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THE NECESSITY OF OVER-INTERPRETATION: ADORNO, THE ESSAY AND THE GESTURE OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

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This article is a discussion of Theodor W. Adorno's comment, in the beginning of 'The Essay as Form', that interpretations of essays are over-interpretations. I argue that this statement is programmatic, and should be understood in the light of Adorno's essayistic ideal of configuration, his notion of truth, and his idea of the enigmatic character of art. In order to reveal how this over-interpreting appears in practice, I turn to Adorno's essay on Kafka. According to Adorno, the reader of Kafka is caught in an aporia: Kafka's work cannot be interpreted, yet every single sentence calls for interpretation. This paradox is related to the gestures and images in Kafka's work: like Walter Benjamin, Adorno means that they contain sedimented, forgotten experiences. Instead of interpreting these images, Adorno visualizes the experiences indirectly by presenting images of his own. His own essay becomes gestural.

I. INTRODUCTION

The interpretations of the essay are not philologically definitive and conscientious; in principle they are over-interpretations. Theodor W. Adorno states in the beginning of his programmatic essay 'The Essay as Form'.¹ The interpretations of the essay are over-interpretations – the statement could be mistaken for a defence of the common notion of the essay as a kind of sanctuary for more informal, less stringent analyses; a genre with lower claims to truth than traditional academic research. I would argue, however, that the opposite is the point: the talk about over-interpretation points to a central aspect of Adorno's attempt to establish a form of critical thinking – in opposition to a positivist epistemological ideal – which has not given up the idea of an objective truth.

In broad terms there are two ways of understanding the status of interpretation in Adorno. According to one opinion his aesthetic theory and essays fits into a hermeneutical tradition. This is contested by other critics who argue that his so-called negative aesthetic implies a fundamental opposition between art and understanding.² From the latter perspective his essays appear more deconstructive than hermeneutical.

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 4; 'Der Essay als Form', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11, *Noten zur Literatur*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), 10: 'sind nicht philologisch erhärtet und besonnen, sondern prinzipiell Überinterpretationen.'

² See, for example, Dorthe Jørgensen, 'Svaret blæser i vinden' [The answer is blowing in the wind], *Nordisk estetisk tidskrift*, no. 15 (1996): 14; Mattias Martinson, *Perseverance*





The aim of my essay is to approach the question of Adorno's relation to hermeneutics by way of the often overlooked remark, just quoted, from 'The Essay as Form'. What is actually at issue here? Why are interpretations of the essay over-interpretations? And what does that imply? How does this over-interpretation affect his own essays? Does his over-interpretation differ from what we normally mean when we talk about over-interpretation, and – above all – why does it differ from a traditionally hermeneutical interpretation? There are no clear answers to these questions in the immediate surroundings of the remark, and 'over-interpretation' does not really have the status of a concept in Adorno's work. He makes similar statements in other works – in some passages in *Minima Moralia* for example – but, as far as I know, without ever using the term 'over-interpretation' again.³ So even though the term does not return, it seems to point out something important in Adorno's way of writing.

In order to clarify the implications of the remark in 'The Essay as Form' I will consider his essay 'Notes on Kafka', first published in 1953, shortly after Adorno's return to Germany from exile in the United States. Adorno himself was obviously very happy with the piece, and his biographer Stefan Müller-Doohm is hardly alone in ascribing to it 'a central importance in his *oeuvre*'.⁴ I would not contest that opinion, even though there are certainly other works on literature (including the essays on Beckett, Hölderlin, and Proust) which may be considered just as important, and in some cases more elegant. In my opinion the Kafka essay does not stand out as exceptional in Adorno's *oeuvre*, but it is important since it is

without Doctrine: Adorno, Self-critique, and the Ends of Academic Theology (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 176. And, on the other hand, Arild Linneberg, *Bastardforsøk* [Hybrid attempts] (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1994), 225–26; Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, trans. Neil Solomon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), chaps. 1, 3.

³ In *Minima Moralia*, in an aphorism on the nuances of language and thinking, he writes: 'The conclusion to be drawn from the decay of nuance is not to cling obstinately to forms that have decayed, nor yet to extirpate them altogether, but rather to try to out-nuance them, to push them to the point where from subjective shading they switch to being a pure, specific definition of the object.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexions on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 220–21; *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), 252: 'Die Konsequenz aus dem Verfall der Nuance ware nicht, an der verfallenen obstinate festzuhalten und auch nicht, jegliche zu extirpieren, sondern sie an Nuanciertheit womöglich zu überbieten, so weit sie zu treiben, bis sie aus der subjektiven Abschattung umschlägt in die reine spezifische Bestimmung des Gegenstandes.'

⁴ Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 353. Müller-Doohm also cites Adorno saying, in a letter to Rudolf Hirsch, the editor of the *Neue Rundschau* where the text first appeared, that 'it is the first time in my life that I have the feeling that I have written something that more or less corresponds to what I must expect of myself' (p. 355).



the first (although he had certainly written on literature before) in a series of literary essays with which it has a lot in common. In that sense 'Notes on Kafka' is typical rather than exceptional, and thus a good choice if one wants to study his essayistic method. But before turning to 'Notes on Kafka' it is necessary to touch upon some other concepts and aspects of Adorno's thinking.

II. DEFINITION / CONFIGURATION

The Danish historian of ideas, Hans-Jørgen Schanz, once remarked that Adorno's writings 'exercise a kind of quotation compulsion'.⁵ To a large extent Adorno's work consists of catchphrase-like, paradoxical excesses, statements seemingly made to be wrenched from their context and brought to illuminate other contexts. But since the individual sentences are often peculiarly independent of the textual surroundings, and regularly contradict the adjacent sentences, such a procedure is as risky as it is tempting. In *Aesthetic Theory* one may, for example, read: 'art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art.'⁶ Ten pages later it says: 'the immanence of society in the artwork is the essential social relation of art.'⁷ It is not easy to bring those statements together – no matter which quotation one chooses to refer to, one will be guilty of a falsifying simplification. This contradictory character is of course not an expression of sloppiness or disorder; it is the result of a conscious strategy.

