual's repression. But the wounds continue open, and pain persists in silence: "Each philosophical term (*philosophische Terminus*) is the toughened scar (*verhärtete Narbe*) of an unsolved problem (*ungelösten Problems*)" (Adorno, 1997 [1962-1964], p. 10-11). When translating pain into concept, to sense, an injustice is not only committed with the victims, but also, and this is more worrying for Adorno, we reconcile with reality, we leave it as it is, we justify it. This is the ideological function of the search for sense, of the translation of pain to concept. To extract sense of what seems negative, senseless, illogical, of what seems to escape to all reason, to understand the horror of the real, it is to legitimate it, to glorify the world just as it is. The will of dominion that underlaid Enlightenment ends in a theodicy, in pure positivism.

In Adorno's opinion the essential danger resides in that the social system identifies everything with itself, homogenizes everything and integrates it in itself, repressing all that denies it, keeping the pain silent, masking all that refutes it. To dominate is to silence, to remove the word to the negative. The silence is the condition of possibility of integration. This is the program of a society of dominion. The system of horror does not want to be recognized as such and it wants to hide the proofs. However, the critic's key element is art, because art, Adorno writes down recovering the thesis of Schopenhauer, is "a second world". But that it is not a simple 'aesthetic' reduplication: this artistic 'new' world for Adorno "is composed out of elements that have been transposed out of the empirical world in accord with Jewish descriptions of the messianic order as an order just like the habitual order but changed in the slightest degree" (Adorno, 1969, p. 208). Art is then a place of transgressions, it is *another thing* regarding the natural world, the bourgeois modern world. Therefore, "there is nothing in art, not even in the most sublime, that does not derive from the world; nothing that remains untransformed" (Adorno, 1969, p. 208). But this 'second world' of art presents a negative tendency against the first one; the artistic transfiguration of the empiric world, when it really is a transfiguration, it always happens in a critical, polemic sense. Art leaves from the world to deny it in its aesthetic transubstantiation. The definitive feature of the aesthetics according to Adorno is criticism, the resistance and the protest against what it is. "Artworks are *a priori* negative" (Adorno, 1969, p. 201). To understand art it is necessary to see it in a negative relationship with what is not art, with the reality (Menke, 1991, p. 22). The authentic work of art is a revolution (*Revolte, Rebellion*) in itself: "The idea of a conservative artwork is inherently absurd" (Adorno, 1969, p. 264, 339). The aesthetic dimension represents for Adorno another thing regarding the society of the exchanges of the *homo economicus* (Adorno, 1969, p. 296, 298), where everything is for another thing (cf. Füllsack, 1999, p. 48).

But not all current art is critic, not as a whole it is resistance. Only the contemporary radical art is so, black art (Kafka, Picasso's *Guernica*, Beckett), and only then it is truly aesthetic. Adorno points out that there is also an art ("much contemporary production") that is happy with the colours and "childishly delights in color", a colourful and happy art (*heitere Kunst*) (Adorno, 1969, p. 65-66), an art that adopts the attitude of comfort and narcosis before the ugly and blackened

empiric reality by means of the false beautification of the world⁵. Therefore, an art also shares the same destiny that reason and participates in the 'dialectics of the enlightenment' (Adorno, 1969, p. 86-88). There is also an art that –like the idealistic concept– serves to the dominion, an art *entkünstet*, that has lost its artistic character, that is to say, its critical capacity (Adorno, 1969, p. 32-34), and that serves to the same end: to silence and to sterilize the pain. But the ideological character of this art reaches its maximum expression with the cultural industry (*Kulturindustrie*) that is nothing but the reproduction to great scale of that colourist art, transforming it in a gigantic dominion machinery: while we console ourselves of the black historical reality that surrounds us with the false colourist beauty of this art, we conceal the reality of the existent, we legitimate it and we leave it just as it is. The conversion of art in a consumption object by the cultural industry coincides with its reduction to pure entertainment, to pure diversion, what supposes the paralysis of its innovative forces, the suspension of its critical and utopian power (Adorno, 1947, p. 152). It promises 'di-version', that is, flight, escape, evasion, but this promise is the mask of its ideological character as an instrument of the dominion. Diversion (*Vergnügen*) is flight, but not of the negative reality but of the "last resistance thought" that becomes agitated against that situation (Adorno, 1947, p. 167).

This cheerful, charming and *diverting* art that forgets and conceals horrors, is an injustice: "The injustice committed by all cheerful art, specially by entertainment, is probably an injustice to the dead; to accumulated, speechless pain (*akkumulierten und sprachlosen Schmerz*)" (Adorno, 1969, p. 66). Adorno has written that "perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream", and for this reason "hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems (*Gedicht*)" (Adorno, 1966, p. 355). They can be written, whenever they are black poems! In this sombre time, an art that cannot be done, an art that has lost all evidence and legitimacy (Adorno, 1969, p. 9-10), is art as embellishment, the one that has aesthetic appearance, the ideological art that conceals and justifies the unbearable current reality. The *other* art, on the other hand, the contemporary radical art, the critical art of Kafka and Beckett, as long as it gives word to pain, is necessary and is the only hope. In contrast to art understood as false embellishment, fiction simulator or reconcilable enchantment, an art able to transform deceptively the negative into positive, the irreconcilable in reconciliation, the chaotic in order; being opposed to this integrative capacity of art that follows the canons that mark the cultural industry to the system service and that are summarized in forgetfulness and repression of pain, of the negative, that is to say, in the false cicatrisation; in contrast to all this, Adorno affirms that "the task of art today is to bring chaos into order (*Ordnung*)" (Adorno, 1944, p. 251). That mission is carried out by radical art giving the word to pain, to what is repressed by the ideological system of concealment.

