

**UTOPIA IN BLACK. THE NEGATIVE AESTHETICS
OF ADORNO AND THE CONTEMPORARY BLACK ART**

ANTONIO GUTIÉRREZ POZO, Filozofická fakulta, Sevillská univerzita, Sevilla, Španielsko

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Black is the colour of the negative aesthetics of Adorno, and the true of our time. The aesthetics that thinks the radical art of our time, a black art, can only be a *black aesthetics*. The radical contemporary art is black art, and it is so because according to the aesthetic principle that constitutes the work of art as such – the spirit understood as mimesis –, this one, the work of art, is writing of a blackened historical reality. What Adorno tries with black art is to return to art its right to exist after Auschwitz, in a discoloured world. But black art, as alive conscience of pain, as truth of the real, is already salvation, hope, utopia.

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The Materialistic Aesthetics of Black Art. Colours talk, mean; they are texts¹. Als the black one. Adorno considers that the black colour tells the truth. This thesis can agglutinate the aesthetic theory of Adorno, that it has in the black colour, already risen to the category of maximum aesthetic/philosophical relevance, its 'ideal'. Black is the colour of the negative aesthetics of Adorno. The paragraph that he dedicates to black colour in his *Ästhetische Theorie* (AT 65-7)² summarizes the spirit of this work and in general the spirit of that the truest contemporary art says, a *black art* (*schwarze Kunst*). Adorno is a *black thinker*, a *black writer*, as the thinkers, writers and artists who exerted bigger and deeper attraction and influence on him were: Sade, Poe, Baudelaire, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kafka, Beckett or Ionesco (DA 139).³ An aesthetics can not be built with the help of pure intellect, and to the margin of the real experience of art. The negative aesthetics concretely tells what *black art* of its time says, an art that Adorno calls "radical art (*radikale Kunst*)" (AT 65), that is to say, an art that thinks, an art that tells the truth. Art thinks, it is a "complexion of the truth" (AT 152, 391). For Adorno, to affirm that art thinks or that tells the truth, means to affirm that it consists on "unconscious writing of the history (*bewußtlose Geschichtsschreibung*)" (AT 286, 387). The contemporary radical is so by force of thinking the truth of his (our) times, and it is a *black, ugly* art, because the reality that thinks of is black, ugly, horrible. Black colour is the true of our time. Today, Adorno concludes, a radical art is equal to a dark, gloomy art, "an art whose fundamental colour is black colour" (AT 65).

The thesis of Adorno about the work of art as writing of the history supposes a non-idealist understanding of art. Black colour tells the truth. But on what the eloquence of black colour is based?. The works of art are, in principle, appearances, manifestations, and in this sense Adorno compares them with fireworks and circus. As the former, the

works of art “are showed in the shine of an instant in their expressive manifestation”, they are “writing that shines during an instant and goes out (*aufblitzende und vergehende Schrift*)” (AT 125-6). It is certain that every work of art tries to plot with the circus, but it annuls its primary artistic stratum if it does not imitate circus, if it does not include the moment of the appearance, that it is as the frame of a picture that notices us that right there the real world is interrupted and that *another* one begins, a imaginary, new and hopeful universe. The same role plays the curtain of the theatre: “The instant in that the curtain rises is the expectation of the appearance” (AT 126). Even Beckett, an author that represents the maximum expression of the contemporary radical art for Adorno⁴, he is faithful to the circus when using the stage and when “raising the curtain full with promises”, and it is in spite that his intention is “to exorcize the multicoloured thing of the circus” (AT 127). The authors that suppress “the charm of the backstages”, the moment of hope of the appearance, are signing the surrender of art. The proposal of Adorno suggests that negative art can not abdicate of its artistic level if it intends to be negative, black. Only being art it will be able to be anti-art.

