

Article

Concerning Some Marrano Threads in The Aesthetic Theory of Theodor W. Adorno

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Received: 11 January 2019; Accepted: 5 March 2019; Published: 9 March 2019



Abstract: This article is an attempt to re-read the magnum opus of Adorno's philosophy, namely *Aesthetic Theory*, using an interpretative key offered by Agata Bielik-Robson's book entitled *Jewish Cryptotheologies of Late Modernity: Philosophical Marranos*. This interpretative key, called by the Author *The Marrano Strategy* implemented to Adorno's late philosophy allows us to investigate the common points of Adorno's theory of art criticism and modern Jewish thought. Therefore the main question of this text concerns the characteristics of Jewishness and messianicity (Scholem, Derrida) in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. The thesis that I am attempting to justify is as follows: the implementation of *Marrano strategy* to the modern art criticism redefines and reverses the relationship between the particular element and the universal domain. Consequently, this dialectical 'appreciation' of the particular establishes a common conceptual field for critical thinking and traditional, religious motifs.

Keywords: Adorno; Bielik-Robson; Marranism; modernity; aesthetic theory; negative dialectics

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

Theodor W. Adorno, "Minima Moralia"¹

The aim of this paper is to present the implementation of the philosophically most important principles of the so-called *Marrano strategy* in the aesthetic thought of Theodor W. Adorno. My definition of this strategy, or the interpretive key, allowing a different reading of modernity, is based on Agata Bielik-Robson's definition. I attempt to support the author's general thought presented in her paper with examples of specific methodological solutions from Adorno's last book, in my opinion the most important, namely *Aesthetic Theory*. Thus, I point to the legitimacy of this still unpopular "reading" of modernity—its philosophy and art. The work is divided into two main parts. In the first part, I describe the specificity of Jewish thought, as defined by Bielik-Robson, focusing on the answer to the question of how language, interpretation, and criticism are understood in this thought. Against this background, in the second part, I discuss in detail the threads of Jewish nominalism in the concept of Adorno's art, selected and considered by me to be the most important in this context. The thesis that I am trying to justify is as follows: the value that the Marranic interpretation of late modern thought brings is the redefinition and reversal of the relationship between the individual

¹ See: (Adorno 2006, Aphorism no. 153, *Finale*, p. 247).

element, the particular element and the universal, general, conceptual domain. Finally, the valorization of what is individual makes it possible to describe the process of acquiring subjectivity as not based on subordination, hierarchy, or exclusion.

1. “Third Language”—Cryptotheology as Modernity Cipher

In the book *Jewish Cryptotheologies of Late Modernity: Philosophical Marranos*, Agata Bielik-Robson describes Jewish philosophy as a “third language”. The simplest way to illustrate the specificity of this thought is as follows: if there is a special Jewish perspective of experiencing the world, it is the “place” that corresponds to the “in between” location. It is a crevice in which the falling light of idealistic and post-idealistic Western thought refracts, creating unique constellations, but it does not disappear. Putting aside the metaphors, the Jewishness of philosophy is described by the author as a connection between anti-philosophy and “counter-philosophy”. The author defines the philosophy, of which both tendencies oppose when combined, by describing its Greek genesis and special heritage:

“The mixture of anti-philosophy, which explicitly declares war against the Greek genre of thinking, and counter-philosophy, which implicitly engages in creating counter-arguments, aimed to oppose the Greek vision of the uncreated cosmos, will become a characteristic feature of this uneasy, deeply troubled thing we call, for the lack of a better name, ‘Jewish philosophy’, from the Hellenistic times of Philo of Alexandria up to the postmodern, neo-Alexandrian times of Lévinas and Derrida.”²

The vision of the uncreated cosmos, rejected by Jewish philosophy, is described here as a typically Greek amalgam of beliefs about the cyclicity and natural unity of the cosmos. This rejection is simultaneously the “anti-philosophy” element, proposing a different presentation of the myth of the beginning. Using this simple “pedagogical” distinction, she speaks about heritage in the “counter-philosophy” paradigm. The author questions the possibility and further even undermines the necessity and value of rejecting what she calls “the argumentative form of the ‘Greek wisdom’”. Therefore, the “counter-philosophy” part in the characteristics of Jewish philosophy means that the format of Jewish philosophy is Greek in nature, takes over the ontological-epistemological issues typical of Western continental philosophy, and hence also the above-mentioned form of argumentation. At the same time, it remains the opposite, a “mirror image” of Western thought, a proposal for a different perspective on classical Greek-Christian metaphysical problems. This otherness—peculiarity, to put it more clearly—gives voice to the Jewish thought. The author is convinced that:

“The situation of ‘Jewish philosophy’ is exactly like the one described by Reznikoff: it is the singular predicament of the ‘third language’ in which Jewish thinkers talk Hebrew in words, concepts and arguments bequeathed to them by Greek philosophers. (. . .) the fusion is inseparable, as indeed in a true marriage, and that ‘talking Hebrew in every language under the sun’ does not leave the Jewish component untransformed.”³

For Bielik-Robson, the position of the third language occupied by Jewish philosophy means this “instantaneous bilingualism”, the “in-between”, influenced by native tradition and orthodox faith in the revealed truth⁴, and the freedom of beloved thinking, a freed metaphysical speculation with Greek roots.

Together with the author, we have reached the first important point of these considerations. Bielik-Robson defines the meaning of Greek-Jewish dilation, the third language, by comparing it to the

² (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 2).

³ (Bielik-Robson 2014, pp. 3–4).

⁴ As we will see in the further part of the essay, this relationship will be rich in philosophical consequences. Particularly, when we transcribe Scholem’s category of commentary into Adorno’s concept of art criticism. See: (Scholem 1976), see also: (Adorno 2002, pp. 22–33, 193–97).

principle of Marranism. Marranos, Spanish Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity, retained their traditional faith, Judaism, under the surface of the official religion—they used a language of ideas that was strange to them but thought in Jewish. So, the subversion was bidirectional. The language that was foreign to them “deformed” their learning, and their specific tradition influenced the way they moved around the territory they had inherited, whether they wanted to or not. The last heir of Marranism understood in this way was Derrida, who somewhat ironically called himself Marrano. After all, Bielik-Robson means to narrow the consideration of Marranism to the field of philosophy. The author characterizes his philosophical Marranism, as well as the philosophical Marranism of his predecessors—Spinoza’s, or Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s—in the spirit of the above considerations:

“The last one of this great philosophical line, Jacques Derrida, openly claimed to be ‘a sort of marrane of French Catholic culture’, and this declaration prompted him to articulate this peculiar experience of the ‘third language’, which we would like to call a ‘philosophical Marranism’—to denote a type of thinker, like himself, who will never break through the Joycean ‘Jew-Greek, Greek-Jew’ confusion, but nonetheless will try to turn it into his advantage. That is, to marry the speech of strangers and let the Hebrew talk through it: to do counter-philosophy with the help of philosophy.”⁵

The Marranic metaphor best describes the topos and ethos of Jewish philosophy. As I noted, the author writes that the phenomenon of marriage is reflected in deliberations on language. In other words, what defines the specificity of Jewish philosophizing, is in reflection on forms of thinking. The language will also contain the baggage of ideas of strictly Jewish tradition and the method of secretly maintaining them will ultimately be a way they are pronounced, which, by doubling the official discourse, is not available to everyone. The problem, then, will be assimilation in the language without losing what defines a specific identity—a challenge between what is inherited and what is adopted for various historically relevant reasons and goals. As a first step, the nature of the Marrano strategy’s “in-between” (full assimilation and orthodoxy) location should also be specified. This is an important problem posed by the philosophical position of the formula of the assumed universality of philosophical language. Universalization, as understood, for example by Hegel, is to be connected with the process of individualization not only of its own, but also of what is particular, detailed, universalized. However, as we know, for example from the *Dialectics of the Enlightenment*, this process historically ends in total failure. This simply happened because the marriage of the universal and the particular was characterized by symbolic, material, and physical violence towards the one striving to be recognized as a unit, an individual, in the name of the generality, such as the state “organism” or the so-called “nation”, or this or other political system claiming the right to the only rightful one. The linguistic Marrano strategy, on the other hand, by questioning individualization in terms of the philosophical discourse itself, undermines its founding a priori general position by not directly expressing the subversive formula of the subjectification process: the particular, i.e., non-conceptual, is now to set the direction and to determine the process of individualization. The question emerges and repeats itself along with the need to establish the “identity” of these “strangers”, “others” being the philosophical Marranos in Europe, philosophizing Jews who do not accept the conceptually idealistic scheme of unsuccessful individualization. Following the needs of this philosophical diaspora and responding to its mentioned location (“in-between”), the attempts to combine the universal and the particular are not abandoned. The proposal to give subjectivity to the “strange” of Western continental philosophy is one that derives from its Marranic nature, which it wants to preserve not only for its own benefit but also to save the compromised Western culture.⁶ The author characterizes this marriage, again using the arguments of Derrida, the last, in her opinion, who used the Marrano strategy to the fullest extent to combine these two tasks:

⁵ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 4).