What distinguishes the essay, Adorno writes in 'The Essay as Form', is its refusal to define the concepts it uses. This refusal is based on the idea that all concepts are already defined in so far as they are part of a language. The definition-eagerness of positivist thinking (and the implicit notion of the concept as a tabula rasa that one may define as one wishes) is most of all an expression of its claim to power. Instead of defining its concepts, the essay creates connections between the concepts it has at hand. 'All its concepts are to be presented in such a way that they support one another, that each becomes articulated through its configuration with the others. In the essay discrete elements set off against one another come together to form a readable context; the essay erects no scaffolding and no structure. But the elements crystallize as a configuration through their

⁵ Hans-Jørgen Schanz, 'Auschwitz og metafysik: Adorno' [Auschwitz and metaphysics: Adorno], in *Forandring og balance: refleksioner over metafysik og modernitet* [Change and balance: Reflections on metaphysics and modernity] (Aarhus: Modtryk, 1990), 99.

⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone, 1999), 225; *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, *Ästhetische Theorie*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Gretel Adorno (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), 335: 'wird [...] zum Gesellschaftlichen durch ihre Gegenposition zur Gesellschaft, und jene Position bezieht sie erst als autonome.'

⁷ *Ibid.*, 232; 345: 'Die Immanenz der Gesellschaft im Werk ist das wesentliche gesellschaftliche Verhältnis der Kunst.'

motion.⁸ This passage elucidates not only the difference between Adorno's idea of the concept and a positivist ideal, but also his way of composing his works. Against the strategy of definition he puts up the configuration. Whereas the former attempts to penetrate and clear away the ominously opaque in its object by means of fixed concepts and deductive argumentation, the latter strives to create a web of statements and concepts which, through their inherent dynamics and contradictions, may give an image of the opacity of the object. It is a matter of constructing 'a complex of concepts interconnected in the same way it imagines them to be interconnected in the object.'⁹ This means that the configuration is both form and content; as Shierry Weber Nichol森 writes: 'form in the essay is defined by the way concepts are used; essentially, by the way they are set in relation to one another.'¹⁰ The configuration therefore lacks a natural beginning, a centre, and an end. No particular sentence, no single concept, is more important than any other and it is always possible to create yet another connection, to make the web a bit tighter and wider.

But this is just one side of the matter. For even though the notion of configuration is founded on the insight of a discursive deficiency, and even though it advocates an anti-systematic procedure, it is not to be mistaken for a defence of relativism. The essay does not, according to Adorno, proceed downright unmethodically, but 'methodically unmethodically'.¹¹ At the same time as the essay is determined by its object of investigation, it is fair to say that it shapes its own object.¹² The lack of

⁸ Adorno, 'Essay as Form', 13; 'Der Essay als Form', 21–22: 'Alle seine Begriffe sind so darzustellen, daß sie einander tragen, daß ein jeglicher sich artikuliert je nach den Konfigurationen mit anderen. In ihm treten diskret gegeneinander abgesetzte Elemente zu einem Lesbaren zusammen; er erstellt kein Gerüst und keinen Bau. Als Konfiguration aber kristallisieren sich die Elemente durch ihre Bewegung.'

⁹ Ibid., 23; 32: 'das Zusammengewachsensein der Begriffe derart, wie sie als im Gegenstand selbst zusammengewachsen vorgestellt werden.'

¹⁰ Shierry Weber Nichol森, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), 107. Weber Nichol森 argues that there is a distinct difference regarding the form between Adorno's literary essays and the more monumental *Aesthetic Theory*. Her opinion is shared by Hendrik Birus among others. Interestingly enough, both of them tend to make an implicit valuation in this distinction, in both cases to the benefit of the essays. In my opinion, the difference is not so distinct as they assert; *Aesthetic Theory* is more fragmentary and unsystematic than one may first think. Christian Schärf's characterization of *Aesthetic Theory* as an attempt to realize the ideas in 'The Essay as Form' is therefore more accurate. Comp. Weber Nichol森, *Exact Imagination*, 124–34; Hendrik Birus, 'Adorno's Negative Aesthetics?', in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 157–59; Christian Schärf, *Geschichte des Essays: Von Montaigne bis Adorno* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 276.

¹¹ Adorno, 'Essay as Form', 13.

¹² That this latter side often prevails is perhaps the most important flaw of Adorno's essays: Adorno often tends to say approximately the same thing, whether writing about Kafka, Proust, Beckett, or someone else.

a natural beginning and end also means that the essay 'says what occurs to it in that context and stops when it feels finished rather than when there is nothing to say'.¹³ Here one may perceive the beginning of an explanation of the hyperbolic, maxim-like style: it is as if the essay were forced to provide an image of its object in every single sentence, before it is too late. If, as Christoph Menke points out, the configuration form does indeed cause a dissolution of 'the illusion attached to its individual statements: that they are able to depict that which is aesthetically experienced in the medium of statements',¹⁴ it apparently demands, on the other hand, a kind of categorical exaggeration, a certain force or violence, on behalf of the individual constituents in order for a configuration to take shape. As Alexander García Düttman convincingly argues, thinking depends, according to Adorno, on exaggeration. 'Thinking is essentially exaggeration, at least to the extent that it opens up and discloses a world. Every thought, which depends on such a disclosure, must bear the trace of an exaggeration.'¹⁵ Without exaggeration, no disclosure, and without disclosure, no truth.

III. AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPT OF TRUTH

In the first of the 'Meditations on Metaphysics' which close *Negative Dialectics* Adorno returns to his own much debated statement that it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz. Perhaps it was a false statement, he admits, but instead of a more balanced argument he then throws an even harsher accusation in the face of the reader: 'But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living.'¹⁶ Auschwitz caused a guilt that is irreconcilable not only with continued poetry-writing, but with a continued life in general, that is, a life worth living. And since it is impossible to make this guilt 'fully, presently conscious', it does not cease to reproduce itself – its actuality is therefore just as great today as at the end of World War Two. This harsh comment is, however, followed by yet another surprising turn: it is that situation, that actuality, and nothing else, which 'compels us to philosophize'.¹⁷ Without further explanation Adorno then enters into an epistemological argument about the philosophical possibility of reaching a truth. Is it not in fact so, he asks, that philosophy leads us away from things, the deeper it penetrates them in its search

¹³ Adorno, 'Essay as Form', 4.

¹⁴ Menke, 'Sovereignty of Art', 110.

¹⁵ Alexander García Düttman, 'Thinking as Gesture: A Note on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*', *New German Critique* 81 (2000): 151.

¹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 362–63; *Negative Dialektik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), 355: 'Nicht falsch aber ist die minder kulturelle Frage, ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse.'

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 364; 357: 'dem Bewußtsein [...] ganz gegenwärtig sein', 'zwingt zur Philosophie'.



for an essence? This question implies a tension between surface and depth, a tension which then returns in the distinction between, on the one hand, common sense and trivial observations – whose theoretical manifestation, Adorno argues, is positivism and unreflected nominalism – and, on the other hand, speculation and elevated thinking. Adorno neither takes sides nor deconstructs this dichotomy; rather, he holds on to the uncertainty: at the same time as he questions the search for an essence, he writes that it would be denigrating truth as such if the trivial, superficial, immediately observable were taken for the truth. On the other hand the down-to-earth *may* appear to be truer than the sublime.¹⁸ How should one understand this comment?

One answer is concealed partly in the indeterminate future tense of the discussion, partly in the positivist truth as a ‘sneering mockery’, partly in the preceding talk about the guilt after Auschwitz. To maintain a transcendent, metaphysical truth is no longer possible; at the same time, however, a truth which confines itself to that which is actually existing would not only be trivial, but would also imply a contented approval of the circumstances that led to the Holocaust. In spite of this aporetic situation, Adorno tries to maintain the idea of objective truth, he even argues that the situation demands it. This is where the compulsion to philosophy arises: by elevating itself above what exists – and even turning against itself – thinking as such may demonstrate that the current circumstances are not necessarily all there is; existence could be different; there are other possibilities. What truth provides is, in other words, a promise. In that sense, Adorno’s conception of truth has an unambiguous utopian trait, but this trait has often been exaggerated and interpreted too concretely.¹⁹ The point is not that there is a true utopia to strive for, but that truth as such has become utopian. There are no valid discursive criteria for distinguishing between truth and untruth.

Accordingly, the essay concludes with an outline of another, non-discursive truth concept: ‘The innervation that metaphysics might win only by discarding itself applies to such other truth, and it is not the last among motivations for the passage to materialism.’²⁰ This comment reflects the dichotomy that was identified earlier. The difference is that the two sides – the particular, trivial, and dirty, on the one hand, and the sublime, general, metaphysical, on the other – are now brought into a dialectical relationship: thinking has to hold on to the material,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See, for example, Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 78.

²⁰ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 364–65; *Negative Dialektik*, 357: ‘Solcher anderen Wahrheit gilt die Innervation, Metaphysik möchte gewinnen allein, wenn sie sich wegwirft. Sie nicht zuletzt motiviert den Übergang in Materialismus.’



but at the same time break the positivist ban on thinking the metaphysical.²¹ This alternative truth concept would consequently demand a kind of materialist metaphysic.²² Adorno finds a step in that direction in Marx, Benjamin, and Kafka.

IV. THE ENIGMATIC CHARACTER OF ART

'All artworks – and art altogether – are enigmas; since antiquity this has been an irritation to the theory of art.' 'The truth content of artworks is the objective solution of the enigma posed by each and every one.'²³ What can be concluded from these detached remarks from *Aesthetic Theory* is that art, according to Adorno, is a privileged form of expression, in the sense that it is a vehicle of truth – the artwork has a truth content (*Wahrheitsgehalt*), or rather a substance of truth.²⁴ This truth is not immediately accessible; in order to reach it one has to find the objective solution to the riddle the artwork constitutes.

But the nine pages that separate the two quotations complicate things. What is noteworthy is that the enigmatic character is said to increase, the more one understands the work at hand. In that sense, the riddle simile is ambivalent. On the one hand, Adorno insists that the artwork is a riddle in a strict sense: it potentially contains its own solution. The riddle character is a call for a solution, a demand that the interpretation should reveal the foundation of the enigma. On the other hand, it is emphasized that the enigmatic character survives every interpretation. The artwork and the interpretation, the riddle and the solution, do not form a symbiotic relationship; the riddle is not made to be solved, and the interpretation is not the perfect tool for solving the puzzle. On the contrary, from Adorno's perspective the interpreter is bound to fail. In other words, the interpretation is characterized by a fundamental insufficiency; he even maintains that the very category of understanding becomes problematic in the light of the enigmatic character of the artwork.²⁵

²¹ See Schanz, 'Auschwitz og metafysik', 110. A concise discussion of Adorno's concept of truth appears in Martinson, *Perseverance without Doctrine*, 69–71.

²² Osborne argues that Adorno's entire project may well be understood as the elaboration of 'a materialist metaphysic of modernity'. This becomes most evident, according to Osborne, in *Aesthetic Theory*. Peter Osborne, 'Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism: The Problem of a "Postmodern" Art', in *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1989), 23.

²³ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 120, 128–29; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7:182, 193: 'Alle Kunstwerke, und Kunst insgesamt, sind Rätsel; das hat von altersher die Theorie der Kunst irritiert.' 'Der Wahrheitsgehalt der Kunstwerke ist die objektive Auflösung des Rätsels eines jeden einzelnen.'