But the works of art are not simple manifestations. For Adorno they are *more* than that: “The works of art become such when producing that more (*Mehr*), when creating its own transcendency” (AT 122). The works exceed the manifestation (*Erscheinung*) itself on which they consist; they are manifestations that are transcended by themselves (AT 123). Art is not only manifestation; it is also spirit. Basically it is a spiritual phenomenon: “The spirit (*Geist*) of the works of art is what converts them, as regards manifestations, in more than they really are” (AT 134). The spirituality is what makes them talk, say; it is what is in the base of the eloquence of colour. The works of art are language, and this – their linguistic character (*Sprachcharakter*)- is what it allows them to transcend their character of thing (AT 122, 249). The spirit is what transforms them into language. However, Adorno underlines, “the spirit is nothing in the works of art outside of their words” (AT 135). The spirit of the works of art is nothing spiritual: “In their fullness works of art are not anything spiritual” (AT 122). They are, rather, something historical-social. The spirit transforms the works of art into language, in writing of history, because the spirit itself is spiritualised history. The aesthetic spirit is not an in itself, but the deposited history that speaks in the works of art. The ‘more’ that is the spirit of the work of art is said by the context – by the history and by the society. In contrast to the radical spiritualization of the aesthetics, Adorno points out that “the spiritual moment of the art is not what idealism calls spirit, but rather the proscribed mimetic impulse (*mimetische Impuls*)” (AT 139). The aesthetic spirit is the mimesis that allows the work of art to be the language of the historical reality. Adorno affirm that “the linguistic moment (*sprachliche Moment*) of art is its mimetic moment (*Mimetisches*)” (AT 305). Everything that talks in the work of art is said by the historical-social context. The negative aesthetics of Adorno is then a materialistic aesthetics: “Art is cell of materialism”, says (KKA 186). In contrast to the idealistic interpretation, Adorno sustains that neither the colours, nor the sounds, intervene in art as if they themselves already express something (AT 140). Adorno defends that colours and sounds and forms do not speak *per se*. What they tell, “its eloquence only comes from the context in which they appear” (AT 140). The colour is certainly a text, writing, but not in idealistic key: it is the historical-social reality the one who writes. What

black colour says it does not say for itself, but because it tells about a blackened reality.

Ideological Art and Critical Art. The radical contemporary art is black art because is writing of a blackened historical reality. Black colour's truth is not in itself but in the historical reality whose writing is so. The totalitarian logic of dominion, and with it horror, injustice and desperation, seem to have been taken possession of the historical life. The situation is ugly, black. The disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) and/or the blackening of the historical world are very patent. The enlightened critical reason, far from liberating, has become dominance instrument, condemning the humanity, that supposedly would liberate, to black darkness. This is the "dialectics of enlightenment": the process of necessary metamorphosis (*Verwandlung*) of the pure idea (freedom, justice ...) in dominion (DA 239-40, 254-55). The dominion is practiced by means of the identification (annulment and forgetfulness) of the differences in the whole of the social system. The idealistic philosophy of Hegel, centred in the "thought of the identity (*Identitätsdenken*)" (JE 506), represents for Adorno the highest philosophical expression of the dominion. Auschwitz will be then the supreme realization of this metaphysics of the identity: the genocide is the most horrible form of the individual's homogeneity (ND 355). 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 the horror (*System des Grauens*)" (MM 126), the world in which the individuals are annulled, *des-individualized*.

