

To Shudder in the Sign of Mimesis

Towards a Recovery of Unreduced Experience in Theodor W. Adorno

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In the last decades, an enthusiastic and undivided attention has been firmly dedicated to Adorno's notion of mimesis. Highly enigmatic and resistant to an easy comprehension, this concept has often been regarded as a fundamental cornerstone of Adorno's philosophy. In actual fact, the meanings and uses he has endowed the term with are so pervasive and diffuse that its imbrication in Adorno's main philosophemes transcends the strict realm of art, showing a substantial entanglement between the aesthetic dimension and the epistemic, the anthropological and the social ones. More precisely, this paper aims to investigate his specific conception of mimesis as that faculty that could contribute to heal that historical process of experiential impoverishment that affects modern life. To the mimetic comportment Adorno associates a productive openness to the other that allows the subject to touch and to be touched by the object, without coercively subsuming it. Thereby, through a renewed interplay between mimesis and rationality, Adorno hopes to restore the possibility of a full and unreduced experience.

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1. Introduction

The peculiar role of mimesis has been recognized quite soon in the history of Western philosophy: Aristotle's well-known account in his *Poetics* marked a rather significant milestone in the theorization of the concept, which became the fundamental notion of his art theory¹. Henceforth, mimesis has been a constant source of interest both in the artistic practice and in the aesthetic reflection: at first, for several centuries, as the prime mover of the creative process; and later, as a polemical target, liable to be completely rejected. That mimesis has faced a controversial reception finds evidence already in Plato's harsh criticism, no less than in the profound suspicions, harboured by the contemporary poststructuralist tradition. Such reluctance towards mimesis is, however, counterbalanced by the representatives of the Frankfurt Critical Theory, who praised the mimetic instance as a strategic resource in order to critically contrast the pervasive power of a rationality that has become merely instrumental².

Among the various intellectuals that have gravitated around the Institute of Social Research and that have tirelessly worked on the concept of mimesis, it is impossible not to mention Theodor W. Adorno, who has been «perhaps the most dazzling of them all [...] the most alluring and surely the most complex representative of critical theory»³. To him, then, I will dedicate the argumentative path of my paper. At a closer look, though, taken in its entirety, my purpose risks to be far too pretentious: to the constitutive

¹ G. Koch, M. Vöhler, C. Voss, *Zur Einführung: Die Mimesis und Ihre Künste*, in id. (hrsg. v.), *Die Mimesis und ihre Künste*, Brill Fink, Paderborn 2010, p. 9.

² M. Jay, *Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe*, in T. Huhn, L. Zuidervaart (ed. by), *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1997, p. 30.

³ S. E. Bronner, *Of Critical Theory and its Theorists*, Blackwell, Oxford 1994, p. 180.

indeterminacy and plurivocity that the term “mimesis” has historically shown⁴, Adorno adds a further factor of complexity. That is to say that his typical constellative way of thinking takes one of its most challenging shapes right in the concept of mimesis, that defies then any effortless understanding. *De facto*, this means that in Adorno’s overall philosophical production it is possible to detect multiple uses and meanings, all related to that same notion, which therefore resists to a settled and static definition.

Such an intrinsic enigmaticity has aroused many scholars’ enthusiastic interest, which has culminated in the publication of several studies⁵ that have tried to map all possible equivocations of the term in Adorno’s texts. Among them, art surely owns a privileged position in appearing as the most evident correlate of mimesis. This is true above all in *Aesthetic Theory*. Here, Adorno notoriously defines art as «a refuge for mimetic comportment»⁶, addressing once more the former as that instance of theoretical, ethical and aesthetical resistance against the reification and identification of the administered world. And yet, the argumentative structure of the present paper chooses to concentrate on specific angle of the mimetic question in Adorno that does not confine it in the sole realm of art, but, on the contrary, it exhibits its substantial imbrication with the aesthetic, the social, the anthropological and the epistemic dimensions.