⁶ (Bielik-Robson 2014, pp. 18–19).

Derrida is particularly useful here, mostly because of his openly declared linguistic promiscuity. By discarding faithfulness to any monolingual tradition, he stands firmly on the post-Babelian grounds of the dispersion of idioms that can approach universality only horizontally: not by assuming a transcendent and superior meta-position, but by engaging in clashes and stormy ‘marriages’. There is no such thing as a homogenous universal language. Yet universality can be approached by ‘marrying the speeches of strangers’, which completes the broken whole on the horizontal level, without usurping the God-like point of view hovering over the clamour of differences. As Walter Benjamin says in ‘The Task of the Translator’ (. . .), the only possible strategy of universalization rests on the awareness of particularity of all languages, which then lend themselves to the practices of translation (*Übersetzung*) and completion (*Ergänzung*). The universal can only be made out of the patchwork of mutually strange idioms that are forced into ‘marriage’ by the translator.⁷

The above-mentioned marriage is characterized by non-hierarchicality, changeability, and openness. Equally important is the leading element in the process of individualization, the process of which this marriage is a “project”. If, in the mainstream of Western continental thought (idealistic or, more specifically—Hegelian) it is a general, supra-unit element, then here, the particular, detailed element gains value:

“To reach universality does not mean to escape the confusion in a vertical manner but to stay at its level and work through the differences it creates. This is precisely the paradox of what we will call here a ‘Marrano strategy’. The uneasy and deeply problematic discipline of thought called ‘Jewish philosophy’ became gradually so unhappy with its own nomenclature that it began to claim universality, a true universality, so far unmatched by any language declaring to be universal: philosophy or Christianity. These ‘philosophical Marranos’, always accused of soiling the universal form of philosophy and its Christian avatar with parochial Hebrew content, eventually turned this accusation to their own advantage and formulated their standpoint as follows: at least we know we are particular and can start from there, while you, our accusers, remain mistaken as to your own alleged universality and thus can never know or doubt your presuppositions. In fact, the whole evolution of modern Jewish thought can be seen as the shift in regard to the issue of universality.”⁸

The universality referred to by the author has nothing to do with the order in which the non-conceptual is subordinated to systemic regulation. If universality is to be looked after, it should be its constellationary, messianic formula.⁹ The author characterizes the Marrano strategy in such a convention—as a form of messianism—saving what is strange in the face of the assumed universal order, by emphasizing the value of the particular in the process of the multiplication of discourses, that is, as a post-Babelic turn in the very kernel of universalization—towards the primacy of what is strange, different, and special in this process.¹⁰ A life-giving strategy against the ontological status quo, altered for all cases of uniformity and sameness is to turn towards the non-identical, the “non-finalizable”, the open. The possible, and what can never be identified in spite of utopia and closed in a single story of reconciliation, is always to take precedence. In this movement, apart from emphasizing the primacy of non-identity and difference, according to the movement of appreciating the particular

⁷ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 5).

⁸ (Bielik-Robson 2014, pp. 6–7).

⁹ See: (Adorno 2004, pp. 162–66); Adorno took the idea of constellationary language of pure names mostly from W. Benjamin. Far more important is that Benjamin was inspired by the Kabbalistic and mystical concept of language. The first is the mystical conception of language by the Magus of the North, J. G. Hamann, as proposed in his *Biblische Untersuchungen*. The second is the idea of language held by the Cabbalist Franz Joseph Molitor, expounded in the seventh chapter of his *History of Philosophy* entitled “Über den Ursprung der Sprache und Schrift bei den Ebraern”, See: (Jacobson 2003, pp. 114–15); See also: (Benjamin 2003, pp. 27–56; Benjamin 2002a, pp. 62–74); see also: (Scholem 1990).

¹⁰ See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 8).

idiom and preserving the values of universality in memory, the peculiar antinomic place of Jewish truth is also defined.¹¹ According to Scholem, the memory of it can only be made present in the proleptic movement, a movement of message which is both a movement of forgetting it and hiding. Therefore, its location within the traditional Western philosophical thought (i.e., post-Kantian, Hegelian) only superficially condemns it to subordination, and in reality gives hope for (constantly and continuously delayed and therefore alive) reconciliation of the particular and the universal. As we will see from the example of Adorno, the strictly secularized discourse is ruled by the hidden-under-the-surface, spectral stream of the Kabbalah.¹² Bielik-Robson refers to Derrida in describing this open Judaism in exile with the following words:

This is what ‘constitutes Jewishness beyond all Judaism’: ‘To be open toward the future would be to be Jewish, and vice versa [. . .] In the future, remember to remember the future’ (ibid., pp. 74, 76). And although Derrida quotes Yerushalmi’s definitions of the ‘Judaism interminable’ not without an irony, he nonetheless confirms that what counts in this whole enormous archive, accumulated obsessively by the Jewish archons of memory, is the unique index of its imperative to remember: it is not past-oriented towards the acts of grounding and legitimating a supposedly distinct ‘Jewish identity’ (for which he gently reproaches Yerushalmi), but future-oriented, proleptic and unprecedentedly open—a *futurité*.¹³

The paradoxical formula of remembrance about the future adopts another condition for the realization of universalization: one should “save” the past, or rather what has been forgotten, because it is subject to the universal laws of history, which is written by the conquerors or their philosophers. At the same time, memory is not Heidegger’s pondering but a socially defined form of *praxis*. Benjamin, Adorno, and later Derrida were proponents of such a formula of Jewish philosophy. Summarizing this introductory part of the discussion, the most important features of Marranism can be listed. This procedure is necessary due to the aim of the essay. I would like to remind you that the subject of the dissertation is to define a specific form of this kind of marriage of tradition and modernity in Adorno’s aesthetic theory. So, if we want to consider the details, we need to know the “guidelines”, the clues that will lead us to answer the main question in this paper.

The most important feature of the Marrano strategy is its secrecy. Secondly, we will “read” it as a kind of crypto-theology¹⁴, according to the slogan: “the less you show yourself as Jewish, the more and better Jew you will be.”¹⁵ Thirdly, we will consider this strategy within the question on the specific form of language that creates and “carries” it, being responsible not only for the form but also for the content of the message. What is equally important, this strategy is the result of the “location” between rejection and acceptance of the existing Greek-Christian metaphysical tradition. Finally, the “third language”, due to its status as a specific particularity, is still forced to legitimize its universality—it will be an example of the redefinition of an unsuccessful particular-universal marriage. Only when individualization of what is particular goes hand in hand with universalization, can we talk about striving for (endless) reconciliation of the non-reconcilable. Defining the features of this idiom: it should be non-hierarchical, and not based on any existing or planned hierarchy. It is to

¹¹ See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, pp. 17–18).

¹² See: (de Vries 2005, pp. 235–99); particularly see: (de Vries 2005, pp. 259–61).

¹³ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 18).