²⁴ One should be careful with the difference between 'Inhalt' (content) and 'Gehalt' (substance): when Adorno speaks of 'Inhalt' he is normally referring to something that can be related (the content of a story, for example), whereas 'Gehalt', as in 'Wahrheitsgehalt', refers to a more elusive feature.

²⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 121.



Adorno provides no concise explanation for the enigmatic character of art. As is his wont, he approaches this feature in a configuration of statements. Between page 125 and page 128 in *Aesthetic Theory*, it says, for example, that the enigmatic character is constituted by the immanent processuality of the work of art, that is, by its historicity; what is enigmatic about the artworks is their discontinuity, their lack of transcendence, which is thematized first in Kafka's 'damaged parables'; art is enigmatic since it gives the impression to have solved the enigma of existence; the enigmatic in the artworks is the configuration of mimesis and rationality; the riddle is made up of the zone of indefiniteness between the unattainable and what has been realized in the work of art. And so on. Without entering more deeply into any of these statements, one may note that the many aspects of the enigmatic character make it difficult to arrange it into any harmonizing image of the experience of art. The enigmatic character depends not only on the insufficiency of understanding in the face of the artwork; it is also a result of the non-identity of the artwork. That is why the enigmatic character makes up an invariable threat, not only against understanding, but also against the aesthetic experience as such.

How then should one relate to art? If the insolubility of the riddle is a premise, which attitude is adequate? To try to solve it nevertheless? Has one then really taken the constitutive enigmatic character seriously? Would it not, in the light of the insolubility, be more insightful to refrain from any attempt to find a solution and any effort to say something about the artwork? On the other hand, Adorno underlines that the truth content of the artwork demands interpretation, theoretical reflection, critique (which is expressed in a number of ways throughout *Aesthetic Theory*) if it is going to unfold at all. Truth subsists in the aesthetic experience that implies the breakdown of understanding; one may only approach it through a 'second reflection', that is, a form of reflection over the breakdown of understanding as such. It is doubtful, however, whether that makes the situation less aporetic.

V. PERSISTING BEFORE THE ENIGMA

Adorno begins his essay 'Notes on Kafka' with a declaration of his reluctance to take up the task. Kafka's widespread popularity, the false renown that has turned his work into an information bureau – 'be it eternal or modern', makes Adorno sceptical about the possibility of even presenting a dissenting opinion.²⁶ What he objects to is the widespread tendency to read Kafka symbolically or, more

²⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka', in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 245; Theodor W. Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.1, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 254: 'je nachdem ewigen oder heutigen'.



precisely, readings that proceed from the assumption that the particulars of the work form a complex that points above itself, and without interruption passes into a symbolic meaning. Such an assumption may be valid when it comes to a premodern author like Goethe, but not in relation to Kafka. For what is characteristic of Kafka's work is the gap between letter and signification: 'Each sentence is literal and each signifies. The two moments are not merged, as the symbol would have it, but yawn apart and out of the abyss between them blinds the glaring ray of fascination.'²⁷ Letter and signification do not form a unity in Kafka. Consequently, every attempt to interpret him conceals rather than reveals something.

The initial reluctance to study Kafka is thus less an expression of an elitist contempt for everything stupid that has been said about Kafka, than of an insight about the dilemma every critic faces: no matter how one interprets *The Trial*, the interpretation will inevitably be embraced in – and contribute to – the same stifling layer of significations. In consequence, it is necessary, according to Adorno, to take the novel by the word, to read it literally: 'To guard against this short circuit, which jumps directly to the significance intended by the work, the first rule is: take everything literally; cover up nothing with concepts invoked from above.'²⁸

At first glance, this may look like a step in a positivist direction, but the matter is more complicated than that. For together with this argument for a literal reading there is a seemingly opposed demand. Although the sentences in Kafka's work do not tolerate interpretation, they call out for interpretation, against their own good, so to speak. If the chasm between letter and spirit makes it necessary to hold on to the letter, the literal in itself still cannot, according to Adorno, disclose anything. The initial scepticism about the task is also a manifestation of this: it is the hopelessness of the enterprise which 'compels one to persist before the enigma.'²⁹ What does it mean to persist before an enigma, particularly an enigma that you know you cannot solve? It means, first, that one insists that Kafka's work is a riddle and not the 'information bureau' it has been reduced to.

²⁷ Ibid., 246; 255: 'Jeder Satz steht buchstäblich, und jeder bedeutet. Beides ist nicht, wie das Symbol es möchte, verschmolzen, sondern klappt auseinander, und aus dem Abgrund dazwischen blendet der grelle Strahl der Faszination.' Although Adorno does not talk about literature in general in the essay on Kafka (who, together with Beckett, from Adorno's perspective almost incarnates modern literature), there is no doubt about that he regards this as a condition of modern literature at large. See, for example, Theodor W. Adorno, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*', in *Notes to Literature*, 1: 242, 250, and Theodor W. Adorno, 'Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry', in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 109, 121.

²⁸ Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka', 247; 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', 257: 'Vorm Kurzschluss auf die allzu frühe, vom Werk schon gemeinte Bedeutung vermöchte als erste Regel zu schützen: alles wörtlich nehmen, nichts durch Begriffe von oben her zudecken.'

²⁹ Ibid., 245 (translation modified); 254: 'zwingt zur Insistenz vor dem Rätsel.'



To insist on the enigmatic character of the artwork is thus an implicit rejection of the positivist or nominalist notion, latent in this first rule of Adorno's, of an immediately accessible meaning. All one can do is guess, so to speak. Second, and more important, the persistence in the face of the enigma means that one does not give up, in spite of the insolubility of the enigma. The association is so close that it is almost surprising that Adorno does not compare this to the hopeless persistence in front of the door of the law in Kafka's parable 'Before the Law'. The necessity of the interpretation lies precisely in the fact that Kafka cannot be interpreted, cannot be read symbolically.

