

# Sur la tâche de l'esthétique et du contenu de vérité des œuvres d'art

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**Résumé:** Adorno considère la théorie de la réification de Lukacs comme une ressource théorique importante. Critiquant la réalité réifiée, sa théorie esthétique est imprégnée de la conscience de la non-identité. En ce qui concerne le chemin possible de la rupture de l'esthétique idéaliste vers le contenu de vérité des œuvres d'art, Adorno explique la relation entre le contenu de vérité et la philosophie, l'être et le non-être du point de vue de sa philosophie de la non-identité, et montre que le contenu de vérité des œuvres d'art est différent de la vérité métaphysique poursuivie par l'épistémologie philosophique. Adorno critique l'immédiateté de l'art engagé dans la réalité sociale. Dans le sens ontologique de la communication entre l'homme et l'environnement, Adorno soutient que l'art peut s'engager dans la société de manière indépendante par le biais de la mimesis, qui est la prémisse pour les œuvres d'art d'obtenir le contenu de la vérité. En termes d'esthétique, l'article examine l'identité esthétique d'Adorno, et montre comment l'art tente d'utiliser l'unité de la forme esthétique pour surmonter la réalité réificatrice et transcender la mimesis immédiate, et explique ensuite le lien essentiel entre l'autonomie de l'art et la rationalité.

**Mots clés:** contenu de la vérité , œuvres d'art , non-identité , mimesis , identité esthétique

# On the task of the aesthetics and the truth content of artworks

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**Abstract:** Adorno regards Lukacs' theory of reification as an important theoretical resource. Criticizing the reificationalized reality, his aesthetic theory is permeated with the consciousness of non-identity. As for the possible path of breaking through the idealistic aesthetics into the truth content of artworks, Adorno explains the relationship between the truth content and philosophy, being and nonbeing from the perspective of his non-identity philosophy, and shows that the truth content of artworks which is different from the metaphysical truth pursued through philosophical epistemology. Adorno criticizes the immediacy of the committed art in social reality. In the ontological sense of the communication between human and environment, Adorno argues that art can commit its task into society independently through mimesis, which is the premise for artworks to obtain the truth content. In term of aesthetics, it examines Adorno's aesthetic identity, and shows how art tries to use the unity of the aesthetic form to overcome reificationalized reality and transcend the immediate mimesis, and further explains the essential connection between art's autonomy and rationality.

**Keywords:** truth content, artworks, non-identity, mimesis, aesthetic identity

In the social history, 'Artworks have no truth without determinate negation; developing this is the task of aesthetics today'.<sup>1</sup> Adorno's point of view shows that the immanent historicity of art clarifies the truth content of artworks. In the face of empirical things in reality, art tries to protect the heterogeneous elements of non-identity in things, at the same time, it also tries to transcend the empirical phenomenon and becomes a kind of being higher than reality. Artworks transform empirical elements into the content through aesthetic form which becomes a negative force to break through the conceptual interpretation of the real world. Meanwhile, artworks that are the products of the social spiritual labor will inevitably accumulate realistic social relations of production. Therefore, Adorno's philosophy of art contains the aims to the realize spiritual liberation and criticize the social reality. The truth content of artworks has the features of critique,

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<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 129

negation and non-identity.

### **1. On the truth in art from the perspective of non-identity philosophy**

When being is understood as an eternal perfect idea, in contrast, the sensible thing is understood as nonbeing because of its inherent historical elements. The traditional metaphysics ignores the constantly changeable empirical world, and believes that only opinions rather than truth can be achieved by means of sense organs. This resulted in the tension between the world of ideas and the empirical world, which is later determined by Plato's idealism, and established the dominant position through absolute spirit in Hegel. In this trend of seeking identity, the empirical phenomenon of the changing things is reduced to the illusion of nonbeing denounced by ideas. The oppression from the traditional metaphysics and the resistance to it of nonbeing show the divergence between philosophy's and art's purport.