¹⁴ I accept the concept of “crypto-theology” as defined by Bielik-Robson. The author writes: “I do not use here the word ‘theology’ in a sense which figures in Lévinas’ ‘God and Philosophy’, i.e., as a being-biased science of God, whose history is the same as ‘the history of the destruction of the transcendence’ (GP, p. 56). I use it in a much more neutral way, which can also embrace the special slant of Jewish religious thinking, which I have already named as the swerve from the free-fall of indifference towards concern and anxiety, refashioning the world in dynamic terms of ontological insufficiency and the need for redemption. The prefix ‘crypto’ reflects here the Marrano stance of our thinkers in question, who rarely disclose fully their Judaic sources of inspiration and if so, then usually for the non-religious purposes aiming at the renewal of Western modes of thinking.”, (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 18).

¹⁵ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 18);

be open: not to exclude but to include, yet with the observation that what is included will not lose its particular meaning. According to Adorno's definition, it is to be "reconciliation in difference".¹⁶ The above-mentioned features of the Marrano strategy do not exhaust its definition, but I consider them to be the most important in the context of these considerations. They allow me to turn to a specific issue: to question the concept of the language resulting from this strategy. Therefore, following the author's example, I will try to bring closer the characteristics of the particular Jewish nominalism. Then, on this basis, I will define the meaning of Jewish linguisticity in Adorno's aesthetic theory and in his concept of art.

2. Jewish Nominalism

At the beginning of chapter 7, entitled "The promise of the Name", the author introduces a working definition of Jewish nominalism, at least to some extent corresponding to specific philosophical concepts by Rosenzweig, Cohen, Benjamin, Scholem, Adorno, and finally Derrida. Important for this definition is the question of one's (own) name and the act of naming, giving names or restoring names as metaphysically expanded acts of communication. The author writes the following:

"Jewish thinkers I have mentioned can be called nominalists in the traditional sense of the word, but only to a certain extent and with a decisive clinamen. Though they all perceive the world as comprised ultimately of singularities, they do not treat names as mere flatus vocis, i.e., arbitrary conventions that express our cognitive helplessness in the face of the material chaos of things. Far from fostering any kind of magical realism, which would attribute an ontological power to the act of naming, they nonetheless believe that naming as such opens the gate to a special relationship with reality: a relationship maintained not in the mute operations of Ockhamian-Baconian instrumental reason, but in the dialogical process of linguistic communication, where names and naming constitute, in Benjamin's words, in its very essence and true calling of language."¹⁷

The adoption of a strictly Marranic perspective of language analysis entails a number of structural solutions. At this point, we can notice the connection between naming and rendering the primacy of the particular, the "not-yet-individual" in the act of the linguistic concretization of universalization. Language universalization is to be at the same time individuation both of itself and of the particular. As Bielik-Robson rightly points out, the concept of the language of names comes mainly from Scholem's interpretation of the Kabbalistic concepts of revelation, message, and salvation¹⁸, within which he calls the revelation of the name or names of God a revelation.¹⁹ The concept of nominalism proposed here is thus rooted in the Jewish tradition, where tradition means the message (of the truth of revelation) and the message means creative interpretation, leading through philosophical and aesthetical criticism (Adorno)²⁰ towards translation-deconstruction led by the imperative of maintaining the memory of Jewish identity as "Jewishness" (vide: Derrida—*Des Tours de Babel*²¹, *Archive Fever: A Freudian*

¹⁶ Criticizing the Hegelian version of reconciliation in *Aspects of Hegel Philosophy* Adorno implicitly presents his own idea of *Versöhnung*. He writes (Adorno 1993, p. 27): "(...) in its emphatic Hegelian version, the concept of spirit is to be understood organically; the partial moments are to grow into and be interpenetrated by one another by virtue of a whole that is already inherent in every of them. This concept of system implies the identity of subject and object, which has developed into the sole and conclusive absolute, and the truth of the system collapses when that identity collapses. But that identity, full reconciliation through spirit in a world which is in reality antagonistic, is a mere assertion. The philosophical anticipation of reconciliation is a trespass against real reconciliation; it ascribes anything that contradicts it to "foul" existence as unworthy of philosophy. But a seamless system and an achieved reconciliation are not one and the same; rather they are contradictory: the unity of the system derives from unreconcilable violence."

¹⁷ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 233).

¹⁸ See: (Scholem 1996).

¹⁹ See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 234).

²⁰ See: (Wasserstrom 2007, pp. 74–76).

²¹ See: (Derrida 1985, pp. 165–67).

*Impression*²²—the titles first mentioned by Bielik-Robson). What is equally important, another feature of religious origin is the one that defines the function of “naming” (so far its detailed course is not relevant). Therefore, naming is also a creative act, although it is not divine *ex nihilo*, but is its immanent, earthly, and material analogon:

“God creates by expressing his absolute name, i.e., by leaving his secret signature in all things and thus bestowing upon them their names; creation is but an articulation, both the expression and fragmentation of the divine name. And if Scholem says ‘God’s language has no grammar’, he means that creation does not need any additional metaphysical structure of mediation between the divine source and the created world, no auxiliary scheme of emanation. The relationship between the one and unique God and his creations, conceived in an equally singular way is direct and strictly nominalist. What unites the creation within itself and with its Creator is not the Neoplatonic structure of participation, where all beings share in various degrees the flow of divine power, but language and linguistic communication, in which all of these ontologically separate elements come into a cosmic dialogue. This emphasis on language as the only metaphysical ‘glue’ of the otherwise fragmented and horizontally diversified universe, accounts also for the special, elect position of man who is the only being capable of using language, that is, of maintaining a relationship with created reality via giving names.”²³

Another noteworthy feature of this kind of nominalism is its separating effect. Contrasting this concept with the idea of “participatory nominalism”, the author pointed to the distinctiveness of its Jewish version and its peculiar “nature”, alternative to the Christian one. If one of Christian origins recreates the hierarchical dependence of individual entities on the Creator in a conceptual matrix that gives each of them its own meaning, then the Jewish one corresponds more to the horizontal, i.e., not stratifying, structure of particularities.²⁴ The primacy of what really exists over the concepts that can be read from here is, again, one of the key features of a Marrano language strategy. The non-participatory form of this nominalism results from the non-participatory and non-emanating model of creation, which is defined as follows:

“in the non-participatory model of creation based on the notion of strict separation, this metaphysical hierarchy is replaced by an anarchic ‘ontological multitude’ (as Spinoza could have called it), which cannot be ordered according to the modes and degrees of existence because it exists in exactly the same way and manner as the God who created it. In a way, therefore, this vision contains *avant la lettre* the famous prenominalist argument of Duns Scotus, who, in his thesis on univocity (*univocatio entis*) ‘equalized’ the notion of being against the Neoplatonic tradition of modes and degrees of eminence, still fiercely defended by Thomas Aquinas. Here, creation means making something other than God himself: something truly distinct that, as Lévinas puts it in *Totality and Infinity*, should be able to exist on its own without being a *causa sui*. Just as God is unique and singular (*echad*), bearing a distinct name, so is his creation: equally separate, singularized and free to express itself in the particularity of the name. For, as Isaiah attests, the singularity of everything created is not at all illusory or secondary; to the contrary, it is the most real, because it was the Creator himself who ‘called it by name’ (Isaiah 43:1).”²⁵

A further consequence of such a model is also the “emancipation” of language from general concepts. In other words, the above model can be treated as a hypothetical structure of equally significant

²² (Derrida 1995, pp. 9–63); concerning the differences between Jewishness and Judaism, messianic and messianism—see: (Derrida 1995, pp. 46–50).

²³ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 234).

²⁴ See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, pp. 235–36).

²⁵ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 239).

“singularities”²⁶ which, paradoxically, because they are named this way, are universalized and thus also the very proposal of metaphysical experience and specific ethos. It is precisely this ethos, as a “serious” action, in a specific social space and context, that will finally—as we will see—be the basis for the negative imperative of Adorno. This philosopher particularly emphasized that the postulated language of names cannot be treated and realized only as an epistemological proposal, but must—according to its Jewish and Marxist genesis—be put into practice. For Adorno, naming would be a kind of a “metaphor” of social criticism, hidden in philosophy or artwork that is subject to interpretation and criticism.