In Adorno's opinion, amid the more extreme (*Äußersten*) and gloomy or dark (*Finstersten*) reality, that is, amid the terrifying current reality, to survive, "artworks that do not want to sell themselves as consolation must equate (*sich gleichmachen*) themselves with that (black) reality" (Adorno, 1969, p. 65). Only the spiritual principle of the mimesis is guarantee of aestheticity. Only black art is art, only black art is really aesthetic. And it is so because black art, in spite of becoming equal to the empiric reality, is not a simple picture or report, but essentially criticism, negation, utopia and hope. What Adorno tries to highlight is the lack of sense of the question: How is it possible for an art to be critical and at the same time to be equal to the reality that it denounces? In the current state of things, Adorno writes that "whereas art

⁵ Nietzsche already emphasized the narcotic possibility of art, a characteristic of the weak spirits, those that do not love: its lack of love to life, its negation, becomes an aesthetics of "the opiate and narcotics effects" of art, with which it is able to mask the terrible reality (Nietzsche, 1980, p. 536).

opposes society, it is nevertheless unable to take up a position beyond it; it achieves opposition only through identification with that against which it remonstrates" (Adorno, 1969, p. 201). This is the formula that is in the base of all contemporary radical art. Only becoming equal to the empiric reality –only being black– it can be critical and utopian. This transcendency toward the other thing (the empiric and black reality), of which radical black art consists, also constitutes the essence of the artistic mimesis. For Adorno, mimesis is the key term according to which he comes to understand the dialectical relations between subjectivity and objects, and, more importantly, between art, philosophy and reality (Huhn, 2004, p. 8). The mimetic *logos* of art consists then of alienation, in becoming equal to pain, in giving the word to that that conceals/silences the society of dominion. The task of aesthetics in the contemporary situation is not to comprehend artworks as hermeneutical objects; in the current state, "it is their incomprehensibility (*Unbegreiflichkeit*) that needs to be comprehended" (Adorno, 1969, p. 179). Its language is such that they cannot be understood. The contemporary radical works of art are absurd, unintelligible and enigmatic, as the social reality that they express. They are impossible objects. Their non-conceptual (or unintelligibility) form is their form of resistance to identity thinking, that is, their form to give voice to pain (Bernstein, 1992, p. 211). Radical art, as alive conscience of pain, that is to say, as truth of the real, is already salvation, hope, utopia. For Adorno, there is not utopian conscience of the truth: "It serves better to the human the fact that men realize about the situation (*Stellung*) in which the coercion of the social relationships has them prisoners than the fact of remaining chained with the illusion that they are subjects", because "if they were completely aware of it they could transform it" (Adorno, 1953, p. 454). For this reason, it is in the cruelty of that radical art, in the scream that it supposes, in the desperation itself in sum, where Adorno finds hope: "Hope is soonest found among the comfortless (*trostlosen*)" (Adorno, 1944, p. 253), in those who experience pain, the wounds and in consequence those who deny the real.

Artistic knowledge and philosophical knowledge

However, against hegelian idealism and through an accurate relation between art (mimesis, dialectic) and philosophy (concept, identity), Adorno's negative aesthetics consists precisely in the philosophical foundation of this understanding of the contemporary radical art. Adorno's aesthetic theory understands the nature and the current philosophical status of aesthetics, beyond the aesthetic approaches of Hegel and of Heidegger. Nevertheless, Adorno's aesthetic theory joins in principle with the fundamental thesis of Hegel and of Heidegger in the sense of affirming the philosophical and ontological relevance of art, opposite to the other perspective that has largely configured the modern understanding of the aesthetics, the one that starting from Kant and that passing to Kierkegaard, culminates in the Positivism. Kant finally granted the rights of knowledge and truth to science exclusively, affirming that the aesthetic judgement –the art– does not contribute with any knowledge about their objects (Kant, 1990 [1790], p. 32). Art would rather have to do with the feeling of life. Kant inaugurated the understanding of art like game, gratuitous and disinterested activity, understanding that culminated in the positivism of Spencer and Taine, where art –already constituted in mere vital tonic, irrational matter left to the wild arbitrariness of the fantasy– becomes pure game, nothing serious, secondary activity opposite to science, that is configured as the only truly serious activity for having the rights of knowledge. For this reason it is not strange that the scientific

character of modern thought (Descartes, Kant or Husserl), neither that when the inadequacy of the scientific/rational thought has been recognized, philosophy prefers religion (Kierkegaard) before art. What Adorno condemns is that when philosophy has come closer to art and not to religion it has made it in an inappropriate way, as if the art and the intuition possessed some preference type with regard to the science and to the concept, and therefore in detriment –as we will see– of philosophy like conceptual thought. As an expression of totality art claims “the dignity of the absolute”, and for this reason has occasionally –like in the case of Schelling or Heidegger– led philosophy to rank it higher than conceptual knowledge⁶.