In fact, the pain, the individual thing, is the negative thing, the different thing, what can not be said or integrated by the system, the inexpressible thing, the incomprehensible thing. "The whole, Adorno writes down, is the no-real thing (*Das Ganze ist das Unwahre*)" (MM 55). The concrete, suffering and bloody of the historical reality escapes to the concept; it is black, opaque. The concept can not say that because it tends to sense, to identify it to itself, while the reality is black, illogical. Idealism 'has told' pain, but "the suffering (*Leiden*), Adorno has written down, when becomes concept, remains silent and sterile" (AT 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, to forget it, to conceal it. The pain is silenced, it fades; it is translated (masked) in sense. For Adorno, to translate it into concept, to rationalize it, that it is precisely what the Hegelian positive dialectics and the current social system intend, is in fact an injustice: "The sensibility is not less able to see a talkativeness in every statement of the positive of the existence, an injustice (*Unrecht*) towards the victims, and it has to rebel against the extraction of a sense, as abstract as it can be, of that tragic destiny" (ND 354). The price of the sense is the forgetfulness of the innocents' pain. But the wounds continue open, and pain persists in silence: "Each philosophical term is the toughened scar of an unsolved problem" (PhT II, 10-1). When translating pain into concept, an injustice is not only committed with the victims, but also we reconcile with reality. This is the ideological function of the search for sense, of the translation of pain to concept. To extract sense of what seems negative, illogical, to understand the horror of the real thing, it is to legitimate it, to glorify the world just as it is. But Auschwitz, an open wound specially bleeding and suffering, radically goes further from the concept evidencing the philosophy and the society of the identity.

In opinion of Adorno 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. To dominate is to silence, to remove the word to the negative thing. To the integration through the silence. The system of horror does not want to be recognized as such and it wants to hide the proofs. The critic's key element is art, because art, Adorno writes down, is "the world for second time" (AT 208). Art is then a place of transgressions, is *another thing* regarding the bourgeois modern world. Therefore, "there is nothing in art, even being the most sublime one, that does not come from the world; not even anything that has not been transfigured" (AT 208). This 'second world' of art presents a negative –critical- tendency against the first one. The definitive feature of the aesthetics according to Adorno is criticism, the resistance and the protest against what it is. "The works of art are negative *a priori*" (AT 201). To understand art it is necessary to see it in negative relationship with the reality.⁵ The authentic work of art is a revolution (*Revolte*) in itself, so that "a conservative work of art is a contradiction in terms in itself" (AT 13, 264, 303, 339). The polemic character *a priori* of art is due to its own artistic nature. Its (critic) social function resides then in maintaining its aesthetic autonomy, its immanent difference with the real⁶: "The comforting of the big works of art is less in what they say (*aussprechen*) than in the fact that they were able to be pulled up of the existence" (MM 253).

But not the whole current art is critic, resistance. Only the radical art is so. Adorno points out that there is also an art that "in an infantile way is happy with the colours" (Matisse?), a colourist and happy art (*heitere Kunst*) (AT 65-6), an art that adopts the attitude of comfort and narcotic before the blackened empiric reality by means of the false beautification of the world. Following the precept that "*mundus vult decipi*" (AT 34, 350), it intends to improve the appearance of the horrible real world from its colourist world, but only a naïve person, Adorno adds, can believe possible that the discoloured and disenchanted world recovers its colours from art (AT 66). There is also an art that – like the idealistic concept-serves to the dominion, a art *entkünstlet*, that has lost its artistic character, its critical capacity (AT 32-4), and that serves to the same end: to silence and to sterilize the pain. The ideological character of this art reaches its maximum expression with the cultural industry (*Kulturindustrie*) that is not 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 with the false colourist beauty of this art, we conceal the reality of the existent thing, we legitimate it and we leave it just as it is. The conversion of art in consumption object by the cultural industry coincides with its reduction to pure diversion, what supposes the suspension of its critical and utopian power (DA 152). It promises 'di-ersion', that is, escape, evasion, but this promise is the mask of its ideological character as instrument of the dominion. Really, Adorno writes down, "escape art, escape movies are abhorrent not because they turn their back to a discoloured existence but because they do not do that with enough energy", so that, "the escape is all a *message*. The message seems just the opposite, what wants to escape to escape from the flight (*Flucht*)" (MM 228). Diversion (*Vergnügen*) is flight, but not of the negative reality but of the "last resistance thought" that becomes agitated against that situation (DA 167). The diversion, far from escaping from this disenchanted world, it affirms it; it is what is most