Another, and the last important, feature of the particular language of names discussed here will be the dialectics of secularization²⁷ which is established and conducted by it. If we consider dialectics, as Adorno and Horkheimer, to be a model of “disenchantment”, then a necessary condition for secularization is simultaneous participation in de-secularization. “Neutralization of nihilistic sting of disenchantment”—from Kant to Nietzsche—is only possible by accepting its dialectical marriage with the “object of disenchantment”. Thus, this particular object, as in the redefined “particular-universal” marriage, will disenchant the phenomenon of secularization itself, the secularization that strives for universal application, as total, finite, closed:

“dialectical use of disenchantment is characteristic of those Jewish thinkers who attempted to translate the traditional Judaic critique of myth and magic into modern conditions of secularizing *Entzauberung*, where the latter would be conceived not as an enemy but as an ambiguous ally of religion. Ambiguous—because everything here depends on how we understand the very concept of *Entzauberung* itself. If it boils down to nothing but a dreary form of a ‘Urizenic’ rationality, reducing being to a machine-like self-sufficiency that blocks any further speculative attempt to achieve any other form of meaning—the view that would immediately conform to what Adorno calls ‘the positivistic myth of what is’—then it is definitely more danger than a help. Yet, if it clears room for a new understanding of God’s transcendence, no longer in any way enmeshed in the mechanism of being—then it paves a way to a new form of religious speculation which both Adorno and Scholem would very gladly endorse: a version of religious nihilism that interprets the disenchantment of the modern world in theological terms. As Adorno says in his Epigrams: ‘No theological content will last untransformed; every single one will have to face the test and enter the sphere of the profane’.”²⁸

At the same time, unsurprisingly, dialectics allows the two seemingly separate spheres of human spirituality to be mutually defined, while at the same time ensuring their preservation in overcoming [their] abstract separateness. From our point of view, it is important that in this dialectical weave, the form of the Jewish tradition that is being assumed and looked for at first becomes clear. This means that its preservation is only possible as a continuous, open, unfinished redefinition-deconstruction. The concrete “result” of this dialectics determines the assumed form of meaning, assigned to this tradition. A form of meaning in which the emphasis is placed on expressing tension between two dialectical moments is conveyed not as an ontologically marked and separate existence, but as a semantic, language-derived differentiation mechanism.²⁹ In other words, the condition for the identification of the philosophical Marrano and the world in the process of disenchantment as a Marrano world, is its de-identification, “separation”, the life-giving non-identity founded in Adorno’s deadly “deserts of abstraction”. Bielik-Robson writes:

²⁶ See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 239).

²⁷ See: (Adorno 2005, pp. 135–43) where Adorno writes on the uneasy relationship between the religion and secularized rationality.

²⁸ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 260).

²⁹ See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 260).

“in modern Jewish thought—death is a dialectical point of departure beyond the world of creation, a beginning of the ‘path’ driving from absolute ‘meaninglessness’ to equally absolute ‘meaningfulness’; from the mute ‘marble-like’ existence of death-destined things to the condition of a dialogue in which every expression acquires a meaning. It is a point of recognition and clarity that, once all the beautiful and deceptive appearances are gone, lends a rock-bottom of semantic orientation.”³⁰

This process, as one may suppose, is not predestined; it does not have a one-way, future-oriented and fulfillment-oriented, certain goal. It is rather a decentralized movement (expanding from all sides) of free autonomous seeking of itself.³¹ It is only in this liberation that messianic features can be seen. According to Bielik-Robson, it is only when a man loses the base of a magical bond with the world that he/she can realize what is at stake in this kind of messianism: individuation or subjectivization, i.e., the earthly salvation of himself/herself and silent matter.³² The Messiah’s salvation in its Marrano form is thus significant for the process of differentiation and separation outlined above, as long as there is no Messiah anymore, and the uncertainty, which triggers critical vigilance, governs each subsequent (straying) step.³³ This is neither an active awaiting nor the practice of restoring a lost bond: in other words, collapse is a necessary condition for being able to grope in the dark.³⁴ The absence of God, which is breaking out of this semantic emptiness, therefore has a meaning. If the emptiness is equal to him, as the philosophical and artistic Marranos see it, then paradoxically—becoming his trace, allegory, track—it makes him present in this absence.³⁵ That is to say, if the presence in the form of a panoptic system of control and the pursuit of hyper-efficiency in each sphere of human practice is a false form of the omnipresence of the absolute, its “true” presence must be radically different from that of the all-encompassing and tracking every step of the spectral total power. In such a dialectical formula, the Marrano nature of the modern “non-existence” of God and the “non-being” of a Jew/Other/Stranger is enchanted. Here, like the author, I accept the perspective of Scholem, which was also accepted by Adorno³⁶:

“For Benjamin, God the Legislator withdraws, leaving a complete vacuum of ‘mere life’ (*blösses Leben*) with its senseless flow-and-fall, unable to produce ‘one grain of meaning’. For Scholem, however, this withdrawal is dialectical: the more God disappears from the world, the more the world is in the need of revelation, which, in the end, becomes a new form of revelation that is characteristic of a ‘religious nihilist’ or a ‘pious atheist’. In the poem dedicated to his friend, Scholem writes: ‘*Nur den Nichts is die Erfahrung./Die sie von dir haben darf*’ (‘Only nothingness is the experience we are allowed to have of you’). Thus, while Scholem concentrates on the nothing itself, expecting from it a renewal of revelation, or a messianic reversal occurring within the Godhead itself, preparing to leap into a new

³⁰ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 262).

³¹ See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 270).

³² See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 271).

³³ See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, pp. 272–73).

³⁴ For Adorno, Auschwitz is the absolute fall of all meanings, teleology and sense, as well as the sense of human bond with the “divine” order. As the final self-destruction of meaning, semantic silence, (Scholem’s “nothingness of revelation” (See: Scholem 1969), this event is equal to the collapse of the Western civilization. This earthly catastrophe—the absolutely negative—is a condition and a guarantee of a messianic hope. What is equally important, for Adorno the specific “code of Auschwitz” determines all possible interpretations of the genocide. Consequently, the thesis that the philosopher assumes an interpretive model in which “universalizes” this particular and historical event, is acceptable. In other words, one could agree that the general concept of Adorno’s “subversion of utopia” is founded on this particular event.

³⁵ See: (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 276).

³⁶ As Habermas wrote: “Adorno and Scholem are interested in the possible truth content that monotheistic traditions can still unfold under conditions of modernity. They are not looking for mythical or pre-Socratic origins. The myth that the logos of the great world religions had overcome must not “keep the last word”. Nietzsche is absent, and the sulfur smell of neo-Nietzscheanism even more so. The “Transfiguration of Mysticism in Enlightenment” is the place where Adorno and Scholem meet. He had studied the continuation of the profound teachings of a Luria of Safed in the frankistic sects of the 18th century and persecuted until the French Revolution. The two are interested in this revolutionary interference of heterodox teachings in the secular society for various reasons.” (Habermas 2015, p. 3).

manifestation (. . .)—Benjamin is ready only to rely on the ‘weak messianic force of the abandoned creatures who must procure the messianic reversal themselves.’³⁷

Simply put, Marrano dialectics, according to Scholem, will therefore be “the dialectics of absence-presence”: the meaning that appears in the place of H/his absence is the almost elusive, emerging bond between the individual and his (divine) designation, his own name. This characteristic corresponds to Adorno’s thought, which is why I devoted more space to its presentation. As it will turn out, this is the shortest way to define the “dialectical negativity” of Adorno’s philosophy and to combine it through irrevocable marriage with the modern Jewish tradition in order to use such a perverse term.

3. Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* as the Philosophical Language of Marrano

Once we have the general characteristics of Marrano nominalism and the understanding of language as such, it is possible to consider the specific issue of the title and attempt to highlight the features of a linguistic martial strategy in Adorno’s aesthetic thought. It should be added that the indication of a strong relationship between the quasi-religious Marranic strategy and Adorno’s aesthetic theory is a certain novelty among the existing interpretations of Adorno’s philosophy. In the group of eminent commentators of Adorno’s thought, to which I undoubtedly include Martin Jay³⁸, Roger Foster³⁹, Jay M. Bernstein⁴⁰, or Robert Hullot-Kentor⁴¹, there is no one who develops and describes the abovementioned relationship. Although Jay, for example, writes about mimesis in the context of Adorno’s redefinition of the particular-universal relationship, he ignores the question concerning the possible Jewish roots of this idea. Hullot-Kentor, on the other hand, mentions the Greek-Jewish synthesis carried out by Benjamin in the context of the concept of naming in only one place in his work.⁴² Similarly, Foster, although he points to the sources of Benjamin’s concept of language in Jewish mysticism, doesn’t address the issue of Jewishness in Adorno’s thought, despite the fact that Adorno can be considered in this context as a continuator of Benjamin’s idea.⁴³ Generally speaking, none of abovementioned authors emphasize the relevance of the Jewish dimension of Adorno’s theory. That’s why I think it’s worth following Bielik-Robson’s and Derrida’s intuitions. One thing can certainly be said now: the idea behind it will be, in its general expression, identical with the “imperative” of the subversive redefinition of particular-universal marriage and will be understood by it in the context of fulfilling or non-fulfilling the task of social criticism. The totality of the society cannot be rejected in one political “gesture” (that is: revolutionary); similarly Adorno will approach the issue of the relationship between the universal and the particular. The condition for the deconstruction of their marriage is criticism as a medium. Therefore, in the end, he writes that the non-conceptual must be achieved by means of concepts, so that they too, as the general, are open to their “other”. Thus, the non-conceptual is a guarantee of the “non-hierarchical”, “constellatory” form of the Absolute’s non-presence as a personified totality. What “thought-images”⁴⁴ of this non-presence are artworks in Adorno’s eyes? How do they correspond to the meaning of the Marrano language strategy and what does it mean for them as carriers of potential social criticism and change? Further on, I would like to focus on the answers to the above questions. I will limit myself to the analysis of Adorno’s main aesthetic text, namely the unfinished and, according to the author himself, constellational in form,

³⁷ (Bielik-Robson 2014, p. 278).

³⁸ See: (Jay 1997).

³⁹ See: (Foster 2007).

⁴⁰ See: (Bernstein 1992).

⁴¹ See: (Hullot-Kentor 2006).

⁴² (Hullot-Kentor 2006, p. 127).

⁴³ See: (Foster 2007, p. 60).

⁴⁴ See: (Richter 2009, p. 4).

Aesthetic Theory (1969). I believe that, as his last work, it also plays the role of a specific philosophical *resumé* when it comes to issues concerning the relationship of the work and society.

Let me start with the most general remark. *Aesthetic Theory* defines what the work of art is. But, as unfinished, fragmentary, open, it (*Aesthetic Theory* eo ipso) corresponds—albeit unintentionally—to the idea of redefining the marriage of a particular position (thanks to the original idiom) and the general (universal) language of notions it uses. The publishers, closing the work symbolically, quote Adorno's words: "The fragment is the intrusion of death into the work. While destroying it, it removes the stain of semblance." Then they continue: "The text of *Aesthetic Theory*, as it was in August 1969, which the editors present here as faithfully as possible, is the text of a work in progress;"⁴⁵ The unfinished, the open, the incidental with which Adorno wanted to measure "vitality", i.e., in his understanding, the social relevance of artworks, refers reflexively to itself. The paradox is that at the same time Adorno activates the dialectics of "death (as) life". In my opinion, this dependence can be directly related to an equally dialectic understanding of the dependence of tradition and what is new in Scholem's understanding, which Adorno took over and developed in *Aesthetic Theory*.⁴⁶ I will risk a statement that the death of the master, the Subject, the Narration and the fragmentariness of the argument, which complement each other and at the same time are a peculiar fullness, a whole, deconstruct the notions themselves. Fullness is fulfillment, and therefore the hope; the entirety is fragmentation, so it is not total; closure is the opening, so it is not final—but also vice versa. This kind of dialectics was launched by Adorno in an attempt to fully express his aesthetic concepts, this kind of dialectics, as we have seen, governs the language of philosophical Marranos when talking about their identity. The publishers, quoting from Adorno's correspondence on the following pages, point to another determinant of its endlessness, openness, and verticality, immanent to the work: "It is simply that from my theorem that there is no philosophical first principle, it now also results that one cannot build an argumentative structure that follows the usual progressive succession of steps, but rather that one must assemble the whole out of a series of partial complexes that are, so to speak, of equal weight and concentrically arranged all on the same level; their constellation, not their succession, must yield the idea."⁴⁷

The above introduction and quote contained in it—apart from the fact that it marks a trail leading to several dimensions of the basic analogy, "philosophical Marranism-theory of artwork by Adorno"—will serve as a matrix for this work. The threads will revolve around the assumed analogy, but I will not give any of them the philosophical name of the first, i.e., the most important one. The first, which Adorno himself writes about, is non-philosophical, as a "material" foundation of social conditions, and their historical determinants, broadly understood as "cultural".

3.1. Artwork as a Third Language

At the beginning, I will not implicate the Reader in reflections on the detailed characteristics of Jewish nominalism which describe, in my opinion, also the specific idiom of the language of art with Adorno. However, here I would like to highlight the deep similarities between the location as a third language of specifically Jewish "understanding", "experiencing", "reading" of reality and artwork also as a special kind of understanding and experiencing it. The third language, characterized at the beginning, is the result of the marriage of the Jewish religious tradition and its ontogenetic and soteriological perspective with the western, Greek-Christian metaphysical heritage. The form of this marriage is not insignificant: what is traditionally Jewish remains hidden under the surface of the official discourse. Thanks to this negation, it is preserved. But what defines the specificity of Jewish philosophy here, as I wrote at the beginning, will focus in the final self-referential reflection on the possibilities, moduses of existence of a negated tradition. Language itself will be considered,

⁴⁵ See: "Editors Afterword. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann" (Adorno 2002, p. 361).

⁴⁶ See: (Adorno and Scholem 2015), for example, letter no. 2, from Scholem to Adorno, pp. 15–20; or: (Benjamin et al. 1994).

⁴⁷ (Adorno 2002, p. 364).

its potential as a carrier of the Word, and the way to “keep it alive”, if one can put it this way. Tradition can be preserved by way of hidden expression, “which, by doubling the official discourse, is not available to everyone”⁴⁸. “Starting the play of the inherited and what is accepted for various historically relevant reasons and purposes”—this is the most abbreviated definition of the “location” of the Marranic third language. What similarities does Adorno’s language of artwork have with such a location?

The temporal dimension, persistence, transience, anticipation in a modernist artwork is marked on a basic level by dialectics of “tradition—the new”.⁴⁹ In other words, a modernist artwork negates what has passed as its own condition of socially significant persistence, transience, and anticipation. Adorno, defining this relationship, writes:

“[T]radition itself, as a medium of historical movement, depends essentially on economic and social structures and is qualitatively transformed along with them. The attitude of contemporary art toward tradition, usually reviled as a loss of tradition, is predicated on the inner transformation of the category of tradition itself. In an essentially nontraditional society, aesthetic tradition a priori is dubious. The authority of the new is that of the historically inevitable. To this extent it implies objective criticism of the individual, the vehicle of the new: In the new the knot is tied aesthetically between individual and society.”⁵⁰

Changes within the category of tradition itself are connected with socio-economic ones. Where experience is (slowly) becoming a commodity, there is a lack of objective ground for categories that have leaned into the past. But the past does not die because of commodification and alienation: “Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated; only thereby, and not by the refusal of a mute reality, does art become eloquent; this is why art no longer tolerates the innocuous.”⁵¹ It is merely a sample of the dialectics which unambiguously indicates the meaning of the presence of what is past in the artwork of modernity as present. The artwork achieves the meaning of this kind through the thematization of this dialectics: “consideration” of one’s own idiom as incorporation of criticism. This, in turn, defines it as a peculiar “language”. The importance of the critical self-reflection achieved by the modern artwork can, therefore, be compared to the importance and validity of the “traditional”⁵² moment as a reflection on one’s own possibility of permanence. Adorno writes “Aesthetic truth content and history are that deeply meshed. A reconciled reality and the restituted truth of the past could converge. What can still be experienced in the art of the past and is still attainable by interpretation is a directive toward this state.”⁵³ However, as long as reality is ruled by antagonisms, the memory of the past and the anticipation of reconciliation must dialectically negate each other in order to preserve this convergence as an opportunity.