Adorno's non-identity philosophy makes nonbeing realistic being in his critique on metaphysics. Metaphysics is based on the world of ideas, while art is built on the empirical world. According to the principles of idealism, we only set metaphysical purpose for art, however, it is just an abstract external purpose in Adorno's view. On the contrary, Adorno keeps the purpose and task of philosophy fixed on rejecting metaphysics and the logic of rational identity. The dialectics of non-identity philosophy provides the epistemological basis for this task. Based on the epistemology of non-identity philosophy, art not only needs to pay attention to the non-being elements in the empirical world, but also needs to think about the truth content in itself. As 'the artwork is nothing fixed and definitive in itself, but something in motion'.<sup>2</sup> Trying to grasp the nonbeing, we can approach the truth content of artworks only by establishing the rational logic of its development and changes in the immanent historicity of artworks. In fact, Adorno denies neither the critical function of philosophy to reality nor rationality. He consciously opposes the opinions trapped in the senses that result the loss of the consciousness of nonbeing. Only through rational mimesis can artworks have the possibility of representing the nonbeing.

Artworks stimulate the enjoyment in our body while impelling us to judge. However, artworks neither can be simply regarded as a tool of rational instruction, nor can they be purely treated as pure enjoyment of sensibility. General things can arouse people's sense of functionality and utility, and then they produce knowledge including those empirical concepts and judgments on general things. But the experience created by art does not stagnate in the feelings, concepts or judgments of utility. This kind of

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<sup>2</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 178

prescription different from general things is artworks' truth content. The truth content is not an essential proposition or judgment, but a special content of art defined by the dynamic boundary between the general things and the artworks. 'Functional forms and cult objects may develop historically into artworks; to deny this implies making oneself dependent on art's self-understanding, whose dynamic development is lodged in its own concept'.<sup>3</sup> As the concepts lack the perception of nonbeing, the dynamic boundary is solidified into clear facts and different propositions, ignoring the attention that should be paid to the current nonbeing. However, 'the artworks are not being but a process of becoming can be grasped technologically'.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between nonbeing and its generation can be understood from three aspects: Firstly, the generation of nonbeing is regarded as both the duration of natural things and the result of this duration. Secondly, the nonbeing endows artworks with historical elements, that is, we should understand artworks from the aspects of movement and temporality, and even hope to 'find continuance in it, want to be extinguished in it, and in their demise determine what follows them'.<sup>5</sup> In Adorno's view, it is that the internal negativity and negative movement of artworks transcends the empirical phenomenon, approaching the truth content. Thirdly, nonbeing is not only the element constituting the history of the realistic artworks, but it also gives the artworks vitality. The death of artworks does not refer to lagging behind the times, but to the disappearance of the internal negative movement of art, which leads to a vulgar trend of identity.

The artworks are in the current social situation. 'The specifically artistic in art must be derived concretely from its other'.<sup>6</sup> The dynamic relationship between art and nonart ensures that the non-identity will not be swallowed by the identity of the art's form. This relationship makes the differences between art and nonart, between art and social reality, which cannot be accommodated by the logic of identity. It is necessary to put the artworks in social and historical context to determine its particularity. The understanding of this particularity depends on philosophy, otherwise we cannot get clear truth content. Benjamin believes that the artworks itself can only be completed through interpretation. The critique on artworks is the way to complete themselves and realize their internal logical cognition. Art regards the critique on reality and itself as the complement of its unrealized self. However, Adorno does not agree with the reduction of artworks in the way of essentialism. The explanation of artworks through categories and concepts is limited. Artworks are not able to be fully grasped by categories and concepts. Ernst Bloch has a great influence on Adorno. Bloch argues that the meaning of art itself does not

