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Perturbing the Reader

The Riddle-character of Art and the Dialectical Impact of Contemporary Literature (Adorno, Goetz, Kracht)

In his criticism of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, Hans Robert Jauß argues that Adorno widely neglects the constitutive role of reception in art, particularly forms of interaction like enjoying, identification, or catharsis (Jauß 1982: 64–65). If he is right, every attempt to analyze Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* via strategies that evoke certain effects would be in vain. As a matter of fact, Adorno himself expresses reservation about the effort to understand artworks by their effects. He defines the logic of the artwork as “determined objectively in themselves without regard to their reception”¹ (Adorno 2013: 188). By this statement Adorno might think of a research tradition, which investigates individual reactions towards the experience of art. In contrast to these empirical studies, from which Adorno wants to distance himself, another research area, namely an abstract one, considers effects of reception as linked to the textual structures. Of course, it takes an act of reading to actualize those structures, but from the perspective of thinkers such as Wolfgang Iser or Umberto Eco, effects cannot be engendered without considering them as implicit models and intentional aims of the artwork. On the basis of this research line, this essay looks at whether and how it is possible to approach one of the most important aspects of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*: the riddle-character of art. Without doubt the term implies an activating mode for those trying to solve the riddle. Regarding the different ways of interaction in the process of riddling, I am going to answer the two following questions. First, how does Adorno conceptualize the riddle-character of art, and in which ways does it relate to concepts of interpretation, sense, and truth? Furthermore, which role does the riddle-character play in the reconciliation, which is according to Adorno the great achievement of art in society? Second, on the basis of the novels *Irre*, by Rainald Goetz (1983), and *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*, by Christian Kracht (2008), I am going to review whether the riddle-character, as Adorno understands it, actually describes all kinds of modern literature – particularly developments in contemporary literature, which strongly works in a dialectic mode of involvement and disruption. By answering these questions, I want to highlight another aspect of modern literature; namely,

¹ “objektiv in sich bestimmt ohne Rücksicht auf ihre Rezeption” (Adorno 1970: 206).

that in addition to Adorno's paradigm of reconciliation it is essential to introduce a paradigm of perturbation.

1 Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and the riddle-character of art

"All artworks – and art altogether – are enigmas"² (Adorno 2013: 166). Adorno's well-known appraisal in the *Aesthetic Theory* means first and foremost: artworks are characterized by an offer of meaning that includes a gesture of hiding. To visualize this effect, Adorno uses the image of a picture puzzle, which indicates the "preestablished routing of its observer"³ (Adorno 2013: 167). The more you try to understand the artwork the more it will cover its answers. Due to this ambivalent character Adorno criticizes the idealism of understanding underlying hermeneutics. According to Adorno it is not possible to resolve all lacks of clarity in arts so as to give concrete answers, although he assumes that artworks pretend to be understood, and therefore want to be interpreted. However, in addition to the sensual component, Adorno points out a second mode of interaction in art experience: a philosophical one. Presuming that the riddle-character arises from a rational mind, and is not an irrational effect, art can be understood as a mediated truth; and mediated in itself the truth can just be localized in a process of mediation. The process Adorno thereby has in mind differs from hermeneutic acts of interpretation, since philosophical reflection just shows how the riddle-character works: "The solution of the enigma amounts to giving the reason for its insolubility"⁴ (Adorno 2013: 168).

Even though Adorno is not interested in the perceptual part of art, the metaphor of the riddle-character only makes sense by considering an active role of perception, which is guaranteed by being astonished and trying to solve the riddle. Moreover, art and its perception can be understood as a mode of communication, by connecting the truth of art with the rational sphere of critical philosophy, as Adorno assumes in his *Aesthetic Theory* (Sonderregger 2011: 422). Both are able to create something that does not exist in reality anymore: the reconciliation of all heterogeneity. According to Adorno, in a broken world only art and philosophy provide a synthesis of disparate elements. Regarding the reflection of art, rational discourse and aesthetic discourse are combined, and therefore rec-

2 "Alle Kunstwerke, und Kunst insgesamt, sind Rätsel" (Adorno 1970: 182).

3 "prästabilisierte Niederlage ihres Betrachters" (Adorno 1970: 184).

