

**Gregor Schwering, Carsten Zelle (Hg.): Ästhetische Positionen nach Adorno**

München: Wilhlem Fink Verlag 2002, 241 S., ISBN 3-7705-3730-0, € 28,90

*Ästhetische Positionen nach Adorno* is a wide ranging conceptually sophisticated collection of essays in contemporary aesthetic theory. The eleven essays vary in content from classically philosophical approaches to the problem of the aesthetic via Petra Gehring's essay „Vom Sich-Fühlen der Vernunft an den Grenzen der Sinne. Kant, die Ästhetik und der Einsatz der ‚negativen Lust‘“ or Michael Wetzels brief treatment of Heidegger's ‚aesthetics‘ in „Scheinwelten. Heidegger und die ästhetische Wahrheit“ to aesthetics in systems theory via Natalie Binczek's „Zur Funktion des Ornaments in Luhmanns Kunst-Buch. Mit einem Supplement zum Bild des Ornaments in L'annee dernier à Marienbad“ to a media theoretical approach to the problem of the aesthetic in a contemporary global context in Urs Stäheli's „Spezialeffekte als Ästhetik des Globalen“. The wide variety of subject matter makes for interesting and demanding reading. What unifies the essays is that they all pay special attention to the philosophical and conceptual implications involved in aesthetic analysis. The book project emerged initially out of a joint Ringvorlesung at Universität-Gesamthochschule Siegen on ‚ästhetische Erfahrung‘ in the Wintersemester of 1999/2000 by Gregor Schwering and Carsten Zelle. Correspondingly Carsten Zelle's essay „Die stete Neuerfindung des Alten“ can be taken as perhaps the clearest illustration of the theoretical perspective that informs the book as a whole. It is also a useful introduction to the works and problems that motivate the discipline of aesthetics in Germany. Zelle begins by briefly introducing the historical origins of aesthetics in Alexander

Gottlieb Baumgarten's philosophy in the mid eighteenth century. Zelle's recount of Baumgarten's understanding of aesthetics illustrates simultaneously the perspective that informs the book itself. Aesthetic's is not merely a *„Nachdenken über das Schöne“*. The problems that motivated Baumgarten's aesthetic philosophy are generally epistemological in nature. Aesthetics was meant to be a science of sensory perception, or in Hegel's words a *„Wissenschaft des Sinnes des Empfindes“*. It was to provide the means for bridging the a priori realm of pure thought and logic and the realm of sense perception and was conceived of as analysis of cognition; or the mind's ability to perceive and represent the world to itself. Aesthetics was Baumgarten's attempt to solve the ancient philosophical problem of the mind/body distinction and correct the logocentrism that dominated epistemology with a more complete understanding of sense perception as a corporeal function in relation to the world. Thus according to Zeller if we follow Baumgarten's example aesthetics is in a sense meant to provide an *„epistemology of the body on the example of art“*. It is Baumgarten's conceptually sophisticated understanding of aesthetics that motivates the call by the editors to reenvision aesthetics. This basic argument is perhaps even more pertinent to the North American than the German context. With a few exceptions the conceptual stakes and the problems that motivate aesthetics are even less well understood in the US than on the continent. Further, aesthetics enjoys wider acceptance as an academically valid discipline in Germany than in the US.

After treating Baumgarten Zeller then traces aesthetics very schematically through Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Adorno, Jauß and its most recent representatives Welsch, Bohrer, Bubner and Rüdiger. Broadly speaking and without going into the actual content of Zeller's essay (here and in the *„Vorbemerkung“*) aesthetics is thought of as a philosophically grounded attempt to *„de-automate perception“* the *„Entautomatisierung der Wahrnehmung“*. The arena of artistic production is the site where this becomes possible and thus the privileged focus of analysis. Following Zelle's essay and Wetzel's essay on Heidegger Rudolf Wansing provides a clear and critical analysis of Adorno's aesthetic theory. It is a lucid account of Adorno's notoriously difficult work on aesthetics and provides further justification for the claim in the *„Vorbemerkung“* that aesthetics after Adorno must reach back to aesthetic theory before Hegel. Several of the remaining essays focus on recent developments in media, attempting to marry the philosophically rigorous understanding of aesthetics that informs the book with analysis of contemporary phenomena. Examples are Gregor Schwering's *„Ästhetik des Fleisches: Fragen zu einer Theorie gestellt an Bret Easton Ellis, René Magritte und Maurice Merleau-Ponty“*; Urs Stäheli's *„Spezialeffekte als Ästhetik des Globalen“* and finally Peter M. Spangenberg's *„Hier und Jetzt“*, an analysis of time and memory in relation to the advance of computerized media and digitalized memory. These texts are informative and theoretically provocative and help to round out a volume that makes an important contribution to aesthetic's and media theory.

Joel Freeman (Berkeley)