<sup>3</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 182

<sup>4</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 176

<sup>5</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 176

<sup>6</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 3

depend on personal preference, but on the investigation of truth and reality. For example, as a cognitive way to the world, music, which is more valued by Bloch, is different from the philosophy categories. He emphasizes that what can be heard by ear is beyond the scope of the concepts. The feelings brought by music to the audience are both immediate and continuous. They are only partially contained by the philosophical categories. The content of the rest depends on the experience and understanding of empirical life. Bloch wants to emphasize three points: firstly, when the truth content of artworks is reduced to the conceptual systems composed of philosophy categories, there will always be empirical residues. Secondly, art can reach a sort of pre-reflective understanding before analyzing artistic experience in a philosophical way. Thirdly, while philosophy actively absorbs and focuses on the truth content contained in the artistic experience, it is in danger of applying the internal logic of philosophical categories externally to the artistic experience to form an external teleology of art. Therefore, on the one hand, Adorno, opposes deconstructing artworks with external philosophical categories. On the other hand, he needs to rely on philosophy to make art realistic.

If the audience only has irrational experience without the assistance of reason, it is still unable to understand the truth content of artworks. The independence of artworks comes from the generation of nonbeing, which is beyond the artist's subjective intention and understanding. This part of the content makes the existing things draw the power of negating themselves from the nonbeing, constantly generating in the movement of realization, and no longer obey the audience's or the maker's established categories. However, as nonbeing is suppressed by the identical principle of rationality, there is a cognitive system before philosophy encounters artworks. These propositions and views relative to the truth content of artworks become some eternal frames. What Adorno wants to solve is what kind of rational form can reconcile the heterogeneous content as the truth content of any artwork lies in itself, rather than understanding the artworks by using philosophical categories externally. The external application of philosophical categories attempts to predetermine the specific content of art, which can only stay in categories and gain nothing from art itself. Rather than interpreting art itself with philosophical concepts, the principle of identity should be used to serve the philosophical categories with the help of art form. For Adorno, the truth content of artworks should not be understood as the conceptual aggregation in the text. The logic of identity will make the artworks lose their real meaning. However, the truth content of artworks is not self-evident or intuitive, and it is necessary to grasp the non-concept being by utilizing philosophical categories. 'A complete metaphysical system should begin with positive methods and end with negative methods'.<sup>7</sup> Logical analysis is a positive method, and Feng Youlan compares the negative method to the skill of exaggerating the clouds and adding shades around to make the moon stand out. This

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<sup>7</sup> 冯友兰：《中国哲学简史》，北京：北京大学出版社，1996年，第295页

means that 'what is considered to be intelligible to all is what has become unintelligible'.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we only need to ask what is comprehensible. Relying on this negative method, the rest is incomprehensible. The task of aesthetics is not to regard artworks as the object of hermeneutics, but to enter into its incomprehensibility, which needs to break the subject-object bisection and carry out criticizing traditional metaphysics.

## 2. Mimesis as the form of art's commitment to society

Influenced by Benjamin, Adorno tries to break through the cognitive framework of the subject-object bisection by means of art's mimesis of the social reality. In Benjamin's view, although human language can effectively show the similarity between things, language does not directly interfere with the sensible things, only expressing some concepts of things. Before the emergence of the human language function, human beings communicated with nature through sense organs, 'His gift for seeing similarity is nothing but a rudiment of the once powerful compulsion to become similar and to behave mimetically'.<sup>9</sup> Mimesis is a direct objective assimilation prior to advanced language behavior. In the chaotic state of subject-object, a man shows the alienation of his essential power through mimesis to achieve similarity, which includes not only the assimilation of the man and objects, but also the assimilation of himself and others. Mimesis can also be considered as a game which does not contain a strong impulse to dominate nature. But the mimesis at this phase is a kind of weak self-identity. The reason for the weakness lies in the fact that the heterogeneity of things and others may terminate the assimilation process at any time. This heterogeneity is confirmed by human consciousness and solidifies the separation of experience and reality, the sensuous and the nonsensuous through language. Language has become an effective identical nonsensuous tool which leads to the suppression of the mimesis of objects, the loss of sensuous similarity and the generation of nonsensuous similarity.