Hegel and Heidegger –except for the enormous differences between one and other– reacted against this positivist understanding of art. Hegel affirms that art is worthy of philosophical treatment and, if it is so, it is due to that that is not neither simple vital tonic, nor a pleasing play; art is not the field of irrationality but rather, together with religion and philosophy, it is simply “one way of bringing to our minds and expressing the Divine, the deepest interest of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit” (Hegel, 1820, p. 14-16, 20-21). They are manifestations of the spirit, that is to say, ways of making conscious its supreme interests, and each one of them makes it according to their particular nature. In short, (beautiful) art is characterized by Hegel as “the pure appearance of the Idea to sense (*sinnliche Scheinen der Idee*)” (Hegel, 1820, p. 151). Certainly Hegel, in contrast to Kant, when making of art an expression of the spirit, an spirit whose essence is the thought, he linked it to knowledge and truth, so that he perceived the philosophical relevance of aesthetics. On the other hand, for Heidegger the essential nature of art would then be this: “the setting-itself-to-work of the truth of beings (*sich-ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit des Seienden*)” (Heidegger, 1977 [1935], p. 25, 58, 64). The work of art is not the reproduction of an entity that happens to be present. It is the reproduction of the thing's general essence. The nature of art is the truth of beings setting itself to work. For Heidegger, art is “the becoming and happening of truth”; and Heidegger adds that all art, as “the letting happen of the advent of the truth of beings, is in essence, poetry” (Heidegger, 1977 [1935], p. 59, 64). The occurrence or happening of truth in a work is the creative bringing forth of a unique being –it occurs once and only once. Definitely Hegel and Heidegger reaffirm the seriousness of art, its epistemological and ontological reach. Adorno also sustains that art, far from being the place of irrationality, is rather a “complex nexus (*Komplexion*) of truth” (Adorno, 1969, p. 391), and only for that reason he considers possible an ‘aesthetic theory’, a ‘theory’ (rational) on the aesthetic, what would be impossible if art were an irrational field. Because art is essentially spiritual, Adorno says, it cannot be purely intuitive. Art must also be thought: “art itself thinks”, art judges, speaks but “wordlessly (*wortlos*)”; its thought, its logic is neither conceptual nor judicative (Adorno, 1969, p. 152, 162). In contrast to the enlightened identification, art is non-conceptual, non-representative knowledge (Sherratt, 2002, p. 174). Art is not a mere vital or emotional stimulant, it not only makes us laugh or cry. According to the journalistic topic that understands art from the point of view of emotions: above all, art makes us think. The resemblance of the Adorno's aesthetics to those of Hegel and Heidegger is limited. The peculiarity of the Adornian understanding of aesthetics is beginning to take shape in the relationship between art and philosophy, a relationship that is the one that underlies

⁶ Another thing is represented by Hegel, whose valuation and recovery of the artistic thing have been done previous subordination to the philosophical thing, to the conceptual thing. Therefore Hegel has not been located very far from the predominant attitude in the modernity that favours the primacy of science (Cf. Adorno, 1947, p. 36).

all truly philosophical understanding of aesthetics. The status and the nature of aesthetics are in fact elucidated to the edge of the relationship between art and philosophy. In other words, all aesthetics contains an essential feature: a certain way to understand the relationship art-philosophy.

Hegel and Heidegger save art, they legitimate its seriousness, they underline its epistemological and ontological competence. But, according to Adorno, their proposals outline some inconveniences. Let us consider the Hegelian aesthetic program especially. For Hegel, art is not a game and not even a vital tonic; he believes that art is knowledge and a serious activity. But paradoxically he considers that art is inessential with respect to philosophy, up to the point to finally dissolve it into philosophy, and to transform it: "art is a thing of the past (*ein Vergangenes*)" (Hegel, 1820, p. 25). But this paradox stops being if we bear in mind that Hegel, far from defending the peculiarity of the artistic knowledge in contrast to the philosophical one, measures art from the pattern of the philosophy already configured in model of art. Hegel has so much put to bed art on the side of philosophical and conceptual knowledge, and he has defended so little its specificity that the outcome could not be other than the overcoming of art (intuition) through philosophy (concept). Certainly, when the purpose is to manifest ideas and to express the spirit, that is to say, that the spirit takes self-consciousness, when this is the fact, art -that truly represents another thing- is in disadvantage regarding the philosophical concept, because the form of artistic expression is sensitive and not all spiritual content can be sensibly expressed. The sensitive character of art forces it to be limited to manifest a certain state of truth, of the self-consciousness of the spirit. What art (sensible intuition) does – a manifestation of the spirit, an expression of ideas- philosophy (concept) does too -better, more appropriately-. Apart from that sensitive understanding of the truth, Hegel affirms the existence of a deeper understanding of truth, the one of the reflexive thought, the philosophical one, that you cannot express sensibly in an appropriate way. For us, Hegel writes, "art counts no longer as the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself"; for Hegel "it is just as necessary to remember that neither in content nor in form is art the highest and absolute mode of bringing to our minds the true interest of the spirit": "The peculiar nature of artistic production and of works of art no longer fills our highest need" (Hegel, 1820, p. 23-25, 140-141). Thought and reflection finally have spread their wings above fine art, and therefore the science of art has greater priority than does art itself. Art, then, turns to be something superfluous, unnecessary, being overcome by philosophy. Art, according to Hegel, dies of superfluity. From the philosophical moment that Hegel conceived the work of art *more* as a symbol of an idea it was dictated its sentence of death. In definitive, Hegel saves the epistemological relevance of art transforming it into philosophy, imitating philosophical knowledge. The recovery of the epistemological value of art practiced by Hegel ends up in the statement that the aesthetics (science of art) is worth more than art itself. The Hegelian authentication of the seriousness of art through philosophy ends up costing art its own life. The case of Hegel teaches Adorno and in general to contemporary aesthetics that the salvation of art cannot be made without art itself, that is to say, the salvation has to come from the statement of the peculiarity of its non-discursive knowledge and it cannot be imported from philosophy.