More precisely, my intent is to let such constitutive and productive entanglement emerge in all its strength by pointing out the value that Adorno accords to mimesis in relation to that crucial issue that permeates his entire reflection, namely today’s withering of experience. In order to account for my interpretation, I will present a detailed analysis of the last segments of *Aesthetic Theory*’s excursus, *Theories on the Origin of Art*, that state as follows:

Ratio without mimesis is self-negating. Ends, the *raison d’être* of *raison*, are qualitative, and mimetic power is effectively the power of qualitative distinction. The self-negation of reason clearly has its historical necessity: the world, which is objectively losing its openness, no longer has need of a spirit that is defined by its openness; indeed, it can scarcely put up with the traces of that spirit. With regard to its subjective side, the contemporary loss of experience

⁴ To elaborate more on some of the possible heterogenous meanings that mimesis has taken on, see G. Gebauer, C. Wulf, *Mimesis: The History of a Notion*, 2013, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3698687>

⁵ See, for example: A. Huyssen, *Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno*, in “New German Critique”, LXXXI, 2000, pp. 65-82: 66-67; or B. P. Paudyal, *Mimesis in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory*, in “Journal of Philosophy”, IV/8, 2009, pp. 1-10: 3.

⁶ T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), ed. and transl. by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Continuum, London-New York 2002, p. 53.

may largely coincide with the bitter repression of mimesis that takes the place of its metamorphosis. What in various sectors of German ideology is still called an artistic sensibility is just this repression of mimesis raised to a principle, as which it is transformed into artistic insensibility. Aesthetic comportment, however, is neither immediately mimesis nor its repression but rather the process that mimesis sets in motion and in which, modified, mimesis is preserved. [...] Ultimately, aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the capacity to shudder, as if goose bumps were the first aesthetic image. [...] Consciousness without shudder is reified consciousness. That shudder in which subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity is the act of being touched by the other. Aesthetic comportment assimilates itself to that other rather than subordinating it. Such a constitutive relation of the subject to objectivity in aesthetic comportment joins eros and knowledge⁷.

2. The contemporary loss of experience and the repression of mimesis

The first point I intend to comment on is Adorno's eloquent juxtaposition between the repression of mimesis and what he deems to be today's withering of experience. By that, Adorno means an ongoing historical process, because of which «[t]he marrow of experience has been sucked out»⁸. To really grasp its implications, it is necessary to deepen his conception of experience, starting by reminding the – rather decisive – nuance of meaning that the German language provides in this respect. That is to say that the term Adorno specifically uses is *Erfahrung*, in open polemic with the notion of experience as *Erlebnis*, which represents the distinctive feature of *Lebensphilosophie*, a frequent target of Adorno's criticism. In that noun, the verb *erleben* resounds powerfully, revealing its experiential connotation in terms of lived experience with highly subjective and punctual character, i.e. endowed with an immediacy without narrative continuity over time. Rather different implications are instead associated with the use of the concept *Erfahrung* that are discernible already from the verb that designates it. More precisely, the act of *erfahren* refers to an experience that values its processual being, the action of travelling a path, indeed. In such a conception, thus, much more significant than the outcome *per se* becomes that experiential accumulation that gathers in the unfolding of the process itself.

In line already with Hegel's idea, the experiential moment is for Adorno as far distant from the cold empiricist conception as it is from that of an originary or ontological

⁷ *Ivi*, p. 331.

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 31.

experience in the Heideggerian sense. In the same way, neither is it identified with the narrowness of its logical-cognitive traits. Inherent to the notion Adorno champions, then, is rather the idea that full experience does not involve the individual in its isolation, but it is nourished in the interdependence of unreduced subjects with each other and with the external world. However, precisely of the experience in its fullest and most meaningful sense Adorno perceives the systematised decay. That the latter has been dying out is according to him index of a more generalized crisis of modern life, where reason has become incapable of reflecting critically upon itself, reaching as a result its sedimentation into a purely instrumental rationality.

Thereby, thinking and knowing have come to correspond to merely identification and classification operations, whose object must be then shaped to conform to the principle of universal iterability. To this end, any particular quality is expunged: working under the strict logic of quantification, the means-end rationality tends to eliminate qualities and to transform them into measurable properties. What remains then is nothing more than effectively quantifiable and, therefore, perfectly manipulable matter. In doing so, the latter is effortlessly integrated by the hypertrophic *ratio* which, in order to fulfil its ambition of becoming an all-encompassing system, must absorb everything that differs from it, homologating it to itself. Except that, as Adorno's harsh criticism points out, by giving course to its identity impulse, that is to say by making everything real conceptually assimilable, thinking resolves itself into an empty tautological mechanism⁹. In other words, by ferociously colonising its otherness, the thought has actually ended up damaging itself as well. Briefly, in order to eliminate any roughness that might affect its well-oiled gear, the sclerotic form of rationality proceeds with the removal of the qualitative. However, «a thinking in which we do not think qualitatively is already emasculated and at odds with itself»¹⁰.