Adorno further expands the connotation of mimesis based on the interaction between the man and the world. He argues that language's 'general cognecy depends on the intensity of its individuation'.<sup>10</sup> Adorno emphasizes that mimesis is the intimate relationship between the non-concept subject and the others, a kind of harmonious relationship between the subject and the object through non-concept mediation, rather than being set as the framework of subject-object bisection by conceptual identity.

<sup>8</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 183

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin, W. *Selected Writings*, Vol. II, M. Bullock et al. (eds), Cambridge & London: The Belknap Press, 2005, p. 720

<sup>10</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "The Artist as Deputy" in *Notes to Literature (Volume One)*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 38

Therefore, this kind of non-concept mediation means that it is a specific sensuous individual, and meanwhile, it can generally play a role in the objective construction process of the subject, reconciling the opposition between the subject and the object. As mimesis has the dual features of non-identity and self-identity, mimesis acts as the non-concept mediation. It means the non-concept parts of art which are different from the conceptual cognition of art. Identity attempts to copy the objective things according to the concepts, while non-identity wants to overcome the identity to realize disenchantment. Only through mimesis of the non-concept content can we get a comprehensive understanding of the objective things. The dual features of mimesis ensures that it can break through the metaphysical identity and avoid falling into the pure sensible world at the same time. Although mimesis must deal with real experience according to the principle of rationality, it seems that it has been suppressed by rationality, but 'The reason that represses mimesis is not merely its opposite. It is itself mimesis'.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, in a society organized by the principle of rationality and dominated by identity, art eliminates the separation of man and nature by mimesis of nature. So Adorno said 'Art is rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it; art is not something prerational or irrational, which would peremptorily condemn it as untruth in the face of the entanglement of all human activity in the social totality'.<sup>12</sup> Once a certain structure or rational interpretation is constructed by reason, the truth content will be covered. On the one hand, art attempts towards perfection which objectively results in the fact that various elements of art cannot be perfectly reconciled, forming a relatively rigid structure of identity; on the other hand, artworks cannot be completely objectified into concepts and feelings understood by people, and there are always gaps. The inherent negation of artworks finds its realistic premise and logical form from the gaps, keeping a distance from the real world and constantly negating the objectification of art itself. To make factual analysis and logical proof of the truth content of artworks, positivists are used to applying the limited sensible experience and limited concepts of things, while the internal logic and the transcendental content in artworks depend on the dynamic grasp of nonbeing. 'Artworks are afterimages of empirical life'.<sup>13</sup> This is beyond the scope of positivist science, and also shows that the positivist way lacks reflection on nonbeing.

The identity of nonbeing makes art face two problems in the process of interaction with reality: one is how to maintain its autonomy, the other is how to obtain reality. If art abandons autonomy and accepts the principle of equal-value exchange, then art will fall into the fetishism and cannot guarantee its spiritual pursuit and its clarity of external form. In view of the fact that art is dominated in the reificationalized reality, it can only

<sup>11</sup> Horkheimer et al., *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 44