4 "Das Rätsel lösen ist soviel wie den Grund seiner Unlösbarkeit angeben" (Adorno 1970: 185).

conciliation has to be considered as a product of interacting. As I have shown before, this interaction relies on certain structures in the artwork, which are of particular interest for Adorno. By linking the reconciliation with the way the artwork is configured, he uses terms that are well known by the tradition he criticizes: that of hermeneutics. These terms are "unity" and "entireness," "consistence" and "coherence," or "balance" and "correlation." According to Adorno, all these elements are an expression of the quality of an artwork; it can be measured by its ability to synthesize its components into a single unit and therefore to offer an experience of reconciliation.

The criteria Adorno uses belong to the classical tradition and, as such, they build a contrast to aesthetic Modernity, which is formed on principles of ugliness, disharmony, and disproportion. Of course Adorno knows that there has been a crisis of meaning in aesthetic modernity, whereby creating harmonious art has become impossible. But that does not mean for him that reconciliation would be replaced by the irreconcilable. Adorno argues quite the opposite: "Today, reconciliation as the comportment of the artwork is evinced precisely there where art countermands the idea of reconciliation in works whose form dictates intransigence"⁵ (Adorno 2013: 183). This statement is based on a dialectical figure, so that accordingly any negation of meaning, unity, and harmony remain dependent on these principles. They are present even in the act of their destruction. Adorno therefore asserts that even where the art insists "on the most extreme incoherence and dissonance, these elements are those of unity; without this unity they would not even be dissonant"⁶ (Adorno 2013: 214). Based on these considerations Adorno establishes a rating scale for modern art. According to it, any attempt of still creating harmonious art, for example a metrical, uniformly composed poem in the style of romantic sensibility, has to be regarded as a failure. The dissonant modernity is measured according to whether it consciously stages a factor of destruction, or simply turns out to be just nonsense. Adorno argues: "Everything depends on this: whether meaning inheres in the negation of meaning in the artwork"⁷ (Adorno 2013: 210). For example, he refers to the absurd theater of Samuel Beckett and avant-garde installation art. While Beckett still preserves the unity of space, time, and action in the absences of it, the collages and montages of the avant-garde art at first glance seem to be interested

5 "Versöhnung als Verhaltensweise des Kunstwerks wird heute gerade dort geübt, wo Kunst der Idee von Versöhnung absagt" (Adorno 1970: 202).

6 "auf dem Äußersten von Unstimmigem und Dissonantem besteht, sind ihr jene Momente zugleich solche von Einheit; ohne diese würden sie nicht einmal dissonieren" (Adorno 1970: 235).

7 "Alles hängt daran, ob der Negation des Sinns im Kunstwerk Sinn innewohnt" (Adorno 1970: 231).

only in destruction. However, the compilation of materials such as newspaper cuttings or cans follows a certain order principle. It is a principle that negates the criteria of harmony, which are thereby inherent in its denial. The reason why Adorno prefers dissonant art in general is that it fulfills an essential social function. As the collages deal with garbage, they remind us of what is excluded by the rules of consumer society in its utilitarian thinking. The riddle-character of art thus gains a critical meaning. If art resigns this character, it gives away the opportunity to create an autonomous sphere, from which a counter-model to reality is possible.

2 Perturbance instead of reconciliation: Rainald Goetz's *Irre* and Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*

The polar constellation in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* leaves no room for alternative configurations of meaning and structures of destruction. However, such alternative setups can be found in a particular line of modern literature, which can be drawn from Romanticism to the present. Texts of this type deny the alternative of synthesis and disruption by not resolving the tension between meaning and meaninglessness. In these texts, no reconciliation can be developed dialectically, because the dialectic only seems to appear, and does not actually take place. I call this effect perturbance. In such an experience of perturbance, it is impossible for the reader to decide whether the incoherence of the text can be unified or the text as whole is constantly undermined by its disruptions. To illustrate this assumption, I will discuss the novels *Irre* and *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*. Both novels have been classified by critics as extremely confusing and prepossessing at the same time. Rainald Goetz's novel *Irre* is about a young doctor called Raspe, who works in a psychiatric institution and suffers under the working conditions of the clinic. To cope with his experiences, he starts writing; however, it turns out that it is impossible for him to break out of madness, because in his desire to recover he constantly reflects on the conditions of insanity. In representing madness, Goetz uses a strategy of a multi-perspective narration and a non-chronological structure. The three parts of the novel are arranged in a confusing relation of 'histoire' and 'discours.' In the logic of action, the middle part called "Inside" has to be considered as the real beginning, as it is about the initial euphoria with which Raspe started his job as a psychiatrist. This optimistic attitude is undermined by the first chapter "Remove oneself," which shows Raspe's suffering and failure. The last part is