If until now I have examined how this process of mutilation towards the qualitatively different takes place in the realm of pure thinking, Adorno's gaze sees it at work elsewhere too. More precisely, the coercion to identification finds its counterpart in the standardisation and homologation in social reality. Thereby, Adorno stresses the pervasiveness of this degenerated form of rationality that penetrates all dimensions of life,

⁹ Adorno expresses this key idea on several occasions, among which for example: T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1966), transl. by E. B. Ashton, Routledge, London-New York 2004, pp. 54, 184.

¹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 43.

not least the social totality, which has turned into a fully administered world¹¹. Consequently, the intransigence of the reified spirit towards everything that is not immediately subsumable in it runs rampant in the administered world too, where it is again the individual who pays the highest price. The process of alienation that the latter undergoes deprives him of every qualitative instance that threatens to evade serial planning. The result of such a distorting operation is nothing but neutral and interchangeable beings, perfectly integrated into conceptual schemes¹².

In short, the prevailing suppression of the qualitative, of the diffuse, of the non-subsumable in favour of a deadly and indistinct homologation leads to a substantial neglect of what is non-conceptual, material, concrete: namely, one could say, to a general anaesthetisation that contributes to the aforementioned experiential pauperization. As the excerpt cited above claims, from the subjective point of view, there is a deep correspondence between such experiential withering and the repression of the mimesis. At a closer look, the middle term that relates the two is the qualitative: on the one hand, the experience gets mutilated right in its qualitative dimension; on the other, in Adorno's own words, mimesis appears precisely as that «power of qualitative distinction»¹³. Accordingly, the next paragraph will help us better understand this significative imbrication.

3. Rethinking con-tact

As already stated, objectively, we have assisted to a deformation of rationality that has hypostatized its means as ends: this is the sense of an instrumental rationality, except that, according to Adorno, ends are precisely the qualitative, which is thus repressed in favour of the quantitative. However, such tendency to universal quantification finds its fitting subjective correlate in the «reduction of the knower to a purely logical universal without qualities»¹⁴. Thereby, the limitation of the subject in its transcendental form affects also its capacity to experience and to know the object, since, in Adorno's view, getting a real

¹¹ M. J. Thompson, *Adorno's Reception of Weber and Lukács*, in P. E. Gordon, E. Hammer, M. Pensky (ed. by), *A Companion to Adorno*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken 2020, p. 224.

¹² M. Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002, p. 149.

¹³ T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, cit., p. 331.

¹⁴ T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, cit., p. 44.

access to the latter would mean «to do justice to the object's qualitative moments»¹⁵. Instead of that, the modern subject proceeds to a coercive subsumption of the object itself: an operation that historically and logically follows the Cartesian surgical hiatus between the two.

In short, Adorno warns us about the incontrovertible threat whereby the world is growing more and more ossified in a tautological abstractness, closing itself in a reiterative ever-sameness. By striving towards an all-encompassing domination, hypertrophied *ratio* turns against what is different, denying it right in its difference: the former is not thus anymore capable of an open and non-possessive contact with its other. And yet, as Adorno claims, such an autocratic attitude of thought «implies an impoverishment of thought [itself] no less than of experience; the separation of the two realms leaves both damaged»¹⁶. This is why, conversely, Adorno strongly envisages only a «thought that is fully saturated with experience»¹⁷. To be clear, this saturation does not consist in a blind anabasis in the isolated experiential datum, which would be just the exact equivalent of spiritual absolutism, but in a conceptual work that finds in the material and historical stratum its fuel to proceed productively. Thereby, the acquired awareness of the non-self-sufficiency of the hypertrophic concept is the moment in which thought clashes with the constriction of what is outside thought itself¹⁸. This friction, as fruitful experience, sets off the spark of critical reflection, namely the realisation of the necessity for thought to innervate and be innervated by those qualitative, material and concrete components that participate in the fullest sense of rationality and of historical and social reality.

In order to account for such possibility then, it is fundamental to rethink the contact with the otherness. For under the sclerotic form of *ratio* described so far, or, in other words, «under the law of pure functionality», it is now ascertained that things «assume a form that limits contact with them to mere operation»¹⁹ and captures them in pre-regulated schemes. In such a context of rigid closure and reiteration, it is not a coincidence, hence, that instrumental reason manifests a profound intolerance towards what Adorno loosely

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 43.

¹⁶ M. Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, cit., p. 28.

¹⁷ T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, cit., p. 349.

¹⁸ R. Foster, *Adorno. The Recovery of Experience*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2007, p. 178.