<sup>12</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 55

<sup>13</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 4

maintain a relative autonomy. Therefore, Adorno does not agree that art should directly intervene with the social reality. As the capital logic places the integrity of individual life in the mechanized system of social division of labor, both scientific positivism and political ideology discipline the individual's critical consciousness. This makes a dominating structure realized in the cultural superstructure which is 'today administered, integrated, and qualitatively reshaped by the culture industry'.<sup>14</sup> This means that the cultural industry has confused commodities with artworks, productive labor and the aesthetic force of production, but also has ignored the discrepancy between the experience of daily life and the experience of aesthetic activities. Even committed art with progressive ideas cannot really play the role of critiquing reificational reality. 'In dismantling illusion they explode art from the inside, whereas proclaimed commitment only subjugates art from the outside, hence only illusorily'.<sup>15</sup> In Adorno's view, Sartre regards the artwork as a kind of expression of ideas or consciousness based on the subject being free to choose. However, this view of choosing only retains an abstract authority. Sartre tries to prove that freedom cannot be deprived by the predetermined form of choice, but this form just cancels freedom, so commitment is a kind of subjectivism. Brecht tried to achieve the critical reflection through alienation effect. Due to the influence of external political and social factors, his art theory is extremely weak in practice. Adorno is not only against Benjamin's politicization of art, but also against Sartre's subjectivism. Adorno also points out the disadvantages of Brecht's didacticism. He argues that artworks' true social effect is 'an extremely indirect participation in spirit that by way of subterranean processes contributes to social transformation and is concentrated in artworks; they only achieve such participation through their objectivation'.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, autonomous art indirectly shows its practical effect, while the defect of committed art is that either its political position is too clear to damage the truth content, or that committed art stays in the artistic expression of formalism and lacks political practice. Brecht, Benjamin and Sartre can be regarded as starting from a certain political position and class interest, expressing their political views of reforming society through artworks. However, Adorno argues that this kind of art commitment is reduced to another kind of abstract political concept against one political concept, and we should be alert to the fact that artworks become political mouthpieces. Marx regards Shakespearization as an artistic principle. According to the law of history, we should truly take reality as the principle and show the universal reflection and reappearance of the specific individual life style in society. Artworks do not only reflect the reality of the appearance, but also can break through the simple mimesis of the appearance and enter into the specific engraving of life, so as to achieve the unity of form and spirit, the

<sup>14</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 16

<sup>15</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment" in *Notes to Literature*(Volume Two), New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 90

<sup>16</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 242

internal and the external. The truth content of artworks is not limited to the independent spiritual area which is 'l'art pour l'art'.<sup>17</sup> It must also maintain an immanent dimension of social practice with the help of aesthetic form to have a real impact. 'No artwork, however, can be socially true that is not also true in-itself'.<sup>18</sup> The universal aesthetic form is embodied in the concrete practice of the individual, which also returns in Adorno's fundamental ground of discussing the problem of art's commitment, that is, the purpose of changing the world. However, the change here should not be understood as a direct return to practice. Adorno always emphasizes the negative movement of art itself, keeping the boundary between aesthetic fields and political, psychological and moral fields clear. 'Immanent criticism of intellectual and artistic phenomena seeks to grasp, through the analysis of their form and meaning, the contradiction between their objective idea and that pretension'.<sup>19</sup> Sartre and Brecht, on the other hand, adopted a transcendental category to intervene in society and presupposed a bourgeois ideology, according to the systems of metaphysics, theology or politics. Meanwhile, Adorno points out that although internal analysis is conducive to overcoming the subjectivity of the construction of the external categories, it is often affected by the positivist tendency to establish a direct causal relationship of vulgar materialism, which belittles the positive role of the ideological function of culture, resulting in the situation that art becomes a simple isolated thing. As for the separation of form and content in the practice of political activities, Adorno insists on the committed consciousness of artworks driven by the negation of internal situation, which establishes the link between form and practice. Adorno does not require art to take immediate action against the external world in the way of productive practice and political practice in the context of Marx, emphasizing labor practice is the premise for artworks. As the 'content is dynamic in itself and does not remain self-identical, in the course of their history the objectivated artworks themselves once again become practical compartments and turn toward reality'<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, on the one hand, from the perspective of the objective transformation of reality, the practice containing the historical content of action, without staying in the field of idealism and aesthetic imagination, is higher than art. On the other hand, artworks are not dominated by practice. The deviation from practice is a critique of economic determinism. It can also be said that it makes the practical determinists in Marx's context reflect on the limitations of their practical theory.