Other dialectical pairs that will allow us to define an artwork as a Marranic idiom will be “heteronomy–autonomy” and “mimesis–ratio”. I will not discuss here the meaning of these pairs, I will only mention that the first of them defines an artwork as an “object” governed by specific immanent, particular principles of construction and expression. At the same time, it is somehow “externally” determined as a field of play of a socially defined subject and the vision of objectivity promoted by it, as well as the objective social and economic principles—as it is the “market participant”. Its double “third” Marranic nature is realized in this context as a unique solution to the “assimilation–orthodoxy” problem⁵⁴. The second pair can be considered as a special consequence of the first one. As a

⁴⁸ See: p. 1 of this text.

⁴⁹ See: (Adorno 2002, pp. 20–21).

⁵⁰ (Adorno 2002, pp. 20–21).

⁵¹ (Adorno 2002, p. 21).

⁵² The idea of “tradition” here, is founded on Scholem’s understanding of tradition as a commentary, transmission. Therefore the inscription into dynamics of historical (socio-cultural) changes is a condition for keeping the category of truth still alive. See: (Scholem 1969).

⁵³ (Adorno 2002, p. 41).

⁵⁴ To compare, see: page 3 of this essay.

proposal of presenting the cognitive aspect of the artwork, it is a criticism of imitation in the way of presentation and understanding, i.e., treating the material and content of thinking as non-mediated, ontologically stable data, the manipulation of which is arbitrary and irrelevant for it. As a redefinition of “non-mediated–mediated” dependence, he points to a dialectical reading of the relationship between the mimetic aspect of an artwork and its structural expression constructed according to the internal logic, thus promoting a critical and non-affirmative model of contact with reality. Striving for reconciliation of what is mimetic with what is “rational” in the artwork and its criticism is, as a consequence, to be a model for cognition in general, promoting the non-hierarchy principle, and the renunciation of thinking founded on ontological priority.⁵⁵ Ultimately, it is to be a suggestion of dynamics of impossible/“negative” reconciliation of the other, the particular (here, mimetic) and the familiar, universal (here, rational), which does not give primacy to any of its moments.⁵⁶ And as such, it corresponds to the mode of reconciliation proposed by Bielik-Robson’s “philosophical Marranos”.

3.2. An Artwork—Inversion of the “Particular-Universal” Marriage

If we refer to Derrida’s words from a quote from page 3 of this essay that “there is no such thing as homogenous universal language. Yet universality can be approached by ‘marrying the speeches of strangers’”, and at the same time, we remember about the reconciliation that an artwork designs, the emerging and necessary redefinition will consist of the inversion⁵⁷ of importance in the interpretation of “particular-universal” relationship. The supposed effect of this inversion is quite clearly defined by Adorno: the language of the work is to be still a realistically unfulfilled model of relations between what has hitherto been oppressed by the mythically prevailing “reason”, and itself as a legislator. Adorno writes: “For artworks it is incumbent to grasp the universal—which dictates the nexus of the existing and is hidden by the existing—in the particular; it is not for art, through particularization, to disguise the ruling universality of the administered world. Totality is the grotesque heir of mana”.⁵⁸ The task of the work is unmasking the generality, the alleged universality in the particular. How does he propose to discover this? He talks about it directly in another quote: “the artwork that appears as something universal bears the accidental quality of being an example of its genre: It is spuriously individual. (. . .) Yet the universal becomes substantial in artworks only by its self-transformation. (. . .) Not only does the dialectic of the universal and particular descend into the depths of the universal in the midst of the particular. At the same time it destroys the invariance of the universal categories.”⁵⁹ Dialectics, which does not “reflect” the primacy of generality in the administered world, but is guided by the aspiration to express the particular as a conscious entanglement, that is, via *negativa*, critically anticipates, as a model, the achievement of individualization and concreteness also by objects that are not artworks, and thus also by languages of strangers, others, the marginalized. Artworks, therefore, are supposed to indicate the places of entanglement of particular contents or idioms in the generality, consistently—their self-critical thematization of this entanglement points to the formula of redefining its relationship with the general order—as negative. Ultimately, therefore, the individualization that they try to achieve can only be an awareness of their own negativity, an unfulfilled utopia, if we can put it this way:

“But because for art, utopia—the yet-to-exist—is draped in black, it remains in all its mediations recollection; recollection of the possible in opposition to the actual that suppresses it; it is the imaginary reparation of the catastrophe of world history; it is freedom, which

⁵⁵ See: (Adorno 2002), chapter “Semblance and Expression”, pp. 100–18.

⁵⁶ See: (Adorno 2002) chapter “Universal and Particular”, pp. 199–224; On “negativity” of reconciliation, see: (Adorno 2002, pp. 133–36, 189–90, 197, 199).

⁵⁷ In my opinion, the most comprehensive definition of inversion in this context is presented by Elisabeth A. Pritchard in her paper entitled: *Bilderverbot Meets Body in Theodor W. Adorno Inverse Theology* (Pritchard 2002).

⁵⁸ (Adorno 2002, p. 84).

⁵⁹ (Adorno 2002, p.181).

under the spell of necessity did not—and may not ever—come to pass. Art’s methexis in the tenebrous, its negativity, is implicit in its tense relation to permanent catastrophe. No existing, appearing artwork holds any positive control over the nonexisting. This distinguishes artworks from religious symbols, which in their appearance lay claim to the transcendence of the immediately present. The nonexisting in artworks is a constellation of the existing.”⁶⁰

The works express the universality and commonness of their individualization in themselves and through themselves, at the same time not having the power to make it real. The only possible movement that condemns them to being manifestations of the non-existent and the desire to preserve such an experience of reality that allows keeping the memory of possible reconciliation, is the preservation of their own validity, relevance. Their strength, certainly today, is showing their own strengthlessness in the face of a disastrous circle of exchange. Thematicization should be repeated again and again in line with changing socioeconomic conditions. These repetitions, as each subsequent work, might be interpreted as multiplication of discourses in reaction to real suffering and marginalization, depriving one or another social group of the voice, its degradation. This links the situation of art with the philosophical strategy of the Marranos, described at the beginning of the article. A critical opening of the future makes it possible to preserve the memory of the claustrophobic and violent past and the present day. This form of remembrance is an opening to the possibility of reconciliation of what was, what is, and what will be. Only this form corresponds to the formula of universal subjectification, concretization of each—already existing or not yet existing particularity. This form of particular-universal endless reconciliation in artwork theory is proposed by Adorno, while other philosophical Marranos propose more general tools—e.g., deconstruction.

3.3. *The Language of Artwork as a Constellation*

It is now possible to answer the question about the linguistic formula of an artwork. The constellatory structure of the language of an artwork most fully expresses the idea of redefining particular-general marriage, which in the Marrano strategy takes the place of the most important regulatory idea. I will now try to justify this thesis. At the same time, the following question must be answered: what does it mean that a specific work should be considered as a constellation of its “moments and elements”? Later, it is necessary to show how works as particular “manifestations” of social relations can influence their formation and reformation if they draw the idea of communication with the “outside” from their own “internal” “form and content” relations⁶¹, the relations that Adorno interprets according to the idea of constellativeness. I will begin with an enigmatic statement by the author of *Aesthetic Theory* about the negativity of truth in art. He writes that there is no other object made by man which expresses its conviction of its own constitutive inability to lie. The next statement, however, is even more interesting. Adorno continues: “... Unlike anything human, art lays claim to being unable to lie, and thus it is compelled to lie. Art does not have it in its power to decide over the possibility that everything may indeed not come to anything more than nothing; it has its fictiveness in the assertion implicit in its existence that it has gone beyond the limit.”⁶² The truth expressed by art is mediated by its “invented nature”, but otherwise art could not participate in history. This participation is possible only as a form of its criticism, which the works express “with themselves”, unintentionally and the “appearance” in which they are. Criticism in this context is a negative projection of the direction of the movement of transcending the *status quo* towards possible (social) change. Although the constellativeness of works has not been defined, we have learned about its very important features: non-intentionality, and action, which is expressed with it through criticism, i.e., transgression. Adorno continues:

⁶⁰ (Adorno 2002, p. 135).