If in Hegel philosophy finally substituted art overcoming it, in Heidegger it is art which 'overcomes' philosophy. In the Heideggerian thought, according to Adorno, philosophy finishes constituting on a pattern of art. After the crisis of reason and of the scientific/rational culture, that is to say, after the crisis of the metaphysical/humanist culture, Adorno thinks that Heidegger's philosophy does not find another possible way of survival but to imitate art, already transformed into a model for

philosophy. The rational or conceptual knowledge of philosophy is abandoned in favor of the poetic knowledge of art previously dehumanised and conceived as the being's word. Philosophy, conceptualizing thought, in Heidegger's opinion, is the "enemy of thinking" (Heidegger, 1947, p. 79), of the poetic thinking of art still hidden but that will finish supplanting the objectifying thought of the concept. Heidegger opposes art and philosophy (as discursive knowledge), and that is the way how he grants ontological and epistemological relevance to art. This is the reason of the Heideggerian sentence of aesthetics, since for Heidegger this consists of the impossible desire to think art conceptually, a desire that represents one more form of the humanist/metaphysical thought for him. Aesthetics is the humanist/metaphysical way of treating the phenomenon of art, that is to say, a humanization of a proper ontological phenomenon as art, that it is a poem written by the being. The aesthetics of Hegel is its last and more accomplished exponent (Heidegger, 1977 [1935], p. 68-69). However, Adorno sustains in favour of the maintenance of the separation of spheres, that art is not –neither it can be, nor it should be– a "model of philosophy (*philosophisches Maß*)" (Adorno, 1997 [1962-1964], p. 167). Adorno thinks that "a philosophy that tried to imitate art, that would turn itself into a work of art, would be expunging itself" (Adorno, 1966, p. 27). Its affinity to art does not entitle it to borrow intuitions from art. The concept is the organon of philosophical thinking. Philosophy cannot survive outside the circles of the concept, its natural habitat. The case of Heidegger teaches modernized aesthetics –Adorno's negative aesthetics– that it is not enough to affirm the peculiarity of the artistic knowledge in contrast to the conceptual one, what Heidegger does without doubt, but rather it is also necessary to avoid that the statement takes with itself the suppression of the discursive knowledge of philosophy.

But this interpretation that Adorno makes of Heidegger's thought is wrong. Heidegger really does not eliminate philosophy (conceptual thinking) to force it to imitate art. He rather pretends achieving a new –and poetical– philosophy that does not imply the annihilation of rational and conceptual thinking, but rather its replacement or rooting in its originary womb: the *logos mitopoiético*. Only the pattern of 'modern' rationality and philosophy and the technique that accompanies it, that have forgotten their *poiético* origin, that is to say, that they have forgotten that they are functions of the *alethéia*, of the revealing of the truth/being, are the enemies of thinking. Then it is not to suppress them, but to return them to their original source. The Heideggerian proposal supposes the suppression of the division between art and philosophy, and its result is poetic thinking, a kind of thinking where reason and poetry would reach a peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, this interpretation of Heidegger would collide again head-on with the position of Adorno, for whom the separation between art and philosophy –something irreversible– is based on the same structure of the conscience, divided in two different and irreducible dimensions: a mimetic/expressive, 'artistic' one, and a conceptual one, 'philosophical'. It is from there that Adorno underrates in principle any philosophical project that is sustained about the hope of finding in the conscience hidden sources that liberate us from objectifying or conceptualizing thinking, and that they open the possibility of a new and different thinking for us (Adorno, 1997 [1962-1964], p. 81; 1966, p. 26). Definitively, overvalued rational or conceptual knowledge in detriment of the epistemological particularity of art; Heidegger does the same thing with poetic knowledge in detriment of the philosophical/discursive one. What both, Hegel and Heidegger, teach to aesthetics is that this has to be mounted on the basis of the avoidance of the confusion of spheres among art and philosophy, of the reduction or absorption of one by another. This is the direction that Adorno follows. Therefore, the elements of departure of the Adornian foundation of aesthetics are the follow-

ing: first, art has epistemological relevance, it is knowledge linked to truth; second, it is peculiar knowledge, not discursive; and in third place, that knowledge exists beside the philosophical knowledge. In Adorno's thought, the determination of the status of aesthetics is forged on the explanation of this last element, the relationship among art and philosophy.

Idealistic identity and dialectical mimesis in the aesthetic experience

Hegel has understood the essence (dialectical) of the Aesthetics, but far from developing it and from displaying his aesthetics and his philosophy all in agreement with it, he has drowned it and betrayed it with another philosophical impulse of a contrary nature (the principle of identity), leaving it as something only initiated, a tendency, that certainly Adorno recovers and that he takes as a central element of his aesthetic/philosophic thought. The phenomenology of art that Hegel practiced, and that it had served him as a base to develop a truly dialectical thought, was subjected to the philosophical principle of identity, and so close this dialectical possibility denaturalising it in a positive dialectics, being founded on the principle of identity, just the opposite of dialectic. A dialectics founded on identity is not dialectical. Indeed, Hegel has conceived art, the same thing as religion or philosophy, above all, like forms of the conscience. Hegel distinguishes three positions, or attitudes, of thought in relation to objectivity (*Stellungen des Gedankens zur Objektivität*) (Hegel, 1986 [1817], § 2-4, 25-26, 74)⁷. In short, art and artworks (the aesthetic moment of the conscience), by springing from and being created by the spirit, are themselves of a spiritual kind. Hegel conceives of spirit as what exists in and for itself, it is recognized in art as its substance. In the products of art, the spirit has to do solely with its own. On the other hand, for Hegel thinking (Concept) is what constitutes the inmost essential nature of spirit. But, Hegel writes, "works of art are not thought or the Concept, but a development of the Concept out of itself, a shift of the Concept from its own ground to that of sense (*Entfremdung zum Sinnlichen*)" (Hegel, 1820, p. 28). Art is born of the spirit and it is of spiritual nature, but in the work of art the spirit reaches the non-spiritual, the sensible/material. Hegel affirms that the essence of the spirit is the thought. So, we can assure that in the aesthetic experience the thought thinks what is not thought, the thing itself, the *other* reality. The aesthetic experience is dialectical, in it the spirit comes out of itself and finds its other one, it penetrates the matter. Adorno also thinks that dialectics is not a method for the treatment of art, but it is something that is immanent to art (Adorno, 1969, p. 211). What is immanent to art, therefore, dialectics, is but the statement of the permanent tension among fellow and object, spirit and matter, thought and real thing, irreducible one to other, but also inseparable, existing in constant reciprocal reference. Neither dualism nor absorption or identification: dialectics.