The interpreter therefore faces a hopeless dilemma; he or she is tied to the literalness of the text, forced to interpret himself or herself away from that. 'Each sentence says "interpret me", and none will permit it. Each compels the reaction, "that's the way it is", and with it the question, "where have I seen that before?"; the *déjà vu* is declared permanent.'³⁰ It is not easy to make sense of this passage, particularly the talk about recognition and permanent *déjà vu*. At one level, this is of course the logic of capitalism (the endless repetition of recognizable novelties), but there is obviously more to understand here. Let us leave that problem aside for a while, and return to it later. The artwork does not permit, or endure (*dulden*), the interpretation it calls for. So far things are clear. In its refusal to be interpreted, it answers 'that's the way it is' (*So ist es*). That this phrase recurs at least another three times in the essay is an indication of its importance. To some extent this phrase seems to be Adorno's Kafka in a concentrated form; with these words the text destroys every attempt to force a meaning on it. The meaning is drawn back into the literal: 'that's the way it is' – that is, exactly like this wording, not in any other way or sense. The interpretation is thus constantly pushed back to the literal surface from which it has only just set out.

And yet Adorno writes his essay. How, then, does he proceed? How does the persistence 'before the enigma' appear in practice? By way of the assertion that there is a gap between letter and meaning Adorno distances himself from a traditional hermeneutic belief in the possibility of reaching the spirit of the work through its literal surface. The problem with this attitude, Menke notes, is that Adorno operates after all with the same distinction between letter and spirit as is presupposed in hermeneutics. Adorno's cult of the literal surface, as it is presented in 'Notes on Kafka', is, Menke argues, merely an inversion of the cult of the spirit of the letter found in traditional hermeneutics.³¹ The weight of Menke's critique

³⁰ Ibid., 246; 255: 'Jeder Satz spricht: deute mich, und keiner will es dulden. Jeder erzwingt mit der Reaktion "So ist es" die frage: woher kenne ich das; das permanente *déjà vu* wird in Permanenz erklärt.'

³¹ Menke, *Sovereignty of Art*, 19.



is slightly diminished by the fact that he, in his ambition to give an overarching image of the negative aesthetics of Adorno, tends to disregard some distinctive features of 'Notes on Kafka'. Above all, he ignores – as we shall see – an important third aspect which, to a certain extent, sets aside the opposition between letter and meaning.

But even though Menke's criticism is not beyond objection, his comment should be taken seriously. What is it after all, he asks, that Adorno accomplishes, apart from a reversal of a hermeneutical approach and thus a confirmation of its premises? What is peculiar about the proposal to stick to the letter is that Adorno turns out to be bad at following his own rule. The fact is that the discussion, throughout the essay, takes place pretty far from Kafka's text. In that way, his reading may appear a bit sloppy – his statements on Kafka are not really supported by Kafka's *œuvre* and the sparse quotations are generally supposed to speak for themselves. The frequent accusation that Adorno's analyses are sketchy and unfinished could then be made about 'Notes on Kafka' as well.³² Or are those accusations perhaps founded on a misunderstanding? What does Adorno really mean by this 'first rule' he invokes – 'take everything literally'?

The literary scholar Isak Winkel Holm contends that there are two aspects of Adorno's notion of literalness: as a rhetorical concept it refers to a proper meaning, in contrast to a figurative sense; as a concept at the level of composition, however, it refers also to a particularity in contrast to a totality.³³ And it is this latter meaning above all, Winkel Holm seems to suggest, that is the point in the essay on Kafka. That this assumption is reasonable is supported by one of the quotations given earlier: one should take everything literally, Adorno states, and not cover it up 'with concepts invoked from above';³⁴ that is, not conceal the particular under general concepts. From this perspective, a literal reading would consequently pay attention not only to the gap in the meaning dimension (letter/signification), but also to the horizontal fractures (part/whole). With that, the remark, made a page or so later, about the importance of dwelling upon 'the incommensurable, opaque details' – that Leni's fingers are connected by a web, that the executioners look like tenors – becomes more comprehensible.³⁵ The interpretation shall not only adhere to the literalness of language in a traditional sense, but also to the particular

³² See, for example, Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 169; Isak Winkel Holm, *Tanken i billedet: Søren Kierkegaards poetik* [The idea of the image: Kierkegaard's poetics] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1998), 114; Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1990), 54.

³³ Winkel Holm, *Tanken i billedet*, 105–13.

³⁴ Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka', 247; 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', 257: 'durch Begriffe von oben her zudecken'.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 248; 258: 'den inkommensurablen, undurchsichtigen Details'.



details, the redundant aspects, that which does not fit in the context, and, one could perhaps add, to the physical and concrete. For immediately after the mentioning of the opaque details, Adorno drifts into something that turns out to be crucial for his reading: *the gestures* in Kafka's work.

It is not obvious what Adorno means when he talks about gestures. The examples from Kafka indicate that it initially concerns gestures in an ordinary sense: a gaze that seems to say something, someone stretching, a slight movement of the head – in short, trivial physical movements. But if, when we talk about gestures, we normally refer to motions with a certain purpose, the gestures that attract Adorno's interest seem to lack both intention and function. But why is he interested in these gestures?