¹⁹ T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life*, Verso, London-New York 2005, p. 40.

understands as substantial openness to the object, namely mimesis²⁰, which has therefore undergone a fate of repression in the administered world.

However, to be more precise, what does this openness consist of, exactly? As a deeply historical category, mimesis has taken on several features and nuances of meaning in correspondence to different historical moments. Nonetheless, it is impossible not to grasp a recurrent and constant trait of its, which depicts it as a more sympathetic, attentive and noncoercive relationship of non-conceptual affinity between particulars, without reifying them in a logic of subject/object dualism²¹. This is reflected actually in the way Adorno refers to the mimetic comportment: not as imitation in terms of identical reproduction of something, of mere identification with something, but rather as the gesture of making itself similar to it²². Such behaviour accounts indeed for an attention towards what is other and, accordingly, for a willingness to assimilate it and to be assimilated by it, finally to merge into it. Briefly, it does attest «an attitude toward reality distinct from the fixated antithesis of subject and object»²³.

Notwithstanding, as Adorno puts it, as much as instrumental *ratio* operates to get rid of the mimetic element, a certain affinity between the knower and the known is however unavoidable. Or else, no understanding between them would be absolutely possible. Thereby, this passage marks one of the pivotal points in Adorno's reflection on mimesis, that is its decisive blend with reason during a secularization process. Of course, what Adorno means by reason here is not the sclerotic deformation of the latter, which in its struggle against mimesis does not realize that it itself relapses into being its apparent opposite, however in a distorted form: mimesis of death²⁴. Imitating death, in this sense, represents the cyclical perpetuation of reified relations in the administered world, where experience has already lost all its vitality and fertility.

So, if mimesis needs to be grasped in its historical imbrication with the rational, this latter would be the rationality in its fullest and worthiest form, instead. Thanks to their interaction, mimesis as power of qualitative distinction is paradoxically supplemented by that very conceptual that seems to be its fiercest antagonist, but it alone can provide «the

²⁰ O. Hulatt, *Reason, Mimesis, and Self-Preservation in Adorno*, in "Journal of the History of Philosophy", LIV/1, 2016, pp. 135-151: 142.

²¹ M. Jay, *Mimesis and Mimetology*, cit., p. 32.

²² T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, cit., p. 111.

²³ *Ivi*, p. 110.

²⁴ M. Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, cit., p. 44.

logical organ for the relation of genus, species, and *differentia specifica*»²⁵ that brings the process of discrimination to complete maturity. Since only difference and the recognition of difference itself could be the appropriate philosophical response to that overwhelming sameness²⁶, Adorno deems the mimetic faculty necessary precisely to allow – epistemic and physical – contact with the particularity that refuses to be absorbed by concepts without remainders.

At the same time, however, mimesis is not sufficient unto itself either: in truth, Adorno does not theorize an irrational or a-rational return to a mimetic approach like in the archaic phase, denying thereby the whole course of civilization, as someone has conversely claimed²⁷. The role of mimesis in Adorno's thought is rather to be sought in its essential contribution to the generation and constitution of reason, no less than to the impellent restoration of the latter. In this regard, concepts should adopt mimesis' attention to differences, which are perceived in their distinction and in their interrelation at once, without being brought to a unifying collapse²⁸. In the enactment of such process of discrimination then, where the mimetic impulse mediated through rationality finds its refuge, Adorno sees the potential to recover the subjective capacity to really experience the object.

4. The aestheticity of goose bumps

As stated above, mimesis is decisive for a contact with the external world that significantly differs from the anaesthetic one that is however predominant in today's administered world. Under such aspect, mimesis shows the value of its contribution to Adorno's investigation on the possibility of an unreduced experience precisely in the realm of aesthetics. In this respect, it is worth referring again to the passage we have selected from *Aesthetic Theory*, that once more proves to be highly eloquent. Here, Adorno explicitly addresses the question of the aesthetic comportment as that peculiar instance where mimesis has already overcome its most immediate form, but at the same

²⁵ T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, cit., p. 45.

²⁶ L. Goehr, *Dissonant Works and the Listening Public*, in T. Hunh (ed. by), *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 223.

²⁷ See, for example, D. Roberts, *Art and Enlightenment: Aesthetic Theory after Adorno*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1991, p. 70.

²⁸ M. Jay, *Mimesis and Mimetology*, cit., p. 31.

time it does not incur in the contemporary prohibition and taboo. Consequently, in the aesthetic comportment Adorno finds the most fruitful evidence of the inextricable bound between mimesis and a non-reified rationality that is still capable of critical self-reflection.