Dialectics, as long as an opposed principle to identity –that does not leave from itself–, and as a statement of the other thing, is what allows philosophy to truly be philosophy, that is, thought of the concrete, of the thing itself, phenomenology. Here it is pointed the philosophical transcendence of the aesthetics discovered by Adorno: aesthetics is the characteristic field of dialectics. What Adorno considers an essential nucleus -dialectical- of the Hegelian aesthetic is that it affirms -at least in a tendency form- that art is a "cell of a materialism" (Adorno, 1984 [1931], p. 186),

⁷ Adorno will later insist on the same thing, he will say that "the aesthetics is not a theory of art, but, in words of Hegel, a certain position of the thought before objectivity" (Adorno, 1984 [1931], p. 262).

that is to say, a principle of statement -salvation- of the other, of the non-spiritual. Therefore, in art the spirit exists in permanent excursion toward what is not itself. Adorno has referred to this dialectical activity that characterizes art under the name of 'mimesis'. Adorno writes that "the spiritual element of art is not what idealist aesthetics calls spirit; rather, it is the mimetic impulse (*mimetische Impuls*) fixated as totality" (Adorno, 1969, p. 139). The spirit of artworks is their objectivated mimetic comportment. The aesthetic spirit is not basically a constructive principle, but the mimesis that allows the work of art to be the language of the historical reality that speaks in the former. Art (radical art) thinks as writing of history. Everything that talks in the work of art is said by the historical-social context. The work of art speaks, it is certainly a text, a language, writing, but not in an idealistic key: it is the historical-social reality the one that writes, because the work of art itself is deposited history. What art says it does not say for itself because it tells about a blackened reality, damaged. According to the aesthetic principle that constitutes the work of art as such –that is to say, the spirit understood as mimesis–, this one, the work of art, is the writing of a blackened historical reality. This is the way art 'thinks', mimetically or immediately, and not by means of the concept. It does not think with words, but using mimesis, without mediations. For this reason Adorno sustains that "the element that in art resembles language (*Sprachähnliche Moment*) is its mimetic element (*Mimetisches*)" (Adorno, 1969, p. 305); it only becomes universally eloquent in the specific impulse, by its opposition to the universal.

Hegel denies this mimetic/dialectical character of the spirit, and with it he suspends the dialectical possibility for the philosophy discovered by himself in the aesthetic experience. In the philosophy of Hegel the imperative of identity weighs more than the dialectical principle. Hegel has recognized, moved by a phenomenological impulse, that the characteristic of the aesthetic experience consists in that in it the spirit reaches and penetrates the other, what is not spirit. But this dialectical moment of aesthetics –centre of interest for Adorno– is disconnected by Hegel himself when sustaining that "the power of the thinking spirit lies in being able not only to grasp itself in its proper form as thinking, but to know itself again just as much when it has surrendered its proper form to feeling and sense, to comprehend itself in its opposite, because it changes into thoughts what has been estranged and so reverts to itself" (Hegel, 1820, p. 28). Hegel annuls dialectics in which the spirit (subject, thought) recognized the other sensible/material (object, reality) to exist in constant and irreducible tension, and he transmutes dialectics in identity: "The subject-object of Hegel, Adorno affirms, is a subject" (Adorno, 1956, p. 261). Against the dialectical nature in principle hinted, Hegel sustains the identity of the spiritual and sensitive moments of art. Alienation is only a moment overcome by the impulse of self-acknowledgement characteristic of the spirit, by *Versöhnung*. The spirit that Adorno has discovered in the art is mimesis, alienation, dialectics; the Hegelian spirit is self-conscience. But to say that in Hegel the spirit is self-conscience is equal to say that it tends to be recognized in the seemingly other thing, annihilating the strangeness of the world with respect to it, which reveals in last term only as appearance. The world is not essentially strange for the spirit; the final relationship between the spirit and the world is not of strangeness but of familiarity. The Hegelian spirit feels everywhere like at home. The Hegelian statement of spirit like self-conscience is a correlate of its philosophy of identity. But Adorno writes that identity thinking has been something deathly, "something that devours everything": identity thinking "is always virtually out for totality" (Adorno, 1962, p. 506). And so Hegel overcomes the injustices to which it seems to be subjected the world of the concrete reality, all the blood spilled for the long-suffering individual reality. Elaborated from the point of view of the reason (spirit or thought), sub-

stance of reality, philosophy, Hegel wrote, is not really a means of consolation, but "it is more than that, for it transfigures reality with all its apparent injustices (*das Unrecht scheint*) and reconciles (*versöhnt*) it with the rational" (Hegel, 1955 [1822], p. 78). The rational spirit, that legitimates all the reality when understanding it like an external reality of itself, does not deny –logically– the pain nor the blood; what it denies is that they are unjust. They will be unjust from the individual's point of view, but not certainly *sub specie aeternitatis*. In other words, from the point of view of reason –not of understanding– everything is like it should be: "All that is real (*wirklich*) is rational, and all that is rational (*vernünftig*) is real" (Hegel, 1821, p. 24).