committed with the exploitation and the dominion. The message that the flight carries with itself really means 'to be in agreement': diversion is to collaborate, to forget the suffering, to abandon criticism (DA 167, 181). As Pascal⁷, Adorno conceives diversion like a mask, like turning one's back before reality not to face the real problems face to face, in sum, as a closing in false of the wounds, what impedes to man the possibility to solve them in a more appropriate way: utopia. The diversion is the opposite side to the suffering conscience, the conscience that is nurtured of blood that flows from a wounded reality; the message of diversion is the suppression of the conscience of pain, the only way to salvation. This is the aesthetic hedonism that Adorno condemns. This cheerful and charming art that forgets and conceals horrors, is an injustice against "the deads and the accumulated pain and without word (*akkumulierten und sprachlosen Schmerz*)" (AT 66). Adorno assumes those verses of Brecht in which it is prohibited for our time an art that does not want to realize of horror: "What kind of times are they, where / a talk about trees is almost a crime / because it implies silence about so many horrors!" (AT 66). The poetry that has become impossible after Auschwitz, for being barbarian (KG 30), is the colourist poetry. For this reason Adorno has written that "maybe it has been false to say that after Auschwitz it can no longer be possible to write poems" (ND 355). They can be written, whenever they are black poems!. In this sombre time, an art that has lost all evidence (*Selbstverständlichkeit*) and legitimacy (AT 9-10), is art as embellishment, the ideological art that conceals and justifies the current reality.

The Expressive Mimesis as Instrument of Criticism. The *other* art, the contemporary radical art, the black and critical art of Kafka and Beckett, as long as it gives word to pain, is the only hope. In contrast to art understood as false embellishment or reconcilable enchantment, an art able to transform deceptively the negative into positive, the irreconcilable in reconciliation, the chaotic in order, Adorno affirms that "today the mission of art is to introduce chaos in the order (*Ordnung*)" (MM 251). That mission is carried out by black art giving the word to pain. What Adorno tries with black art is to return to art its right to exist after Auschwitz, in a discoloured world. In opinion of Adorno, amid the more extreme (*Äußersten*) and gloomy or dark (*Finstersten*) of reality, that is, amid the terrifying current reality, art can only subsist by becoming equal (*sich gleichmachen*) to that (black) reality (AT 65). Only the spiritual principle of the mimesis is guarantee of aestheticity. Only black art is art. And it is so because black art, in spite of becoming equal to the empiric reality, is not simple reflection, but essentially criticism, negation, utopia and hope. How is it possible that an art is critical being equal to the reality that denounces? In the current state of things, Adorno writes that art "is only able to be opposition by means of the identification with that against it rebels" (AT 201). Only being black – only becoming equal to the empiric reality- it can be critical and utopian. In a blackened world, black is the colour of criticism, of resistance, of negation and of utopia. This is the paradox of the contemporary radical art.

If dominion is silence and integration, concealment of what suffers, criticism and utopia can only be scream, failure of (identifier) tendency that silences and conceals. The scream represents the statement of the difference faced with the horror of des-individualization. If the dominion system heals the wounds in false, resistance and hope depend on

that the wounds bleed again. Black art represents for Adorno the maximum exit to pain, the absurdity and the ugliness of the current reality (AT 171). Then black colour expresses the experience of the no-identical, what does not allow itself to be dissolved in the concept; it is the highest expression in the aesthetic phenomenon, understood as opening of the conscience to the other thing, what is not reducible to sense. This transcendence toward the other thing, on which radical black art consists, also constitutes the essence of the artistic mimesis. The mimetic *logos* of art consists then on alienation, in becoming equal to pain, in giving the word to that silences the society of dominion. This mimesis, last refuge of criticism, should be understood in a deeper sense than the usual: not as ‘representation’ but as ‘expression’ (*Ausdruck*). There is not aesthetic mimesis without expression (AT 171-5). Black art has become equal to the absurd, black and ugly reality, becoming absurd, black and ugly; becoming “social wound (*gesellschaftliche Wundmal*)” (AT 353). In this sense black art is for Adorno “language of suffering (*Sprache des Leidens*)” (AT 35). Beckett’s and Kafka’s art embodies the oppressed by the totalitarian society, what does not allow itself to be led, nor to be identified, nor to be integrated: the other thing. It tears the conciliatory facade that recovers the “lack of moderation of pain (*Unmaß des Leidens*)” (AT 348; KG 262).