Nonetheless, the Frankfurt philosopher does not simply report that in such an aesthetic behaviour mimesis is indeed preserved, but he also makes explicit how: immediately thereafter, the former is described as that capacity to shudder. This is a really dense juncture in Adorno's reasoning that deserves to be analysed more closely to grasp all its pivotal implications. In this regard, the first element I intend to examine more in depth is, of course, the shudder. The reference to the latter points directly to the source that triggers such epidermal phenomenon and that is of the utmost interest for my argumentation, namely the – albeit tangential – contact with what is other from ourselves and that we do not expect. Hence, the aesthetic has inherited from mimesis the disposition to an open encounter with object that affects the subject in a tangible way: in this sense, the aesthetic experience of shuddering bears a decisive epistemological value²⁹. The goose bumps, which Adorno speaks of as the first aesthetic image, represent the actual evidence that a productive touch has indeed occurred, that is to say a full experiential process that has left behind the perceivable debris of its enactment, which does not take place just in the empty space of concepts.

At a closer look, however, Adorno depicts the shudder in terms of a capacity. This implies, thus, a strong intrinsic historical dimension: today, that human capacity to engage contact with the other has been roughly sedated, especially since it imposes itself as an inherently qualitative, aesthetic, sensual and tactile act³⁰. And yet, Adorno does not exclude *a priori* the possibility of rescuing the reified consciousness that has lost the ability to shudder: by letting the modified mimesis operate through the aesthetic comportment, the subject could regain an unreduced access to the object. Except that, the subject involved in such an experiential encounter is quite significantly different from the transcendental subject that characterizes the instrumental rationality. In harsh contrast with the latter, the subject of the mediated mimesis does preserve its somatic and sensuous

²⁹ S. Singh, *The Aesthetic Experience of Shudder Adorno and the Kantian Sublime*, in N. Ross (ed. by), *The Aesthetic Ground of Critical Theory: New Readings of Benjamin and Adorno*, Rowman & Littlefield, London-New York 2015, p. 129.

³⁰ G. Matteucci, *L'utopia dell'estetico in Adorno*, in "Rivoluzioni Molecolari", I, 2017, p. 3.

element: as it clearly appears already in the image of the goose bumps, the human body entails a pivotal role in the mimetic interaction between the self and the external world³¹.

Actually, this should come as no surprise at all, for a genuine capacity to experience object again, which Adorno does strive for, can be performed exclusively by a complete (*voll*) subject. By that, he means obviously a subjective pole that has recognized the mutilating alienation of a strictly logical absolutism and, therefore, that aims to recuperate its qualitative determinations, in order to be able to appreciate those in the object. Accordingly, the integrity of the subject encompasses not just its cognitive aspect, but also its corporeal, sensitive and sensual one, in other words, its body. Since the latter is our first mediation to get in touch with the external reality, it goes without saying that it plays a vital function in the mimetic and aesthetic process. In that regard, I would like to stress also the anthropological value that such imbrication between aesthetics, mimesis and human body expresses. Therefore, I tend to disagree with Simon Mussell, who believes that Adorno's deployment of mimesis becomes less anthropologically directed when it deals with aesthetic experience³². For sure, in terms of quantity, the passages I am commenting on do not present the socio-anthropological inquiry that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has gotten us used to. Nevertheless, in terms of significance, I do not find the former any less remarkable.

With Mussel, however, I do agree on what concerns his comment on Habermas' influential criticisms of mimesis. Recalling Habermas' substantial dismissal of the latter as a critically unhelpful impulse, completely opposite to reason³³, Mussel rightly stresses the erroneous simplification that this concept has consequently undergone. The crucial misinterpretation that Habermas has put forward lies in reading Adorno's notion of mimesis purely and simply in the sense of imitation to the point that the former goes so far as using the two terms interchangeably. As Mussel agreeably claims, imitation does account for some traits of mimesis³⁴: this is true, for example, if we refer to its archaic form or to its connotation as natural mimicry, where the subject really pursues an external resemblance up to a complete indifference with its *desideratum* (environment, inanimate

³¹ M. Jay, *Mimesis and Mimetology*, cit., pp. 32-33.

³² S. Mussell, *Mimesis Reconsidered: Adorno and Tarkovsky contra Habermas*, in "Film-Philosophy", XVII/1, 2013, pp. 212-233: 215.