One way of understanding what is the point here is to do what Winkel Holm does: return to the obvious influence that is concealed in the concept of the gesture – namely, Walter Benjamin's essay on Kafka. According to Benjamin, 'Kafka's entire work constitutes a code of gestures which surely had no definite symbolic meaning for the author from the outset; rather, the author tried to derive such a meaning from them in ever-changing contexts and experimental groupings'.³⁶ Benjamin means that the gestures contain something Kafka himself did not understand. Through their corporeality they break through the intentions and significations to something forgotten and enigmatic, something bestial that has become remarkably foreign to modern man. But what Benjamin tries to achieve is neither a resurrection of a lost corporeality, nor an interpretation of the gestures. The point is rather the urge to do justice to the gesture as gesture. The same thing may be said of Adorno's essay on Kafka. But whereas Benjamin sees a relieving dimension in the oblivion inherent in the gesture, the gesture, from Adorno's perspective, stands at most, as Alastair Morgan puts it, for 'an alienated yet precarious life within the subject'.³⁷ It is not a matter of primordially or essence; the gesture is merely an indication of the thingness of a human being. In that respect there is no hidden message in the gesture; what is there is just a movement where the subject appears as an object.

But even though the bodily movements in that sense are their own significations, both Benjamin and Adorno stress that the gestures in Kafka contain something more to be revealed. After having cited a few examples of the gestures he has in mind, Adorno writes that they are traces of experiences that have been covered by significations, common, forgotten experiences that may be discerned only in the gestures, standing in a contrapuntal relation to the words. Or, as he puts it in

³⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 117.

³⁷ Alastair Morgan, *Adorno's Concept of Life* (London: Continuum, 2007), 117.



a letter to Benjamin, 'What we see in Kafka's gestures is the self-liberation of the creature which has been deprived of the language of things.'³⁸

But, one may ask, how does that make sense? And where does it lead in our context? Does one not deprive the gestures of their gestuality in the same moment as one asserts that they may be interpreted? And if they may be interpreted, do they not then provide the same dilemma to the interpreter as language at large? Adorno raises this objection himself, only to overrule it in the next moment, typically without any argument. The beginning of an explanation may, however, be found one page earlier. Kafka turns the relation between concept and gesture upside down, he writes, and continues: 'The gesture is the "that's the way it is"; language, the configuration of which should be truth, is, as a broken one, untruth.'³⁹ Here the phrase 'that's the way it is' returns. So how does this comment relate to the passage I quoted earlier? What was being dealt with there was the dilemma of the interpretation: every sentence rejects any attempted interpretation with a 'that's the way it is'; with this answer the signification is drawn back into the literalness. The gesture, we are now told, is this answer. Apparently, when Adorno talks about gestures he refers not only to bodily movements at the level of content in Kafka's *œuvre*, but also to something that takes place in the reading, in the aesthetic experience. It is above all this gestural aspect that interests him.⁴⁰

If we turn for a moment to a passage in *Aesthetic Theory* where the expression of art is discussed, this use of the concept of gesture becomes more comprehensible. The expression of art, Adorno writes there, resembles the expression of ordinary, that is, non-aesthetical, things and situations, insofar as they contain a sedimented history that speaks through them. Then he adds: 'Kafka is exemplary for the gesture of art when he carries out the retransformation of expression back into the actual occurrences enciphered in that expression – and from that he derives his irresistibility. Yet expression here becomes doubly puzzling because the sedimented, the expressed meaning, is once more meaningless.'⁴¹ This comment sums up the central observations of the Kafka essay, but above all it clarifies what Adorno means when, in 'Notes on Kafka', he talks about the gesture

³⁸ Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 70.

³⁹ Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka', 249; 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', 259: 'Der Gestus ist das "So ist es"; die Sprache, deren Konfiguration die Wahrheit sein soll, als zerbrochene die Unwahrheit.'

⁴⁰ For other aspects of Adorno's concept of gesture, see Alastair Morgan, "'A Figure of Annihilated Human Existence": Agamben and Adorno on Gesture', *Law Critique* 20 (2009): 299–307.

⁴¹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 112; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7:170–71: 'Kafka ist darin für den Gestus der Kunst exemplarisch, und zieht daraus seine Unwiderstehlichkeit, daß er solchen Ausdruck in das Geschehende zurückverwandelt, das darin sich chiffriert. Nur wird er doppelt rätselhaft, weil das Sedimentierte, der ausgedrückte Sinn, abermals sinnlos ist.'



as an event – a ‘that’s the way it is’ – in the interpretation: ‘gesture’ here seems to denote the double movement in which the artwork conceals the meaning which it simultaneously offers. In this oscillating motion all interpretation is made impossible, on the one hand, at the same time as the movement as such bridges language’s fractured nature, on the other hand.

If Kafka is doubly enigmatic, this oscillation is crucial. With this oscillation (the gesture of art) in mind, Adorno’s comment about the *déjà vu* that ‘is declared permanent’, which made me halt earlier, suddenly makes sense: the reading of Kafka arouses a feeling of recognition, but what we recognize is nothing but what we are facing. In the dynamics that evokes this experience, however, lies the promise of something else, something more than what is written, something universal in the particular, eternal in the occasional, metaphysical in the physical. The problem is that when we try to grasp this in the form of an interpretation, we inevitably turn the permanent *déjà vu* – that is, the permanent oscillation – into something permanently static. This is probably the way to understand the cryptic last paragraph of the quotation we have already discussed, which includes the idea that ‘the *déjà vu* is declared permanent’.

Kafka, Adorno argues, was facing the impossible task of finding words for the objectless inwardness, but instead of vainly searching for these words, he *visualized* objectless inwardness gesturally. As Morgan notes: ‘It is only the gesture, in its emphatic guise, that can approach a means of expression for the pure space of empty subjectivity but, in the very process of manifesting this expression as bodily gesture, the subject is doubly disgusted and alienated at an element that is seen as alien to the sovereign self.’⁴² This explains the characteristic tableaux in Kafka’s work, the strange petrified moments, as well as Adorno’s interest in them. In the same fashion as he isolates, in his thesis on Kierkegaard, ‘the cipher-like image that contains no immediately readable meaning, but stands before the reader as a damaged parable’ (as Winkel Holm puts it),⁴³ Adorno focuses these images in his essay on Kafka. It is there, in the perpetual tableaux – a person stretching in a window, a couple lying in pools of beer under a table in a bar – that the sedimented experiences can be found.