Black art does not speak ‘of’ but rather ‘is’. Becoming equal, it is made ‘thing itself’. Instead of imposing to the object, art becomes its instrument, in the language of the thing itself, expression of its total negativity: to express the pain, to be the wound itself. The “central criterion” of the works of art, of its aesthetic and critical character, is the “force of its expression, thanks to which tension the works of art become eloquent with an gesture without words” (AT 353). The opposition to the society that art represents is not *said*, because to say is to understand, to rationalize, to find sense and to legitimate; it can not be made in the content but in the form, ‘becoming itself’ just that against what protests. The commitment of the works of art is not manifested by means of harangue, thesis or doctrines; it is rather executed in the form. More than to say it, it is expressed. The works tell by means of the form, not by means of the content. But what the work says is always a historical-social truth. And this is what Adorno finds fulfilled in an exemplary way in Picasso’s *Guernica*, that “achieves in its inhuman construction that expression that transforms it into a sharp social protest beyond any contemplative misunderstanding” (AT 353). In this way art *tells*, that is how it gives the world to pain and becomes language of the suffering. In the Kafkian style, and not so much in what it says, it is where Adorno finds Kafka’s criticism to the dehumanised society (AT 342). The aesthetic identification with that that it denies is expressive, that is to say, it has to load on itself all the blackness and the pain of that denied reality, and to express it, to show it, not to represent it or to say it. The black radical art is identified to the world by giving it the word, making the world be expressed through the works.

To be writing of a black and senseless history is what explains, in opinion of Adorno, the enigmatic character (*Rätselcharakter*) of the work of art. The understanding of the works of art like language should not lead us to understand them as hermeneutic objects, but “it would rather have to understand, in the current state, their unintelligibility (*Unbegreiflichkeit*)” (AT 179). Its language is such that they can not be understood. Their enigmatic character means that what they conceal – black reality – they manifest it and

when manifesting it they conceal it (AT 182-84). The work of art is absurd, unintelligible and enigmatic, because it is so the social reality that it expresses. This enigmatic character is what more says about the contemporary radical art. It intends to express the irrational, inexpressible and absurd of the real, and how better to do it than being as incomprehensible as the reality that it talks about. The sense of the radical work of art is the lack of sense. This is the meaning of Beckett's and Kafka's literature of the absurd. The absurd of the work of art reproduces the social absurdity (AT 230-1). For that reason Kafka's work resists to sense and is constantly getting dark and retiring (KG 257). This also explains why Beckett refused to interpret his works (AT 47). In our time aesthetic darkness and aesthetic irrationality are symptom of artistic authenticity and radicalism. Beckett seems to summarize the condition of black art when he refers to the impossibility of talking and, at the time, when he refers to the impossibility of remaining silent which have constituted his life.⁸ Black art can not talk about the horror of the real, but it can not also stop screaming against it. This enigmatic character affects negatively to the reception of the work of art. As being accustomed to an art of beautiful appearance, the public does not understand this art. The radical music of Schönberg and Berg, and in general the whole black art, has become enigma like the world and – in this way- has also become answer to the enigma that is the world, but the scream that it represents resonates without anyone listening to it: is a “message locked in a bottle (*Flaschenpost*)” (PhMU 126). It waits for receivers being able to carry out the necessary interpretive effort to put themselves on a pair with it.