⁶¹ See: (Adorno 2002, p. 4).

⁶² (Adorno 2002, pp. 132–33).

Artworks say what is more than the existing, and they do this exclusively by making a constellation of how it is, “Comment c’est”. The metaphysics of art requires its complete separation from the religion in which art originated. Artworks are not the absolute, nor is the absolute immediately present in them. For their methexis in the absolute they are punished with a blindness that in the same instant obscures their language, which is a language of truth: Artworks have the absolute and they do not have it. (. . .) Artworks are a priori negative by the law of their objectivation: They kill what they objectify by tearing it away from the immediacy of its life. Their own life preys on death.⁶³

The constellational structure of the work “reveals”, in the manner not fully intended by the creating entity, the dependence between what is, how it is reflected (specific socioeconomic conditions) and the “apparently” possible movement that transcends its heteronomy and any relationship between objects and subjects. This very ambitious plan that Adorno draws for art, at the same time, contains a reference to what art has inherited from religion—the imagination of the absolute. The constellational structure of the works does not allow for its direct, that is to say, its imaginary “presence”. Objectivization, i.e., unintentional criticism and interpretation (of history), which, according to Adorno, is art, thus brings it closer to the radical formula of Revelation, which Bielik quotes after Scholem.⁶⁴ In the context of Marranic thinking, these considerations can be summarized in the following dependence: only the radically hidden presence of the O/other, its actual “non-presence”, enables it to be socio-historically relevant. The model of this “non-presence”, which for Adorno are works of (modern) art, can be interpreted as axiom of nonidentity. In other words, nonidentity in this context could be “read” as a condition for the coexistence of “others” with those, whose identity is legitimized by official culture. Furthermore, an inversion of importance within the particular-universal relationship, presented by this model, may initiate a debate on the assumed—and culturally inherited—homogenous identity. But first things first.

Thanks to the metaphor of the constellation, Adorno speaks the truth about the spiritual content of the work—that it is “readable” as a code to configure its moments, showing the work as a meaningful whole. Art must include meaning, sense, even as a social untruth, a negation of sense. Otherwise it is trivial. That is why Adorno so eagerly evokes Beckett’s art, using the category of the absurd:

“Beckett’s plays are absurd not because of the absence of any meaning, for then they would be simply irrelevant. but because they put meaning on trial; they unfold its history. His work is ruled as much by an obsession with positive nothingness as by the obsession with a meaninglessness that has developed historically and is thus in a sense merited. though this meritedness in no way allows any positive meaning to be reclaimed. Nevertheless the emancipation of artworks from their meaning becomes aesthetically meaningful once this emancipation is realized in the aesthetic material precisely because the aesthetic meaning is not immediately one with theological meaning. Artworks that divest themselves of any semblance of meaning do not thereby forfeit their similitude to language. They enunciate their meaninglessness with the same determinacy as traditional artworks enunciate their positive meaning”.⁶⁵

It can be said that the whole, which is made up of constellations, is according to Adorno, untrue. The untruth of the whole speaks a lot about the totality, which, according to a Frankfurt citizen, is the society. Consistently, the category of meaninglessness says a lot about the meaning of what is strange, hidden and non-identical—meaning the strategy of philosophical Marranos—as present and relevant, as “not-identical”. Identification with the minus sign, vividly speaking, will be the

⁶³ (Adorno 2002, p. 133).

⁶⁴ See: p. 10 of this essay.

⁶⁵ (Adorno 2002, p. 153).

principle of totality inversion, the principle governing the constellation, defining it with the principle of “uniting in differentiation”, paraphrasing the words of Adorno. The non-identity which is the principle of identity in general, also in this particular case of a constellation, defines its form: openness, which automatically becomes its condition, however, does not mean “spatial” openness. The work as an object is separate. But this abstract autonomy ends when we recall that, in Adorno’s opinion, there is no work without interpretation and criticism, without defining it as a product of social and economic play of forces—in other words—as a field of relations. A field whose persistence—as in the case of the discussed crypto-theological form of tradition—ensures openness to the passing of time, that is, to commentary and critique.⁶⁶ But it is only thanks to this that Adorno can state that the truth of an artwork lies in its uttered longing for reconciliation, but expressed in terms of what is now, evoked perversely by means of a certain expression of social hopelessness. Consequently, works as constellations are a sign of the time, which they show in its breakdown. A time of profaned myth and rationalized religion or religion of rationality, which they oppose by expressing a subversive longing for the once expressed reconciliation. Non-identity, which they constitute, significantly “speaks”—as an inversion of utopia. Adorno points out that art poses itself a question about its own utopianism through a particular constellation of its elements⁶⁷, and the truth of artworks or objects of artistic production is a configuration in which the different emerges from the identical and the defined.⁶⁸ Adorno writes the following about the inversion of utopia as configuration-constellation: “The constellation of the existing and nonexisting is the utopic figure of art. Although it is compelled toward absolute negativity, it is precisely by virtue of this negativity that it is not absolutely negative.”⁶⁹ He adds that it is precisely the social, “revolutionary” power that works draw from within, from this original method of configuring what is social and intra-artistic:

Art, even as something tolerated in the administered world, embodies what does not allow itself to be managed and what total management suppresses. Greece’s new tyrants knew why they banned Beckett’s plays, in which there is not a single political word. Asociality becomes the social legitimation of art. For the sake of reconciliation, authentic works must blot out every trace of reconciliation in memory. All the same, the unity that even dissociative works do not escape is not without a trace of the old reconciliation. Artworks are, a priori, socially culpable, and each one that deserves its name seeks to expiate this guilt.⁷⁰

The work finally speaks, becomes “speech-like”—that is, it is considered by Adorno to be successful—thanks to its own immanent way of construction, all directly social content “dies” in it, so that it can be read from the constellation created by the work as a formal-content, non-identical unity.⁷¹ In order to be a “silent” accusation, a work must be “coherent” in this way, control the contradictions that the antagonized society gives it. Thus, the non-identity is not arbitrary and undefined; on the contrary, one can say about the “openness” it provides, about the possibility of thinking and subversive transfiguration of utopia, which it provokes, only when the identity is realized as unity. Conversely, unity only then turns out not to be a closed whole, but a unity in multiplicity: a constellation that binds non-hierarchically what is special and general, as a social negative of the experienced suffering, marginalization. Art as an expression of suffering is not its uncontrollable expression or pure imitation. On the contrary, in order for suffering, as an element of an inverted utopia, to gain expression, i.e., to meet the condition of universalization, it must be transformed, constructed. Experienced and well-considered, but not figured out, it gains in concreteness. The relationship is

⁶⁶ See: (Scholem 1969).

⁶⁷ (Adorno 2002, p. 311).

⁶⁸ (Adorno 2002, p. 311).

⁶⁹ (Adorno 2002, p. 233).

⁷⁰ (Adorno 2002, p. 234).

⁷¹ See: (Adorno 2002, pp. 291–92).

two-sided: the structure gains expression when elements of experience, social antagonisms and the principles of exclusion and marginalization inscribed in it exist as principles of its form:

In the case of such exemplary artists of the epoch as Schoenberg, Klee, and Picasso, the expressive mimetic element and the constructive element are of equal intensity, not by seeking a happy mean between them but rather by way of the extremes: Yet each is simultaneously content-laden, expression is the negativity of suffering, and construction is the effort to bear up under the suffering of alienation by exceeding it on the horizon of undiminished and thus no longer violent rationality. Just as in thought, form and content are as distinct as they are mediated in one another, so too in art.⁷²

4. Conclusions—Art Nominalism and Jewish Nominalism

The analysis of configuration-constellation leads to reflections on similarities between the language and the structure of the work. The thesis to be verified by this analysis speaks of the structural similarity, or even analogy, between the generally discussed Jewish nominalism and the nominalism of the language of art.