anything but what its title "Order" suggests, because the confusing condition of Raspe is represented in an associative structure. His desire to be freed from his deranged state can only be described in an open question at the final end of the novel: "Is finally everything one, my work?"⁸ (Goetz 1983: 331). With regard to this open ending, the novel represents a loss of unity and coherence, and at the same time the desire to recover from this loss. The text shows a desperate attempt by Raspe to gain control of himself through discourses that are extracted from the subject over and over again. The basic perturbation is that nothing leads to a whole, though constantly the desire for it is expressed. Thereby the reflection mode of the text, as Adorno understands it, does not reconcile the reader with the disparity of the text. It rather causes several disturbing moments. This connection between reflection and destruction is particularly evident in the statements that directly address the reader. The first of these passages strikes the difficult beginning of the novel, with its bewildering juxtapositions of paragraphs and multi-perspective representation of madness. In a fictional dialogue with a so-called benevolent observer, the narrator states:

Now that I have constantly explained myself and the text in this passage, this short sentence: You should just wait for it, and because the sentence was so short, I repeated it: *You should just wait for it*. This you of course points to the benevolent neutral observer, but at the same time it seems to me that this you also refers to you, unlike the outset where I was meant [...].⁹ (Goetz 1983: 22f.)

This passage promises to resolve all irritations and is trying to encourage those readers, whose attentions were badly strained by the non-linear mode of presentation, to continue reading. It is particularly important that this form of confidential talk between the narrator and the reader creates a horizon of understanding, which is undermined below. Although the second chapter seems to be much more coherent, it is not true that "everything will be clear"¹⁰ (Goetz 1983: 105), as promised by the motto of this chapter. Therefore, the way the text addresses the reader has to be considered as preparing a confrontational strategy. The polite form of "Sie" indicates a detached attitude against this type of reader, but in the two other clauses, in which the reader is addressed, it becomes even clearer

⁸ "Ist endlich alles eines, meine Arbeit?"

⁹ "Nachdem ich Ihnen in dieser Passage laufend mich selbst und den Text erläutert habe, dieser kurze Satz: Warten Sie es doch einfach ab, und weil er so kurz war, wiederholte ich ihn: *Warten Sie es doch einfach ab*. Mit diesem Sie war natürlich einerseits er gemeint, der neutrale wohlgesonnene Beobachter, doch zugleich sind diesmal, anders als eingangs wo ich gemeint war, mit diesem Sie auch Sie gemeint, wie mir scheint [...]."

¹⁰ "alles klar werden [wird]."

that the communication between the narrator and the reader loses its suggestive immediacy. Both use the third person and can be found in the last chapter, where completely different opinions occur about the relation between the text and its perception. They are committed to what Roland Barthes has defined as a characteristic feature of the so called “writerly text”: a “plurality of entrances” and an “opening of networks” (Barthes 1990: 5).

This information was for users who have entered here by accident. Today I care especially for those users who are more likely to be etched by longer contiguous WordPassages, who, if they read such a book at all, prefer to browse through it, and for whom this super short AllSubChapters might have been logically a possible entry. My sympathy applies highly to these users. With them I share my desire for an accurate tight language (BUBBLE COOK SNOTS SPLASH), and my desire for pictures.¹¹ (Goetz 1983: 259)

The fact that the narrator sympathizes with this type of reader creates a paradoxical situation, because on the one hand, this narrator granted the readers of his text a wild usability; on the other hand, such a recommendation just makes sense if it is directed to a reader who is doing exactly the opposite: a reader of the hermeneutic orientation who tries to understand the novel by successive approximation. For him the title “Irre” as the primary reader orientation becomes an advisement. Therefore, the novel does not work as openly as it pretends to, but rather works in a dialectical reversal, as demonstrated in a retrospective at the end:

There was no narrative thread any more, which treats the narrator and subtle reader so well. Instead it had been necessary: minced meat, theory, messes, brain and brain again, manic pamphlets, gossip and corny jokes and finding instead of groping. That’s a shit, not literature, I am told. But I don’t give a hang, because it concerns immeasurably the truth and nothing else, because nothing can be taken into account, except that the whole thing is true.¹² (Goetz 1983: 279)

11 “Dies war eine Information für Benutzer, die zufällig hier gerade eingestiegen sind. Meine Fürsorge gilt heute vor allem jenen Benutzern, die von längeren zusammenhängenden WortPassagen eher angeätzt sind, die sich so ein Buch wenn überhaupt mehr durchblättermäßig reinziehen, und für die dieses superkurze AllesSubKapitelchen logisch ein möglicherweise Einstieg gewesen sein könnte. Diesen Benutzern gilt sehr meine Sympathie. Mit ihnen teile ich meine Sehnsucht nach einer treffend knappen Sprache (BLUBBER KOCH SPROTZ SPRITZ) und nach Bildern.”