The radical art can only be ugly and repugnant, as the reality that denounces and that talks with it. This is the ‘realism’ that is in the base of the production of Kafka, Beckett or F.Bacon. It is not a ‘positive’ realism that affirms what it is, but a negative one, critical. Art has to convert the ugly, the outlawed and the repellent in one of its topics, and not to integrate it or to soften it, by no means to reconcile with all itself. It has to appropriate the ugly to be able to denounce with it to the world that produces it. The defenders of the established order, indignant by this tendency (‘anti-aesthetic’ in their opinion) of the contemporary art toward the ugly and thorny, toward the physically repellent thing, they oppose it an ‘aesthetic’, ‘beautiful’ ideal, convinced that the world is already quite ugly (*häßlich*) as for art to be also (AT 79. PhT II, 183-5). But what modern radical art has made is to elevate the black, the ugly and repugnant, to the ideal of art. Baudelaire and Rimbaud used for the first time the aesthetics of the ugly and thorny, that will reach its highest expression with Kafka and mainly with Beckett. Only in this way F. Bacon's art can be conceived, his aesthetics of the degradation of the body (PhT II, 184-5). Black art breaks away from the traditional aesthetics of the ‘beautiful art’. Referring to Berg's and Schönberg's music, but in valid thesis for the whole black art, Adorno has written that “all its beauty consists on being eluded to the beauty's appearance (*Schein des Schönen*)” (PhMU 126). Beauty of the modern art therefore depends on refusing the beauty's appearance and on being as ugly as the torn world. Music, art, Adorno affirms in Schönberg's words, “does not have to adorn but rather it should be true” (PhMU 46). But it is only true expressing pain, being ugly. (Black) Art, as long as it refuses to itself as (beautiful) art, is anti-art (*Antikunst*) (AT 50, 53, 503): the “only works of art that are worth today are those that are no longer works” (PhMU 37), those that deny their *aesthetic*

appearance of beauty. Black art shows that the true aesthetic experience can only become as negation of the values that constituted it traditionally, mainly the pleasure of the beautiful. Adorno condemns the pleasure that arises of the pure, idealized aesthetic experience, and he only considers legitimate the aesthetic pleasure that comes from the negative-utopian burden of art, and that represents an advance of the liberated society.⁹

However, black art has to continue being art. The aesthetic difficulty of this art resides in that it has to balance the aesthetic and the critical/social, to articulate aesthetically the negation of sense; that is to say, to expose in form of aesthetic sense an absurd world. Beckett's *Endgame* is, in opinion of Adorno, an example of this aesthetic construction of the senseless (AT 371). Beckett discovers that the only space that is left for art between the discursive barbarism and the poetic pretence is the indifference of the formal realism, an impression in negative of a completely administered world (AT 55). Paradoxically the aesthetic character consists on breaking the artistic language understood as a veil that should be pulled out to get to the thing, to give the word to pain. In Beckett's opinion, this is the highest goal for an artist of our time.¹⁰ The philosophical reflection can not achieve this goal directly. The contemporary art has especially felt the same expressive dissatisfaction that the philosophy experiences before the concrete. This was what led Picasso, Adorno explains, to stick newspaper cuttings in his pictures, as the only way to give voice to the empiric-social reality (AT 382-3). The price that art pays for transcending its *aesthetic* natural tendency is that its language returns to silence; it is, Adorno writes down using Beckett's words, "*a desecration of silence*" (AT 203). The will of identification that characterizes black art gains access to the thing itself by means of silence. For that reason Beckett asks not to fall in love with language, and he attacks words, that are as scabs that impede the blood to flow, and he claims for a "literature more over this way from words", a "literature of the unword"¹¹, that is to say, a literature where things themselves speak in the words. Only silence shows what the words conceal: the truth, the unspeakable truth. Love to the truth is, according to Beckett, what forces to silence, because we always say too much¹². Beckett identifies black with silence.¹³