So, if art wants to keep it alive, 'social critique must be raised to the level of form, to the point that it wipes out all manifestly social content'.<sup>21</sup> The key to deciding whether art

<sup>17</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment" in *Notes to Literature* (Volume Two), New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 85

<sup>18</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 248

<sup>19</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" in *Prisms*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997, p. 32

<sup>20</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 241

<sup>21</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The

can intervene in social reality is aesthetic form. Traditional idealistic aesthetics tries to regard formal features as the essence or truth content of artworks. However, Adorno holds the features of incoherence, imbalance, difference emphasized by modern art and criticizes the view that form is a pure structure or a mathematical essence. In the field of art, form cannot be limited to a mathematical relationship or a physical structure. Only when the aesthetic form contains all the variabilities, can art obtain the autonomy and the truth content. Form is 'the nonviolent synthesis of the diffuse that nevertheless preserves it as what it is in its divergences and contradictions, and for this reason form is actually an unfolding of truth'.<sup>22</sup> That is to say, autonomous art can reach the height of critiquing the reificationalized reality through aesthetic identity constructed by the rational organization of empirical facts. We can understand aesthetic identity from two aspects: on the one hand, art maintains the necessary boundary against reificationalized reality and vulgar art through aesthetic form, making itself a utopian being; on the other hand, the principle of rational identity is the internal logic of social integration, and artworks eliminate heterogeneous elements in order to obtain identity in form. According to Adorno's view of successful artworks, the content and themes can be integrated into its internal law, resisting being completely integrated, and the cracks that appear in the process of integration can be maintained. The existence of this heterogeneity makes it possible for artworks to obtain autonomy. Therefore, Adorno used the constellation to integrate the cracks in art in order to relieve the suppression which results from the identical integration of heterogeneous elements.

### **3. Aesthetic identity beyond mimesis**

Under the formal principle of identity, the specific individuality depiction can make the essential relationship in life organically integrate with the truth content of artworks. Individuality presents its essence through concrete reality, which is also the form of essence. The aesthetic form of autonomous art establishes that art has a space independent of political and social factors. Although the form is rooted in content, it is also a sublimation of universality. This sublimation comes from the negative elements of content and the critical elements of form. However, Brecht and Sartre always adhere to their transcendental intention, committed art cannot play the role of propaganda and education either because of its form's defects, or because the form of artworks distorts the expression of political ideas. Committed art is eager to achieve the goal with direct action, but it also ignores the drawback of doing so — the form only becomes a tool. Adorno's emphasis on the role of form is to maintain the logical integrity of artwork. The theorists

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Athlone Press, 1999, p. 250

<sup>22</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 143

who support the committed art often use their uncritical concepts of form directly to deal with the empirical elements in art, and hold a derogatory attitude towards form, which, in Adorno's view, just shows that the committed art theorists fall into the formalism which is isolated from reality having the features of simplicity and reificationalization. As they 'must fail to recognize that form is essential to art, that it mediates content'<sup>23</sup>. Therefore, art is in danger of becoming a tool of media and consumption.

Adorno proposed the constellation in an attempt to adhere to the principle of autonomous art. Artworks 'only achieve such participation through their objectivation'.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, nonbeing is the content of conceptual reference. This content is not a reference in the sense of what the concept means, because the content is far beyond what the concept means. He emphasizes the concrete and qualitative differences between individual things. This means that concepts cannot reflect the existence of non-concept things, thus Adorno criticizes the identical violence of concepts on concrete things. Only through the constellation of many concepts can we replace the identical relationship of concepts mapping things. On the other hand, he opposes the unity of subject-object realized by absolute spirit, that is, it is still the same identical logic of subject over object, which suppresses the concrete sensual existence. Adorno insists on the irreconcilability of subject-object, emphasizes the priority of society over individual consciousness and experience, and focuses on the mediator of subject-object. Therefore, although the concept comes from the empirical elements, it has the function of associating the subject's experience with the object's attribute. The non-identical mimesis of various phenomenal elements in artworks shows the truth content in a complex reconstruction, which needs to adjust and reconstruct the real experience according to its own rules. Decomposition and reconstruction are the characteristics of constellation, and the result of reconstruction leads to the enigma of social and historical content in art.