In my opinion, the first analogy exists between the meaning of the quasi-creative act of naming, generally discussed in the first part of the text as redefining the relationship between creation and the absolute, and the principle of nominalist art, the principle of creation and the existence of artworks—monads. The idiom of art, distanced from empiria, proposed by Adorno, will be his original proposal of redefining the binding of what is considered universal, i.e., the conceptual language, and every particular idiom, existence, moment, act, expression present in the work. In other words, the work as a “windowless monad” will establish a model similar to the one proposed by e.g., Scholem or Benjamin, considering the possibility of preserving the link between the universal field of theology and religion, tradition and profaned and fatally secularized cultural reality. Adorno, referring to the Jewish formula of preserving tradition proposed by the two thinkers mentioned above, speaks first of the act of naming.⁷³ For him, it is a link between creation, interpretation, and criticism, mediating in artistic activities and activities defining the duration of the created objects- artworks. For Adorno, the act of naming is an artistic statement and its socio-cultural imprimatur. This kind of linguisticity will be a model of continuous, non-preferential individualization—analogously to the creative model of Jewish nominalism.⁷⁴ If we are talking about non-hierarchical unification with a dialectic structure, we assume that individualization includes both the subject and the object. Consequently, the artwork, its specific idiom, will be a field of play between the subjective moment and the objective moment of the aforementioned relation. In his last work, Adorno therefore proposes—and this is my interpretation of the main goal of the *Aesthetic Theory*—a method for fulfilling and implementing the principles of negative dialectics. It is necessary to take a closer look at how he characterizes the specific object of these activities, i.e., artwork.

As I mentioned earlier, the monadology of the artwork determines its idiom distanced from empiria, which in turn marks how subjective-objective relationships within it are arranged. Adorno defines the manner in which the subjective and the socially-inherited elements of the work speak. He thus characterizes this monadology by writing about the intentionlessness and indirectness of pronunciation in the following words:

The language of artworks is, like every language, constituted by a collective undercurrent, especially in the case of those works popularly stigmatized as lonely and walled up in the ivory tower; the eloquence of their collective substance originates in their image character

⁷² (Adorno 2002, p. 257).

⁷³ See: (Benjamin 2002a, pp. 62–74; Benjamin 2002b; Scholem 1990, pp. 97–99); on function of Scripture in Lurianic Kabbalah, see: (Scholem 1996; Biale 1982, pp. 112–47).

⁷⁴ See: p. 8, of this essay.

and not in the “testimony” as the cliché goes—that they supposedly wish to express directly to the collective. The specifically artistic achievement is an overarching binding character to be ensnared not thematically or by the manipulation of effects but rather by presenting what is beyond the monad through immersion in the experiences that are fundamental to this bindingness.⁷⁵

In other words, art does not wish to oppose the general, the social and the cultural, but to oppose the specific. This is why the work adopts a monadic idiom in order to de-hierarchize this marriage and to make the other generalities speak with their own language—as it speaks—as a model of such an experience—the work. For art is an unfulfilled promise of reconciliation, and the idea of reconciliation is individualization not based on subordination. In this way, completely convergent with the proposal of the Jewish Marranos, art secularizes the revelation about which Adorno writes that it is both an ideal and a barrier (impassable for) of every work.⁷⁶ Again, the fact that art “speaks” as a monad, brings it closer to the language of the Jewish message, a tradition that draws on the idea of creation proposed by the Kabbalah interpreter, Scholem. The presence of revelation is its non-presence or a barrier to the meaning of the work. Adorno writes:

“The contamination of art with revelation would amount to the unreflective repetition of its fetish character on the level of theory. The eradication of every trace of revelation from art would, however, degrade it to the undifferentiated repetition of the status quo. A coherence of meaning—unity—is contrived by art because it does not exist and because as artificial meaning it negates the being-in-itself for the sake of which the organization of meaning was undertaken, ultimately negating art itself. Every artifact works against itself.”⁷⁷

The impossibility of reconciliation, about which Adorno further writes, the negation of the unity that the work is, are supported by the truth of the unfulfilled social conditions of the model postulated by every artifact. The artwork is an expression of a lack of unity and sense—it is a monad communicating its own closure, including a social fiasco of subjectification decreed in the notional definitions. So how to read a model of meaning from the negation of sense? If any particular unity read from a work is denied in this identification, then a possible way of “reading” the work will be to incorporate the lack of unity into the process itself. We end up with nothing, or with the space of experiencing the ontological impossibility of any finite narrative. Or the impossibility to transform it into a classic definition. The mechanism of differentiation, about which I wrote in the context of identifying oneself as a Jewish Marrano in the first part of the work, is a model of subject-object relationship postulated in the language of art.

Adorno, as a philosopher reading from fragments of a messed-up life, links the above de-semantic model of meaning, negation of sense and differentiation (as) of identification with a specific event in the history of the West. Auschwitz is a condition of semantic emptiness and eloquent silence as the “language” of 20th-century art⁷⁸. Adorno would also read the preceding works through the prism of radical erasure of what is different from the western cultural tissue—like signs with their inaccessibility proclaiming the need for shelter from real violence. Auschwitz was also the event that most affected the European Jewish diaspora. At the same time, it was an unprecedented genocide in the Western history of those who, for various reasons, were considered the other. They were stigmatized and excluded: symbolically—attempts were made to erase the memory of them—and really, as they were brutally and mechanically murdered, they were eventually deprived even of death.⁷⁹ Adorno, who wrote

⁷⁵ (Adorno 2002, p. 86).

⁷⁶ See: (Adorno 2002, pp. 105–6).

⁷⁷ (Adorno 2002, p. 106).

⁷⁸ Whereas Lacoue-Labarthe has a completely different opinion. As I wrote (see: Górski 2017, pp. 150–54), he defines Auschwitz as the ultimate caesura of any kind of relationship of the universal and the particular, so also critical and artistic; see also: (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, pp. 41–52).

⁷⁹ See: (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990; Vogt 2016).

Aesthetic Theory many years after the war, reconstructed a particular symbolic, or rather allegorical and real, material, bodily marriage. Art is supposed to be a remembrance of suffering, and as such, to carry this suffering within itself, otherwise, it is no longer defensible: “Even in a legendary better future, art could not disavow remembrance of accumulated horror; otherwise its form would be trivial.”⁸⁰ This means that the expression of the other as concrete, in the philosophical language of the Marrano, and the expression of suffering that monadic work brings in itself and communicates through dissonances, contradictions, antagonism, can be combined with a strong analogy. Nominalism in art, unequal to the philosophical one, due to its dialectic and at the same time monadic attitude towards universality⁸¹, thanks to its similarity to language, shows how to bring together the particular and accidental in a work with the universal. What is more, this bringing together means the only formula of transcendence recognized by Adorno. Adorno writes:

“In art, universals are strongest where art most closely approaches language: that is, when something speaks, that, by speaking, goes beyond the here and now. Art succeeds at such transcendence, however, only by virtue of its tendency toward radical particularization; that is, only in that it says nothing but what it says by virtue of its own elaboration, through its immanent process”.⁸²

The expression of suffering is what connects the immanent formula of the work with its tendency to show the possibility of transgression in its closeness and specificity towards the universal. Thus, the work is a model of individualization, a model which closes in a dialectic square of dependencies, where the direction of movement is determined by the dialectics of the notions of immanence and transcendence and its content is determined by a pair of particular—universal notions. The model, impossible to realize, drives the imperative of remembrance of the accumulated terror, the imperative that gives back the meaning to art and restores the “others” the possibility of identification in the tissue of European society—and thus, its constitutive, creative incoherence. Therefore, the topos of art after Auschwitz is equal to the place “reserved” for the Marranos, about which Bielik-Robson writes. The memory of the Other and its prefigurations—about corporeity (vs. conceptuality), about difference and differentiation (vs. identification), about the individual (vs. total), about the open (vs. closed and systemic), etc., is a condition of messianic hope. There is no better way toward an endless reconciliation than the way of social and cultural criticism as a form of remembrance. And the most mature form of this remembrance (and Jewish nominalism) is, in my opinion, the potential of modern artwork described and defined by Theodor W. Adorno in his *Aesthetic Theory*.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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⁸⁰ (Adorno 2002, p. 324).

⁸¹ (Adorno 2002, pp. 199–208).

⁸² (Adorno 2002, p. 205).

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