Hope of Desperation. Utopia in Black. But it is necessary to speak; better, to scream. The silence only goes against the language/veil. Instead of concealing, the word has to be voice itself of the damaged and repressed reality. Moreover: black art, as alive conscience of pain, that is to say, as truth of the real, is already salvation, hope, utopia. Only this truth in the raw, that expresses the radical art, can modify the conscience of the individuals, that is after all the only practical effectiveness that can become detached from art. The harangues are not worth (AT 360). Kafka is the model that Adorno follows. He has attempted to break the curse of the subject's reification getting in his works that the subject reifies itself. He has not tried to heal the neurosis directly but – by showing it- to look for in her the saving force. He has conquered the enemy by incorporating it (KG 262, 285). For Adorno there is not utopia conscience of the truth: "It serves better to the human thing the fact that men realize about the situation 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 (*ändern*)" (IO 454). The (black) truth is the road toward utopia; the difficult thing is to

cross the false scars, to reach truth. And the main difficulty is fear to the truth, to the horrible truth. There is fear to black art because it tells us about our true situation. We fear the dissonance (*Dissonanz*) –the black thing in music- because it expresses our own condition (*Zustand*), Adorno clarifies, because it expresses horror and misery, and for that reason it is unbearable for us (PhMU 18). We prefer to listen to consonances, which are symbols of the conciliation (PhMU 100), for not knowing anything about pain and the irreconcilable horror, to *overcome* them ... But only the fact of knowing the truth saves us. This is the first mission of the radical art according to Adorno: to serve to the clarification (*Erhellung*), “to convince the world consciously, apparently so luminous, of its own darkness” (PhMU 24).

This conscience of pain is not something intellectual. It is true experience of the real horror in which we are immersed and that the ‘lights of neon’ of the cultural industry try to conceal. Black art redeems by means of truth, expressing pain, being black, horrible, inhuman. If the atrocious features of black art were its “final result” there would only be for us the “historical desperation (*geschichtliches Verzweiflung*)” (AT 66). But it is in the cruelty of that radical art, in the scream that it supposes, in the desperation itself, where Adorno finds hope. Black art is *utopia in black*, hope in black, a black conscience, negative. It is the utopia of the desperate one, “a negative manifestation of utopia” (AT 196). Adorno has written that “the hope (*Hoffnung*) is fundamentally in those who do not get comfort (*trostlosen*)” (MM 253); in those who experience pain, the wounds and in consequence those who deny the real. Let us remember the verses Hölderlin wrote in *Patmos*: “*Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch*”. Adorno, again in paradox form, sustains that “we have not been given hope but for the desperate ones” (KG 252). Only those who feel the blackness of the real are not integrated and can survive. Adorno assumes this statement of Ch. D. Grabbe: “Only desperation can saves us” (GUP 405). Adorno has found in Kafka and Beckett this form of utopia: in their works, the absence of all possibility of flight of the current situation, the absence of all hope, seems to be the last element that is left from a free humanity. The experience of the horror, the desperation, the black, only represent utopia when they are experienced as negation of what it is and promise (broken) of what is not, and not as simple “final result”. Art can only shelter utopia by being black, that is to say, by identifying itself with catastrophe and by rejecting the aesthetic distortion of the real. But it is such the blackening of the real, that “the darkening of the world makes rational the irrationality of art” (AT 35). “The only object today worthy of art, Adorno adds, the inhuman pure, escapes to it in its excess and inhumanity” (MM 163). For that reason art still has to be blacker, more absurd, uglier, because the more it is the more it screams, protests and clamours against the darkness of the world, the only way of founding utopia: “The inhumanity of art should surpass that of the world for man’s love” (PhMU 125). While there is pain and desperation there will also be radical and black art, so that, according to Adorno, “only in a pacified humanity (*befriedeten Menschheit*) art will stop existing; today its death would be the pure being’s victory upon the vision of the conscience that hopes to withstand to it and to oppose to it” (PhMU 24)¹⁴. In our alienated situation, art’s death will mean the absolute victory of what it is, the total integration. However, so disastrous would be its death as its total conversion into ideological art to the system’s service: “A goody day art as such would be preferable to

disappear, than to forget about suffering that is its expression and has its substance in the artistic form” (AT 386-7).