The solution of the enigma must rely on the power of reason and logic. In Adorno's view, art imitates reality so that it can respond to the irrationality in the society dominated by reason. On the one hand, artworks construct their formal identity according to certain rational principles; on the other hand, in the art form, non-concept sensible experience contains irrational elements that are not the products of the artist's irrationality or pure emotion, but the aesthetic form with internal rational logic. Only with the help of reason can mimesis not completely fall into the logic of reificationalized reality. The difference between art's deductive logic and positivism's logic is that art requires deductive logic to criticize its own rigidity. Aesthetics used to adopt three modes of critique: the first mode is an external ideological critique, which is actually based on the separation of cognitive subjects and objects, and the subjects use the established

<sup>23</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 142

<sup>24</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 242

categories to explain and critique the objects. The second mode probes artworks from the perspective of art production technology. The third mode is to publish some accidental judgments only according to the aesthetic preference of the subject. However, these three modes either ignore the heterogeneous elements in the rational construction, or are constrained by the positivists' view and only focus on the scientific and social factors, or emphasize the structural fracture in an irrational way. In the reificationalized society, the deductive logic is often characterized by positivism or instrumental rationality. Nonbeing loses its living space, leaving only an abstract schema. Aesthetic form is a field providing the nonbeing with space to live in. It is not only the formalization of deductive logic for art to maintain its own continuity, but also an opportunity for rationality to integrate into the content of artworks. In the face of reificationalized knowledge and categories, art criticizes instrumental rationality by means of mimesis. Art appeals to oppose the violence of identical logic, which needs to rely on the critical power of reason itself and rely on artworks to complete the transcendence of reason itself. Utopian aesthetic imagination is only a mysterious image. Only when reason returns to its enlightenment, can nonbeing manifest itself through art. Aesthetic form draws a clear boundary between reificationalized reality and truth content.

The unity of aesthetic form is the core of autonomous art. The deductive logic of art is externalized into aesthetic form, which shows the truth in an indirect way higher than life. From this point of view, lyric poetry is a good example. Ordinary people only regard lyric poetry as a kind of life picture subjectively constructed by individuals against society. In short, this view is similar to critiquing the real world with abstract ideas. For ordinary people, the aesthetic form and the social and historical content of the artworks exist separately in the two kinds of world. Adorno pointed this out with respect to master level artworks which 'lack the quality of immediacy, of immateriality'.<sup>25</sup> Artworks cannot be the mirror image of life. They must be rooted in the details of social history. The details of the artworks' internal critique and resistance of the spiritual power shape the image. Historical content will not be arbitrarily projected on the subject's concepts and languages, this will not automatically become art. It needs to realize the unity of aesthetic form by trying to externalize itself into concrete universality. The historical generative relationships between subjects and objects, between individuals and society confirm the dual unity of spirituality and reality, of self and society, through the mediation of aesthetic form rather than through the direct critique of reificationalized reality by languages and concepts. In artworks, like lyric works, 'no trace of conventional and concrete existence, no crude materiality remains'.<sup>26</sup> If we only see the form from the perspective of hermeneutics, the form will be drawn into the categories. The aesthetic experience of the subject comes from the realistic content and contains the demand of

<sup>25</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *"On Lyric Poetry and Society"* in *Notes to Literature*(Volume One), New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 40

<sup>26</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *"On Lyric Poetry and Society"* in *Notes to Literature*(Volume One), New York:Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 41

internal transcendence. Although we advocate for philosophical reflection, the parochialism of ideas is sometimes not conducive to the critique and freedom of art itself. The reason for doing so is to avoid using philistine or vulgar materialism to grasp the sensible material content and turn it into all artistic content unilaterally. 'There is no content, no formal category of the literary work that does not, however transformed and however unawarely, derive from the empirical reality from which it has escaped'.<sup>27</sup>