12 “Und es gab auch keinen langen erzählerischen Atem mehr, der jedem Erzähler und feinsinnigen Leser so gut tut, sondern notwendig waren: Hackfleisch, Theorie, Sauereien, Hirn und nochmals Hirn, manische Pamphlete, Tratsch und Kalauer und Finden statt Tasten. Das ist eine Scheiße, keine Literatur, sagt man mir. Aber das muß wurscht sein, weil es maßlos um

The plea for coherence of the whole is not meant ironically, even if the narrator has already made clear: “If anybody wants me to explain how it all fits together, I will take the piss out of him”¹³ (Goetz 1983: 60). Consistency and coherence are rather substituted by a different concept of totality. It is a totality that tries to master madness in all areas of its impact. Therefore the novel does not generate a coherent relationship between the whole of the text and its individual components, as for example the hermeneutic circle suggests, but forms a mazy set of passages that are sometimes more, sometimes less connected. Such a mission of incoherent totality challenges a new form of reading in the sense of de-concentration, chaos, oblivion, and a-linearity. Due to the structure of the novel, however, this attitude cannot be obtained seamlessly as the result of a successful reading. Rather it takes place in the contrary way: in concentration, order, remembering, and linearity. This tension between method and knowledge makes it impossible to break out of the discourse of madness, what is exactly intended by the novel. The question of the last sentence as a gesture of opening, in which the main character Raspe is mired, turns out to be also a figure of closure for reader. To get to the end of the novel, it must be read again.

Christian Kracht’s novel *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten* works initially as a dystopian story about an alternative reality. Furthermore, the permanent state of war between the fictional Swiss Soviet Republic and fascist Germany represents the fundamental disruption of social interaction. Beside these chaotic circumstances there is a common thread in the text. The nameless protagonist, a high-ranking officer from the African colonies of Switzerland, gets the order to arrest the absconding Colonel Brazhinsky. For this purpose he sets out for the so-called “Réduit,” a mountain massif, which has to be considered as the mystical power center of the Swiss and therefore works as the symbolic center of the text. When he finally arrives, the actual order turns out to be unfeasible, because Brazhinsky proves to be too powerful. Also the Réduit itself, which the African officer longed for since his youth, turns out as an elusive rhizome. This topographic significance can be described in terms of deconstruction as a promise of fixation of meaning that will never fulfill. The same postponement can be found in the shape of the drawings on the walls inside the Réduit, which no one knows who painted; as one climbs higher, they alter from the concrete to the abstract, until they become a primitive cave drawing again at the top. The paintings show symbolically the way the protagonist will take at the end of

die Wahrheit geht und um sonst gar nichts, weil es nie keine Rücksicht nicht geben darf, außer darauf, daß das Ganze stimmt [...].”

13 “Wer fordert, ich solle erklären, wie alles zusammenhängt, wird einfach verarscht.”

the novel, which is to go back to Africa to the origins of mankind. With this twist, the goal of the plot turns into new possibilities of sense. At the end of civilization, there just may be a new approach to sense as an endless cycle of life.

In addition to this circularity, the narrative structure is based on a particular logical case. An indication of this can be found in the following passage, in which the narrator is sleeping with the female Major General Favre and meanwhile makes disturbing observations:

We touched each other. Her fingers ran over my eyebrows. [...] There was a Korean print on the wall above her bed that showed a wave that threatened to overwhelm a small wooden boat. A mountain was visible in the background. In the picture it was raining, or it was not raining. When it was over, she smoked one of my cigarettes, the last Papierosy.¹⁴ (Kracht 2010: 46)