In principle, the Hegelian aesthetic is phenomenological: open to art, liberated to the aesthetic experience, it discovers the alienation, the dialectics that constitutes it essentially. But then it turns its back on this artistic peculiarity, it stops to meditate assisting with the own aesthetic experience, and it finds in it what it has already established *a priori*, in a purely conceptual way: that the aesthetic experience is pure manifestation of the spirit, so that in it the spirit does not really reach the other thing, it does not alienate, but rather it recognizes itself in the other thing, it alienates for self-recognising. It is the systematic moment of the Hegelian aesthetics, the one that finishes determining it. For this reason it can be said that the aesthetics of Hegel is made from outside the own art, without meditating about the same aesthetic experience, turning its back on the dialectical specificity that this last one represents, and on the alienation of the spirit toward the other that happens in it, and it is so in spite of 'having seen it'. Such is the force of the imperative of Hegelian identity. Logically, if art is a symbol of ideas, that is to say, that in art the spirit is to be recognized itself and not to be alienated, and philosophy does it in a more appropriate way, then Hegel can consider the question 'for what art'. The crash of the dialectical peculiarity of the art before the principle of identity transforms art into something superfluous. After the overcoming –death– of art the philosophy of identity is founded. What Adorno underlines is that Hegel himself, in the dialectical essence of the aesthetics, had discovered the antidote against this philosophy of the identity that legitimated the wounds of the concrete reality healing them up in false. In the work of art the spirit is mimesis. Adorno thinks that in artworks, "spirit has become their principle of construction; although it fulfills its telos only when it emerges from what is to be constructed, from the mimetic impulses", by shaping itself to them rather than allowing itself to be imposed by sovereign rule: "The rationality of artworks becomes spirit only when it is immersed in its polar opposite" (Adorno, 1969, p. 180). This mimetic/dialectical spirit, instead of overcoming the other, its opposing one, the pain of the reality that screams in silence, is submit to that silent reality to give it the word. It only, only this spiritual mimesis, prevents the false Hegelian reconciliation of the real pain that transmutes it by means of the magic of the philosophy of the identity in rational justice; it only prevents the dissolution of the blood that does not cease flowing from the individual in ideal intelligibility. And it is necessary that we experience that the alive individual really continues bleeding and suffering, because this alive conscience is the only hope that we have left in the universe of the totalising identity. Without that conscience, pain –real– will be buried. But this movement is the one that idealism began, especially the Hegelian philosophy: to transform the pain into concept, to identify it, as Adorno sustains, it supposes to leave it mute and inconsequential. In front of this legitimization of the pain characteristic of the philosophy of the identity by means of silence and oblivion, Adorno finds in the mimetic/dialectical spirit of art the opportunity to give it the word. For Adorno, to affirm that art thinks or that tells the truth, means to affirm that it is the "language of suffering (*Sprache des Leidens*)", "unconscious writing of history (*bewußtlose Geschichtsschreibung*)"

(Adorno, 1969, p. 35, 286, 387). Logically, for Adorno the contemporary radical art that serves as support to his aesthetic theory is so by force of thinking the truth of his (our) times. The consequence of this thought exercise is a black and ugly art, because the reality that thinks is also black, ugly, alienated, dehumanised, reified, horrible, bloodstained, torn and exasperating. Black colour is the truth of our time. We are condemned to black colour if we hope to say the truth. The negative aesthetics concretely tells what radical art of its time says, an art that thinks, an art that tells the truth. Mimesis is the condition of possibility of a negative dialectics. To be the voice of pain is what, in Adorno's opinion, also explains the inintelligibility and enigmaticalness (*Rätselcharakter*) of art. All artworks –and art altogether– are enigmas (Adorno, 1969, p. 179-182). If the work of art could be fully understood and translated into concepts, it would be also the concrete reality that it designates, but this is in fact what philosophy of identity does to exorcize the negativity of such reality. The work of art completes its dialectical function giving the word to the real pain in all its negative power, indissoluble to all interpretation.

Difference and relation between art and philosophy

The aesthetics of Hegel is philosophical and not merely a theory of art, as the aesthetic theory of Adorno. But the aesthetics of Hegel is philosophical in a systematic sense, that is, in the sense that it is an aesthetics made from above or from outside the properly aesthetic, from an established philosophy *a priori*, a previous and independent philosophy of the aesthetic: the philosophy of identity. The Hegelian aesthetics is philosophical because it is philosophy applied to art. However, it is so in the price of extirpating the specificity of the artistic –the dialectics, the alienation of the spirit toward the other– applying from outside a philosophy that is strange to it. The philosophy enters it this way, legislating from its pre-aesthetic categories the truth of art. The aesthetics of Hegel is not but applied philosophy, a philosophy pre-aesthetics, elaborated to the margin of the aesthetic. From this philosophy of identity the art is interpreted and, when making it, it prevents the unfolding of the nature of the aesthetic, that Hegel himself had suggested. The Hegelian aesthetics gives up before the philosophical imperative of the identity and surrenders to it, abolishing the dialectical imperative properly aesthetic. The opposition of Adorno to this idealistic understanding of the aesthetics is radical: "Aesthetics is, however, not applied philosophy but rather in itself philosophical (*philosophisch an sich*)" (Adorno, 1969, p. 140). Instead of applying to aesthetic reality a philosophy of contrary sign, the philosophy of the identity, Adorno finds in this reality the essence of philosophy: the dialectics. Aesthetics is not supposed to judge art from an external and superior vantage point, but rather to help its internal propensities (dialectic) to theoretical consciousness. Dialectical philosophy is immanent to the aesthetic experience. In fact, only because in the aesthetic he discovers the philosophical one, only for this reason, it can be the aesthetics, the aesthetic theory, philosophical in itself. The aesthetics is not philosophical because we applied to it a certain philosophy; it is philosophical because the topic of the aesthetics, the aesthetic, that is to say, the dialectical position of the thought in the face of the objectivity, is philosophical. The aesthetics of Adorno, far from being carried out from outside art by virtue of a strange philosophy applied to art, is directed by the phenomenological principle of attention to the artistic phenomenon. It is not philosophy applied to art, it is not an aesthetics from outside or from above. Aesthetic theory, wary of *a priori* construction, has as its arena the experience of the aesthetic object; it abides to