³³ J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), vol. 1 (*Reason and the Rationalization of Society*), transl. by T. McCarthy, Beacon Press, Boston 1984, p. 390.

³⁴ S. Mussell, *Mimesis Reconsidered*, cit., p. 216.

object, living being etc.). And yet, the mere sense of imitation does not do justice to the conception that Adorno actually elaborates for the notion of mimesis, as the excerpt above paradigmatically exemplifies.

Hence, the aesthetic comportment, which through the mediation of reason inherits the mimetic element, places the emphasis on the latter as a configurational force, which fuels a praxis that is able to establish a genuine interconnection between subject and object. Thereby, in this specific experiential process, the former does undergo a moment of passivity that results from the unexpected contact with the objective otherness. However, such passivity is at the same time susceptible of provoking some active response from the subject, whose reaction physically appears in the goose bumps. As Adorno suggests, the latter testifies a modality of encounter between the subjective and objective instances that essentially differs from the violent subjective coercion to identification. Accordingly, the subject in its shudder acknowledges the experience with an alterity that always remains to some extent negative, namely resistant to a full conceptual appropriation.

Therefore, by alluding to what permanently fleets the hypertrophic *ratio*, mimesis plays a pivotal function in decentering the autarchic constitutive subject, soliciting a consequent radical reconfiguration of the traditional epistemological pair. Such an operative trait of mimesis acts especially in the aesthetic comportment that engages the subject and the object in a relationship of co-constitution, where the differences between them are conserved in a way that the two poles do not collapse in a deadly identification. However, preserving their distinction in the sense of a *differentia specifica* mentioned above does not imply the impossibility of any interrelation between them. On the contrary, thanks to the mimetic impulse, subject and object are caught in a substantial affinity that maintains nonetheless their non-identity: such is the power of the qualitative distinction that Adorno attributes to the modified mimesis.

Thus, moving to the conclusions, the aesthetic comportment that recognizes the value of the latter does open up the possibility of a relation that fruitfully «joins eros and knowledge»³⁵. On the basis of what might be called a qualitative contact with otherness that the aesthetic inherits from mimesis, one is prompted to radically rethink not only the epistemological pair *par excellence*, but also the ideal of knowledge to which they lead. This is the sense of the erotic moment raised by Adorno, which stands for those

³⁵ T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, cit., p. 349.

dimensions of the somatic, of the sensual, of the material: in short, for everything that falls victim of the universal quantification process but that is conversely rescued through an aesthetic approach. Accordingly, instead of continuing to perpetuate the split between spirit and body, between knowledge and eros, always in favour of the first poles, Adorno insists that the «somatic moment as the not purely cognitive part of cognition is irreducible»³⁶. Not only does it persist then, but it does so «in knowledge, as the unrest that makes knowledge move, the unassuaged unrest that reproduces itself in the advancement of knowledge»³⁷. Thereby, Adorno's thought proves to be firmly rooted in the experiential stratum, belying those contemporary suspicions that reduce it to a pure categorical effort³⁸. As a matter of fact, Adorno points to the aesthetic as the modality through which the erotic moment co-operates with the cognitive, in a logic that does not catch them in mutual idiosyncrasy. In other words, by means of an aesthetic reconsideration, he advances the attempt at a critical understanding of experience, namely of knowledge in its meaningful sense, which, in taking on all aspects of the real, also contemplates a possible surplus of and in the latter.

Last but not least, we could ultimately very well remark that Adorno identifies in the aesthetic way of comportment the chance for a renewed interplay between subject and object too: one, in which a subject – complete, in its turn – engages with the object in its entirety and not just in narrowness of its logical-cognitive traits. As my reasoning has hopefully shown, the contribution of mimesis in this radical reconsideration of the subject-object relationship is rather decisive. Posited in constellation together, Adorno says, reason and mimesis make up for the deficiencies of the other³⁹. In particular, in the argumentation I have proposed, mimesis helps the subjective rationality restoring a genuine connection with its correlate. Among the many nuances that can be traced in Adorno's thought then, mimesis does represent also and above all a critical force, deeply rooted in the history of human civilization, which today has become necessary to regain a full and unreduced experience of the object.

³⁶ T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, cit., p. 193.

³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 203.

³⁸ R. Crawford, *Index of the Contemporary: Adorno, Art, Natural History*, in "Evental Aesthetics", VII/2, 2018, pp. 32-71: 46.

³⁹ M. Jay, *Mimesis and Mimetology*, cit., p. 46.