But things are still not clear. On the contrary, the same questions remain. What does Adorno do with these tableaux or images? Does he make any attempt to reach the forgotten experiences that are sedimented in them? Does he interpret the images? Does he just let them be? Does he try to freeze the oscillation? Winkel

⁴² Morgan, “Figure of Annihilated Human Existence”, 302.

⁴³ Winkel Holm, *Tanken i billedet*, 112. ‘Damaged parable’ (beschädigte Parabel) is a formulation Winkel Holm fetches from Adorno. See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 126; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7:191.



Holm gives no clear answer. He concludes the discussion by stating that the task does not consist in translating the incomprehensible 'into easily comprehensible social conditions, but rather, as it is famously formulated in the epigram in *Ästhetische Theorie*, to comprehend incomprehensibility'.⁴⁴ At the same time, he reproaches Adorno for negligence: in fact, Winkel Holm argues, Adorno rarely provides any 'proper reading of the images he argues should be read singularly; instead, he is content with citing the relevant passages and then telling the reader what they are really about'.⁴⁵ This critique is directed at Adorno's book on Kierkegaard, but it might just as well be directed at the essay on Kafka. Or perhaps not? For what's interesting is that Adorno actually does something more than just present the petrified images in Kafka.

I indicated above that it is easy to criticize 'Notes on Kafka' for its insufficient argumentation, for the lack of a deductively satisfying demonstration of its conclusions. To that, one could reasonably add its badly arranged content: although the 33-page essay (in the German original) is divided into nine more or less equally long chapters (for Adorno, an unusually reader-oriented device), it is difficult – even after several readings – to form a comprehensive idea of it. However one struggles to sum up its content and central points, it feels as if one were lacking large parts of text. The reason is that the essay flows along, seemingly aimlessly, discussing this and that – Freud, the Third Reich, sexuality, theology, Expressionism – things partly linked to Kafka. This, I would argue, is not unintentional. On the contrary, the essay is a good example of the strategy of configuration that was discussed earlier: one observation is followed by another and another, in a non-hierarchical, serial design (... and ... and ... and ... and ...). It does not lead to any final point; instead it weaves a larger image of Kafka.

But there is another aspect in the way the essay tries to get at Kafka's work. 'Only the visible can be narrated, yet in the same process it becomes completely alien, a picture. Truly a picture.'⁴⁶ At one level, this is a comment on Kafka's attempt to visualize the objectless inwardness, that is, on the function of the gestures and tableaux in his work. It may, however, also be read as a meta-reflection on the interpreter's relation to Kafka's work. Let us have a closer look at a few passages in Adorno's essay:

To fully participate in the process that produces the abnormal experiences which in Kafka define the norm, one must have experienced an accident in a large city; uncounted

⁴⁴ Winkel Holm, *Tanken i billedet*, 113.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁶ Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka', 264 (translation modified); 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', 277–78: 'Nur von Sichtbarem läßt sich erzählen, während es zugleich vollkommen zum Bilde verfremdet wird. Wahrhaft zum Bilde.'



witnesses come forward, proclaiming themselves acquaintances, as though the entire community had gathered to observe the moment when the powerful bus smashed into the flimsy taxicab. The permanent déjà vu is the déjà vu of all.⁴⁷

History becomes hell in Kafka because the chance which might have saved was missed. This hell was inaugurated by the late bourgeoisie itself. In the concentration camps, the boundary between life and death was eradicated. A middleground was created, inhabited by living skeletons and putrefying bodies, victims unable to take their own lives, Satan's laughter at the hope of abolishing death. As in Kafka's twisted epics, what perished there was that which had provided the criterion of experience – life lived out to its end.⁴⁸

His writing feigns a standpoint from which the creation appears as lacerated and mutilated as it itself conceives hell to be. In the middle ages, Jews were tortured and executed 'perversely' – i.e. inversely; as early as Tacitus their religion was branded as perverse in a famous passage. Offenders were hung head down. Kafka, the land-surveyor, photographs the earth's surface just as it must have appeared to these victims during the endless hours of their dying.⁴⁹

His world of ideas – as in the 'Natural Theatre of Oklahoma' – resembles a world of shopkeepers; no theologoumenon could describe it more accurately than the title of an American film comedy, 'Shopworn Angel'. Whereas the interiors, where men live, are the homes of the catastrophe, the hide-outs of childhood, forsaken spots like the bottom of the stairs, are the places of hope. The resurrection of the dead would have to take place in the auto graveyards.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid., 252; 263: 'Wer nachvollziehen will, wie es zu den abnormen Erfahrungen kommt, die bei Kafka die Norm umschreiben, muß einmal in einer großen Stadt einen Unfall erlitten haben: ungezählte Zeugen melden sich und erklären sich als Bekannte, als hätte das ganze Gemeinwesen sich versammelt, um dem Augenblick beizuwohnen, da der mächtige Autobus in die schwache Autodroschke hineinfuhr. Das permanente déjà vu ist das déjà vu aller.'

⁴⁸ Ibid., 260; 273: 'Zur Hölle wird bei Kafka die Geschichte, weil das rettende versäumt ward. Diese Hölle hat das späte Bürgertum selber eröffnet. In den Konzentrationslagern des Faschismus wurde die Demarkationslinie zwischen Leben und Tod getilgt. Sie schufen einen Zwischenzustand, lebende Skelette und Verwesende, Opfer, denen der Selbstmord mißrät, das Gelächter Satans über die Hoffnung auf Abschaffung des Todes. Wie in Kafkas verkehrten Epen ging da zugrunde, woran Erfahrung ihr Maß hat, das aus sich heraus zu Ende gelebte Leben.'