the historical reality of art. The constitution of an aesthetic starts from, in Adorno's opinion, the challenge of all idealistic principle. An aesthetics cannot be built with the help of pure intellect, starting from the idea of art and to the margin of the real experience of art. Adorno has denied the possibility that the aesthetic object is known –legislated– from outside and demands “an understanding of artworks that would be knowledge determined strictly through their objectivity” (Adorno, 1969, p. 513).

But aesthetic theory is not mere theory (positive) of the art either. For Adorno, the belief disseminated by aesthetic theorists that “a work of art is to be understood as an object of immediate contemplation, purely on its own terms, is unsound” (Adorno, 1944, p. 253). Art is not certainly understood from a philosophy already done, in a Hegelian way; but it cannot only be understood from itself either. Even where there are no such difficulties, Adorno says that “the work of art demands more than that one should merely abandon oneself to it” (Adorno, 1944, p. 253). For the content of art cannot simply be art, and therefore “contemplation that limits itself to the artwork fails it. Its inner construction requires, in however mediated a fashion, what is itself not art” (Adorno, 1969, p. 518). It claims philosophy. Adorno concludes: “Aesthetics must no more lag behind art than behind philosophy” (Adorno, 1969, p. 510). However, philosophy for Adorno does not intervene in art nor in the Hegelian idealistic way, from outside, legislating the truth of the artistic, nor as in Heidegger either, where the philosophy imitates art: it is self-eliminated as conceptual thought and it becomes poetic thinking. Hegel and Heidegger have understood art philosophically in exchange of absorbing or reducing one to the other, that is to say, in exchange of sacrificing the peculiarity of one of the spheres to the other one. In front of both, Adorno defends the irreversibility of the separation among art and philosophy. Adorno defends the irreducible peculiarity of art and of philosophy. Neither philosophy overcomes art because this decreases to that one (Hegel), nor art becomes a model of philosophy (Heidegger). But the maintenance of the difference among the philosophical and artistic spheres does not mean for Adorno to deny the existence of relationships among them. On the contrary: art and philosophy are different, but in permanent relationship, in constant tension. An appropriate philosophical understanding of art according to Adorno can consist neither of its reduction to philosophy nor in its elevation to a pattern of philosophy, it is only possible on the basis of incorporating philosophy in art.

The discovery of philosophy in art is what makes possible that relation of tension between art and philosophy. That incorporation forces art and philosophy to converge, to be needed mutually. The convergence among art and philosophy that Adorno sustains responds to the same dialectics that impregnates all its thought. Art and philosophy maintain the same dialectical relationship that subject and object, or thought and reality: they are different but inseparable. Let us analyse this convergence. It will be necessary to clarify in what sense Adorno incorporates the philosophy in art. The philosophy discovered in art is not a philosophy already done; art is not philosophy, it is not the symbol of an idea, as Hegel sustained. Precisely, for this reason art could be finally supplanted by philosophy itself. For Adorno, art is rather a demand of philosophy; philosophy that is discovered in art is a demand, a demand of reflection, truth thought not discursively, and that philosophy will have to perform developing it conceptually. In art, as long as it is dialectics, mimesis, there is an immediate presence of the things, there is truth. The alienation of the spirit that takes place in art allows it once a leap, without mediations, to install (the spirit) in the things in their truth. Adorno suggests us that art is a proximity experience to things, and that contrasts with the distance that establishes the philosophical experience -conceptual- between us and things. “The proximity that characterizes

the aesthetic experience has a price, art thinks, it judges, but it does it without words, not discursively; but it is precisely for it that it also has to be thought. The knowledge that is art, has truth, but as "something incommensurable with art" (Adorno, 1969, p. 191). That is the 'philosophy' which exists in art. Implicitly lodged in artistic experience is the "consciousness of art, that is, philosophy", and for that reason, Adorno says that "art awaits its own explanation", that is to say, it is hoping its thought to be thought conceptually (Adorno, 1969, p. 524). Adorno affirms therefore that "aesthetic experience is not genuine experience unless it becomes philosophy" (Adorno, 1969, p. 197). For this same reason aesthetics is philosophical in itself. Art demands philosophy, it needs the discursive reflection.