The statement of the narrator “In the picture it was raining, or it was not raining” is a quote from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. It is used to illustrate an extreme case of elementary propositions, i. e. those sets of propositional logic, which can be asked whether they are true or false. Contrary to the impression that the sentence would be paradox, it must be considered as “unconditionally true”¹⁵ (Wittgenstein 1971: 55), because, whether it is raining or not, the sentence is always true and therefore leaves maximum room for its fulfillment. Wittgenstein calls this a tautology, in contrast to the other extreme case of elementary proposition, the contradiction in which the sentence would read: “In the picture it was raining, and it was not raining.” This statement is always wrong, because one argument repeals the other. The reason why the tautology is preferred by Kracht, compared to the contradiction, lies in its two-fold effect. Interpreted by mistake as an expression of an unreliable narrator (Hermes 2010: 52, 278), the tautological proposition provides a highly reliable and nonsensical statement at the same time. This tension between meaning and meaninglessness produces a subtle disturbance in reading. It is complemented by a second one between logical discourse and fictional context. Regardless of whether we are familiar with the rules of logic, the statement suggests a negotiation of truth. The categories ‘true’ and ‘false’, however, are not relevant in the perception of art. The fictional pact between the text and the reader actually works just by a dispensation of this alternative. Therefore the logical form itself generates disturb-

ance. This effect is reinforced by the fact that the sentence provides no information about the constitution of the narrated world, although it refers to this. The reason why this statement is made at all is for the sense of undecidability, which appears as the crucial narrative strategy of Kracht, and forms an alternative to Adorno’s opposition of coherence and dissonance. It is not by chance that a variation of the statement appears elsewhere in the text, namely where Favre says about Brazhinsky: “He is a danger to the SSR, or he is the hope of the SSR”¹⁶ (Kracht 2010: 41). On the demand of the narrator, as he could be both, he gets the answer: “That is the nature of things”¹⁷ (Kracht 2010: 41). Apparently the tautology is no more just a verbal case, but describes the basic conditions of the diegesis. Therefore the novel unfolds a world in which the logical form $A \vee \neg A$ applies to all circumstances. With respect to the description of the Korean print, there exists a perceptual situation, in which the narrator is sleeping with Favre and recognizes that it is raining, and a situation in which the narrator is sleeping with Favre and recognizes that it is not raining. This simultaneity and undecidability of alternatives, which overlap and claim parallel validity, affects all areas of the novel, particularly the subjective, historical, and poetical ones. Regarding the subjective plot line, Kracht has created a first-person narrator that embodies this superposition of different states of being in various ways. First, he strongly believes in the communist ideals, but always imagines Africa, where he grew up and was influenced by a shaman. Second, he remains nameless throughout the novel and therefore to some extent a stranger, although the reader gains insight into his thoughts and feelings. Third, and most importantly, different tenses change in the presentation of his experience: the perspective of the Swiss officer, who gets the order to arrest Brazhinsky, is in the epic past tense (“I was party commissioner in New Bern”¹⁸) (Kracht 2010: 12), whereas the escape fantasies are written in the present tense (“I am here, just briefly”¹⁹) (Kracht 2010: 27), and the prophecies of the Swiss final victory are formulated in the future tense (“We’ll build golden villages and golden towns”²⁰) (Kracht 2010: 27). By this diffusion of the past, present, and future, the novel thus creates a rupture in the linear plot, so that the safe place of narrative dissolves. The question of the narrator: “Which of my egos felt this?”²¹ (Kracht 2010: 112) suggests that several subjects exist inside him, as a kind of tautological versions of himself. In the lan-

¹⁶ “Er ist eine Gefahr für die SSR, oder er ist die Hoffnung der SSR.”

¹⁷ “Das wiederum liegt in der Natur der Dinge.”

¹⁸ “Ich war Parteikommissär in Neu-Bern.”

¹⁹ “Ich komme nur ganz kurz hierher.”

²⁰ “Wir werden goldene Dörfer und goldene Städte bauen.”

²¹ “Welches Ich fühlte das?”

¹⁴ “Wir berührten uns. Sie strich mit den Fingern über meine Augenbrauen. [...] An der Wand über ihrem Bett hing ein koreanischer Druck, der eine Welle zeigte, die ein kleines Holzschiff zu erdrücken drohte. Dahinter war ein Berg zu sehen. Auf dem Bild regnete es, oder es regnete nicht. Als es vorbei war, rauchte sie eine von meinen Zigaretten, die letzte Papierosy.”

¹⁵ “bedingungslos wahr.”

guage of logic, the narrator is therefore in Switzerland or in Africa, or at any place at all, or at all places at the same time.