⁴⁹ Ibid., 269; 284: 'Sein Werk fingiert einen Ort, von dem her die Schöpfung so durchfurcht und beschädigt erscheint, wie nach ihren eigenen Begriffen die Hölle sein müsste. Im Mittelalter hat man Folter und Todesstrafe an den Juden "verkehrt" vollzogen; schon an der berühmten Stelle des Tacitus wird ihre Religion als verkehrt angeprangert. Delinquenten wurden mit dem Kopf aufgehängt. So wie diesen Opfern in den endlosen Stunden ihres Sterbens die Erdoberfläche muß ausgesehen haben, wird sie vom Landvermesser Kafka photographiert.'

⁵⁰ Ibid., 271; 286: 'Seine Ideenwelt gleicht – wie im Naturtheater von Oklahoma – einer von Ladenhütern: kein Theologoumenon könnte ihm näher kommen als der Titel eines amerikanischen Filmlustspiels: Shopworn Angel. Während in den Interieurs, in denen Menschen wohnen, das Unheil haust, sind Schlupfwinkel der Kindheit, verlassene Stätten wie das Treppenhaus, solche der Hoffnung. Die Auferstehung der Toten müsste auf dem Autofriedhof stattfinden.'



What is actually at issue in these passages? Suddenly, the discursive discussions are interrupted by images that are barely integrated into the context. We are talking about strong images, most of them with something violent, almost shocking, about them. They are related to physical experiences, and yet the tacit point seems to be that there is something more to them than the merely corporeal, particular and literal. Apparently Adorno's purpose – and this is my main point – is to visualize the experiences stored in Kafka's gestures indirectly, using images like these. Instead of interpreting Kafka's tableaux, and thereby covering over the sedimented experiences, he translates them into images of his own. He simply visualizes the forgotten experiences one more time – the procedure is in a way a variant of the 'second reflection' he talks about in *Aesthetic Theory*.⁵¹ This is all the interpreter of Kafka can do. In accordance with the quotation above ('Only the visible can be narrated, yet in the same process it becomes completely alien, a picture'), one may talk about the visual only by means of images. And the experiences Adorno searches in Kafka are indeed visual: they are to be found on the surface – in corporeal motions, in the literal, in the particular details – not in something underneath. When Adorno tries to describe these experiences with images of his own, he makes them, as he puts it, completely unfamiliar.

At the same time, there is something peculiarly familiar about the examples above, in particular the first and last ones. Most people probably recognize, from their own lives, the description of the hide-outs of childhood, or the depiction of the traffic accident with all the curious witnesses. In that respect the images seem to grasp something general. It is that tension between the simultaneously unfamiliar and familiar character that constitutes the permanent *déjà vu*, and thus justifies the images. Adorno simply tries to *evoke* the same oscillation as he finds in Kafka's gestural tableaux.

It is therefore correct that Adorno, as Winkel Holm suspects, focuses and isolates the cipher-like images. But what is interesting is that he also imitates them. Aesthetic understanding, Adorno writes in 'Presuppositions', can be nothing other than 'a kind of following along afterward [*Nachfahren*]', that is, a realization of the objectified process inherent in the artwork.⁵² In the Kafka essay, this idea is transformed into practice: instead of vainly searching for the revealing word that would exhaust the meaning of the gestures, Adorno's essay becomes gestural itself. The point is that it thus remains faithful to the oscillation of Kafka's tableaux, while bringing out their general traits.

⁵¹ See, for example, Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 358; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7: 531.

⁵² Theodor W. Adorno, 'Presuppositions', in *Notes to Literature*, 2: 97; 'Voraussetzungen: Aus Anlaß einer Lesung von Hans G. Helms', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 11:422: 'eine Art von Nachfahren'.



With that we have finally reached a possible answer to the question of what Adorno has in mind when in 'The Essay as Form' he talks about over-interpretation. The essay becomes true, it says there, 'in its progress, which drives it beyond itself'.⁵³ The quotation describes what happens now and then in 'Notes on Kafka': the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of the interpretation forces it out of itself. Persistence in the face of the enigma inevitably turns the essay into something other than an account of a secondary interpretation. The essay starts performing its own gestures, presenting its own enigmas, its own images. Through a configuration of such images, the essay may in the best case present *something* of the truth content of Kafka's work, without falsifying it.

When Adorno talks about over-interpretation it is, accordingly, not about driving an interpretation too far, but about a transgression of the current notion of the unity of the symbol (letter/spirit).⁵⁴ It is hard to follow the connection from Kafka's text to Adorno's interpretation; it is not possible to analyse one's way, step by step, to the almost hyperbolic images his reading ends up in. They are, with a comment from 'The Essay as Form', 'not philologically definitive and conscientious'.⁵⁵ At the same time, however, there is a fidelity to the gestural quality of Kafka's work. In that sense, the interpretation is connected to the work on a more profound or, rather, more material level. Or, as it is explained in *Aesthetic Theory*: the interpretation serves the truth content of the work by transgressing the work.⁵⁶ How such a transgression may look in practice can be studied in 'Notes on Kafka'. The criticism of Adorno's faulty analyses is, at least partly, founded on the omission of this aspect. That his interpretations are defective from a hermeneutical perspective is because they are ultimately something other than traditional interpretations, something more critical in a double sense.

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⁵³ Adorno, 'Essay as Form', 13; 'Der Essay als Form', 21: 'in seinem Fortgang, der ihn über sich hinaustreibt'.

⁵⁴ To put Adorno's over-interpretation into perspective, one could relate it to the discussion between, among others, Umberto Eco, Richard Rorty, and Jonathan Culler in the book *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. The central question there is, in broad terms, whether there is a limit where interpretation becomes over-interpretation, and, if the latter, whether there is something reprehensible. Notwithstanding the disagreements, that discussion took place within a hermeneutic paradigm, where the possibility of a symbolic reading was never questioned after all. See Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁵⁵ Adorno, 'Essay as Form', 4; 'Der Essay als Form', 11: 'nicht philologisch erhärtet und besonnen'.

⁵⁶ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 194.



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