But also, secondly, philosophy, the conceptual speech, needs art. Adorno understands philosophy as dialectics, as thought of the concrete, that is, true phenomenology. Only as dialectics –as rupture of the imposition of the identity– it is possible phenomenology. Besides, philosophy according to Adorno can only be verified as such phenomenology/dialectics by means of concept. Indeed, concept is the organon of philosophy, but Adorno also recognizes that it is a wall that makes impossible his dialectical intellectual project because concept itself distances the thought from that which it thinks (Adorno, 1966, p. 27; 1956, p. 284). This is the paradox in which the philosophy moves: its natural environment, the concept, it is the same one that prevents it from being what it is, phenomenology. Adorno rejects the (idealistic) illusion that earlier philosophical enterprises began with: "that the power of thought is sufficient to grasp (*ergreifen*) the totality of the real"; so that his philosophy is defined by the "conscience of the non-identity" between the thought and the thing, philosophy that in virtue of this critic conscience of the idealistic illusion is denominated by Adorno as *essayistic* (Adorno, 1954, p. 17). The essay is not then a mere form of philosophy, but rather the form of dialectical philosophy: "The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder" (Adorno, 1966, p. 17). Adorno has sustained the "primacy (*Vorrang*) of the object" (Adorno, 1966, p. 184-186; 1969, p. 384), but not for dissolving the thought but for forcing it –against all idealism– to assist the other thing, the real and concrete, what is not thought. The primacy of the object is a call to the 'negative dialectics', a dialectics that does not finalise in identity, opposite to the 'Hegelian positive dialectics', idealistic, that finishes overcoming the difference between thought/thing in identity, in false reconciliation. That philosophy of negative dialectics lives in the conscience of the non-identity between thought and reality, what above all supposes to affirm that philosophy just as Adorno understands it –as essay– is to think (with the concept) the other thing, what is not to think, what is not concept. However, this same concept makes impossible to think the other or concrete, what is not thought. Adorno says: "To think is to identify (*Denken heißt identifizieren*)", so that the concepts –when thinking– they cannot say but what they put themselves" (Adorno, 1966, p. 17). Adorno is here tracking the resilience not only of identity thinking and the ideology of the concept, "but more emphatically the logical root of the belief that the world is always our world" (Bernstein, 2001, p. 346). Philosophy thinks by means of concepts, but these concepts themselves are those that separate it from what it thinks. This is the distance in which philosophy moves, and the cause of the distance regarding the things that we experience in it. Philosophy, discursive knowledge, lacks appearance of things, it lacks truth. Certainly, in exchange for it, it gives us clarity and distinction, rigor and precision, but it lacks truth, the proximity of things. The truth of discursive knowledge (philosophy) is unconcealed, and thus discursive knowledge does not have it (Adorno, 1969, p. 191). The understanding of the concept like a wall that distances the thought from the reality is equal to the crash of the idealistic dream,

but Adorno does not deduce from there the rejection of the discursive knowledge and the opening for the philosophy of another road of knowledge: "Concepts alone can achieve what the concept prevents" (Adorno, 1966, p. 62).

The concept is the organon of philosophy. Adorno does not reject the concept but rather corrects it and enlarges it with the incorporation of another element: the dialectical mimesis of the aesthetic. Adorno affirms philosophy like a will of telling conceptually what is not concept. In philosophy the concepts have to stop being just them to go to their other one and to think about it, they have to penetrate what is not conceptual without absorbing it, without identifying it with themselves, without accommodating that which is not conceptual to the concepts. The (dialectical) concept can transcend the concept, and can thus reach the nonconceptual. For Adorno the "cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the nonconceptual with concepts without making it their equal" (Adorno, 1966, p. 21, 159; 1997 [1962-1964], p. 56). Dialectics means to break the compulsion to achieve identity. As the concept is experienced as nonidentical, it is no longer purely itself; it leads to its otherness without absorbing that otherness. Concepts have to be alienated, but this excursion toward the other thing is the characteristic dialectics of art. Therefore, so that philosophy, conceptual thinking, can overcome its natural idealistic tendency –identifier– and can think the other thing, the concrete thing; i.e., so that philosophy can be at the height of what is heterogeneous for it, the concept has to incorporate in its own conduct –without stopping being a concept– the activity characteristic of art, the alienation, the excursion toward the other thing, the mimesis. This is the one that contributes to the philosophy, the presence, the truth. To represent the mimesis, the concept has no other way other than to adopt something mimetic in its own conduct, without abandoning itself. Philosophy has to appropriate in its conduct of the aesthetic alienation, but being philosophy, conceptual/reflexive thought. For Adorno, philosophy is an attempt to save the mimetic element by means of the concept (Adorno, 1956, p. 354; 1997 [1962-1964], p. 81; 1966, p. 26). The 'new Adornian concept' is a concept of nonidentity; in general, Adorno's philosophy represents an ethic of nonidentity (cf. Bernstein, 2001, p. 330-370). Philosophy can only be carried out as phenomenology –dialectics– by means of the artistic mimesis. Without mimesis there is not dialectics. The concept supplanted the mimesis; now it has to reproduce that mimetic conduct in its own conduct. The mimesis of which art consists like opening to the other thing, to what is not thought, is in fact what Adorno uses for extending/correcting the philosophical concept so that it can tell what the concept cannot say: what is not conceptual (Adorno, 1997 [1962-1964], p. 81-88), i.e., pain, and in this way it overcomes its positive dialectical and identifier tendency. The incorporation of art –the mimetic reason– in the concept is exactly what allows Adorno to correct philosophy –misinterpreted by idealism– so that it can spread as authentic dialectics, as negative and material dialectics, the only one able to think the non-identical (cf. Gómez, 1998, p. 17-19). Those two sides different from the conscience converge this way. Art needs the philosophical reflection to deploy its truth, the truth that is reached in its mimesis but in a dark, incommensurable way; philosophy needs the artistic mimesis to correct the identifying tyranny of the philosophical reason, to overcome its idealistic limit and to be able to think things, other things of thought, of truth. The immediacy of the aesthetic proximity needs the conceptual distance of philosophy to be able to think what it has so next that it cannot think about it; the conceptual mediation of the philosophical distance needs the mimetic proximity of art to be able to have the truth of the thing that that distance could never achieve.

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