The historical tautology of the novel can be explained by the relation between fiction and reality, which is particularly revealing in the story of the foundation of the Swiss Soviet Republic. According to this story “the great Swiss Lenin, who, instead of returning in a sealed train to the decaying, contaminated Russia, had remained in Switzerland to initiate the Soviet, in Zurich, Basel and New Bern, after decades of war”²² (Kracht 2010: 57f.). The passage provides not only information about the fictional founding of the Swiss Soviet Republic, but also refers by the “instead” at the same time to the historical fact that Lenin, in 1917, actually returned from exile in Switzerland to Russia. Within the fictional world, however, this actual history cannot be known. Therefore it is not the counterfactual narrative that is important, as many think (Irsigler 2013: 171–186), but the principle of the alternative itself. The novel is about the simultaneity of multiple parallel worlds in which opposite developments are possible. From this perspective, there is no difference between fact and fiction. Both turn out to be characterized as a realization form of an infinite number, which must always be thought of as alternatives.

The poetological tautology can be exemplified by the Réduit that works as a metaphor for the constitution of the text. Due to the simultaneous fixation and displacement of sense, by which this metaphor is characterized, two different interpretive perspectives intersect in the entire novel: one hermeneutical and one deconstructional. Following the hermeneutic track, the flashbacks to childhood and the current order of the narrator produce a relatively closed context that is indeed frequently disturbed by irritation and a-causal plot elements. On the other hand, the novel cannot be read solely in terms of deconstruction. Although the temporal and spatial configurations represent basic thought patterns of displacement and decentralization, the novel, however, pursues to a large extent a clear goal. Both approaches are thwarted by aspects of each other. This means that there is no interpretive perspective, which works as an exclusive model of explanation. That which, with respect to the subjective and historical reading, creates a perturbing effect – the simultaneity of alternatives – also applies to the poetical reading: it is possible to interpret and understand the novel, or it is not possible to interpret and understand the novel.

22 “[war] de[r] grosse[] Eidgenosse[] Lenin, [...] anstatt in einem plombierten Zug in das zerfallende, verstrahlte Russland zurückzukehren, in der Schweiz geblieben [...], um dort nach Jahrzehnten des Krieges den Sowjet zu gründen, in Zürich, Basel und Neu-Bern.”

3 Perturbance as dialectics of distance and closeness

Both novels send their main characters and readers on a search for sense, which is designed as an infinitive approximation. To quote Rainald Goetz’s *Irre*, it is a “rotary standstill”²³ (Goetz 1983: 219–220) in which the main characters and the readers are enclosed. This hermetic model of narration reveals a different strategy than the dialectical one of reconciliation by neglecting any kind of synthesis. Both novels reflect the effort to gain unity, but ultimately leave the question unanswered if it is going to succeed. Adorno himself describes a kind of aesthetic structure that is quite similar to this open question. It is the “most extreme form”²⁴ of the riddle-character of an artwork, which is characterized by the insecure experience “whether or not there is meaning”²⁵ (Adorno 2013: 175). If you cannot decide whether a text generates sense in the meaning of coherence, it is not possible to transfer its different parts into a higher unity, although you are constantly trying to do just that. Reconciliation as a principle of unity, and destruction as a mode of disruption, are in irresolvable opposition to each other. This is the kind of aesthetic experience I call “perturbance.” Perturbance has to be considered a literary strategy that does not deny the possibility of sense and meaning, but offers an alternative experience that changes between harmony and disharmony; or, to be more specific, an experience that is located in the middle of these extremes. Admittedly, in the philosophical reflection, perturbance can be understood as an organizing principle of the text, but the insight into this intention has nothing conciliatory. This makes it impossible to hold up the connection between art and philosophy through the rational, as Adorno suggests. Because perturbance does not maintain a clear position and awareness, it does not apply for what Ruth Sonderegger points out in her interpretation of Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory*: that experience and reflection of aesthetic truth would generate a critical attitude towards the social reality (Sonderegger 2011: 423). Being perturbed by reading does not make the receiving subject look at reality in a different way, since the state of ambiguity of perturbing art makes it impossible for the subject to judge at all. Nonetheless, both gestures of reconciliation and perturbance share an important effect that Sonderegger calls “non-indifference” (Sonderegger 2011: 423). While the non-indifference in Adorno’s

23 “kreisender Stillstand.”

24 “äußerste Gestalt.”

25 “ob Sinn selbst sei oder nicht.”

aesthetic of truth points to the social life, the non-indifference that arises by way of aesthetic of perturbation refers to art itself. The dialectic of this kind of aesthetic modernity is not about the relation between disorder and reconciliation, but about distance and closeness. Perturbation seems to keep us from art, but involves us even more in its aesthetic dimension.

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