Black art refuses to put a spell to a disenchanted world. It refuses to give to the world the colour that it lost; it refuses to be presented as the false hope of a beautiful world that beautifies this ugly world. Its utopia is black, *anti-aesthetic*. Its aesthetic character –and therefore its utopia- is black, negative. “Already there is not anything about beauty and not about comfort except for the look that, going to the horror, confronts it and, in the non-attenuated conscience of the negativity, it affirms the possibility of the best” (MM 22). The happiness of the black art is in recognizing the misery. Only by denying it affirms, *tollendo ponens*. It makes of the statement of the negative the only possible positivity. The negation is utopia, hope. The negativity or blackness of art, its *methexis* in the dark, it is non-explicit announcement of the catastrophe of the real and at the same time expression of the feasible possible, and it is that, Adorno writes down, “today the real possibility of utopia unites for its last end with the possibility of the total catastrophe” (AT 55-56, 386-7). On the one hand, the black expresses horror, death, the end. In *Endgame*, Clov say: “Do you know what the mother of Pegg died of? Of dark”¹⁵. But on the other hand, in time of the dominion of the identity, only the expression of the horror can save us. This is the ideal of the black that Adorno proposes: black expresses at the same time evil and hope, nothing, death and birth.

NOTES

1. K. Gestner, *Die Formen der Farben: über die Wechselwirkung der visuellen Elemente* (Athenäum: Frankfurt a. M., 1986), 96-7.
2. The quotations of Th. W. Adorno appears in the text according to the following abbreviations:
 AT = *Ästhetische Theorie* (1969), *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 7, (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a. M., 1984).
 DA = *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947), G. S., Bd. 3, 1984.
 GUP = *Gesellschaft, Unterricht, Politik* (1969), *Vermischte Schriften I*, G. S., Bd. 20.I, 1986.
 IO = *Individuum und Organisation* (1953), *Soziologische Schriften I*, G. S., Bd. 8, 1980.
 KG = *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (1949), *Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka (1942/53) und Charakteristik Walter Benjamins* (1950), *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I. Prismen*, G. S., Bd. 10.I, 1977.
 JE = *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (1962/64), G. S., BD. 6, 1977.
 KKA = *Kierkegaard. Konstruktion des Ästhetischen* (1931), G. S., Bd. 2, 1979.
 MM = *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (1944/51), G. S., Bd. 4, 1980.
 ND = *Negative Dialektik* (1966), G. S., Bd. 6.
 PhMU = *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1948), G. S., Bd. 12, 1975.
 PhT = *Philosophische Terminologie. Zur Einleitung* (1962/63), zwei Bände (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1997).
3. See J. Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a. M., 1985), 130.
4. Adorno intended to dedicate *Ästhetische Theorie* to Beckett himself (AT, Editorisches Nachwort, 544).
5. Ch. Menke, *Die Souveränität der Kunst: ästhetische Erfahrung nach Adorno und Derrida* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a. M., 1991), 22.
6. See M. Füllsack, “Adornos ästhetische Theorie von Fortschritt und Reaktion”, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 44, no. 1 (1999): 48.
7. B. Pascal, *Pensées. Oeuvres complètes*, ed. de L. Laffuma (Du Seuil: Paris, 1966), § 139, 518; § 414, 549.
8. S. Beckett, *The unnamable*, (Calder & Boyars: London, 1975), 111.

9. Ch. Menke, *Die Souveränität der Kunst*, 27-8.
10. S. Beckett, "German Letter of 1937", in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (Calder: London, 1983), 52-3.
11. *Ibid.*, 54.
12. S. Beckett, *Molloy* (John Calder: London, 1976), 17.
13. S. Beckett, *The unnamable*, 75, 125.
14. M. Füllsack, "Adornos ästhetische Theorie von Fortschritt und Reaktion", 47.
15. S. Beckett, *Endgame* (Faber & Faber: London, 1976), 49.

António Gutiérrez Pozo
Av. de Kansas City 28, p. 201
41007 – SEVILLA
ESPAÑA
e-mail: agpozo@us.es