Art critique and aesthetics must raise themselves to the height of form, otherwise we cannot really understand artworks. As the whole of rational elements in art, the form not only expresses the logic of continuity of art itself, but also includes the diachronic process of empirical facts. Only by breaking through the universal concepts of idealism can formal aesthetics absorb the new quality which is constantly generated and not limited to a certain transcendental mode and judgment principle. Only relying on the deductive method to expect to acquire the unity of aesthetic form is equivalent to only using abstract reason and dialectic formula to establish a universal principle. However, 'The organizing principle in every artwork, the principle that creates its unity, is derived from the same rationality that its claim to totality would like to put a stop to'.<sup>28</sup> This kind of rational self negation can accurately grasp the historical generation process of artworks through the unity of aesthetic form by recognizing the constantly generated experience in society, and this generation process also confirms the universality of negative movement. Therefore, the intuition brought by the aesthetic form is joined by rational reflection. Because of the internal negative movement, reflection grasps the existence of non-concept. The result is the rethinking of concept and the recognition of non-concept existence under the guidance of rationality, which breaks through the formal confinement of abstract identity.

The truth content in artworks is not the so-called direct expression of reality, because reality is the uncritical reificationalized reality. However, the problems in real life are not solved by art. Aesthetic form is the mediator in life. It clarifies the boundary between general things and artworks. Although form can suppress the elements of experience, only form can show the truth content. The empirical element is the reality reificationalized by the identity. Through rational mimesis, artworks not only complete the construction of the unity of aesthetic form, but also avoid the suppression of the objects. The resulting identity with non-identity itself has more critical content and dimensions. Material empirical elements consciously accept the organization of the form, while retaining the historical elements that can not be integrated into the form, the truth content of artworks is realized through the aesthetic form. 'The zone of indeterminacy

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<sup>27</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment" in *Notes to Literature*(Volume Two), New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 89

<sup>28</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment" in *Notes to Literature*(Volume Two), New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 91

between the unreachable and what has been realized constitutes their enigma'.<sup>29</sup> The answer to this enigma is not directly through the rational calculation of the social interests involved in the artworks, nor is it written by the author in advance. 'Instead, it must discover how the entirety of a society, conceived as an internally contradictory unity, is manifested in the work of art, in what way the work of art remains subject to society and in what way it transcends it'.<sup>30</sup> In this sense, Adorno not only expounds the legitimacy of modern autonomous art from the aspects of form and content, art world and external reality, but also interprets the truth content with the help of philosophy, so as to raise art critique to the aesthetic dimension.

#### 4. Conclusion

Adorno has always viewed the fluidity of artworks dialectically from a negative perspective. The connotation of truth content has undergone fundamental changes compared with idealistic aesthetics. The truth content of artworks is not the abstract idea of history, but the crystallization of specific social and historical process in the artworks. The key problems of being and nonbeing, concept and non-concept all have the dual dimensions of social reality and rational speculation. Although there is still, to some extent, ideal truth in the theoretical form, Adorno's grasp of truth does not rely on the speculative abstraction of traditional German classical philosophy, but on the complex relationship between individual objects and social background in specific situations. Starting from this, the material elements of experience are orderly organized into the unity of aesthetic form.

The formation of aesthetic form is influenced not only by the attributes of material, but also by the rational function and subjective intention of artistic themes and makers. However, what has a greater impact on it is that there is a two-way relative movement of assimilation and alienation between art and society. Therefore, the communication between the two is continuous and the internal logic of art is revealed through aesthetic form. Adorno believes that the empirical elements in daily life are reificationalized into a repressive order. Only by excluding the heterogeneous sensible experience and meaning can we maintain and consolidate the self-repeating homogeneous order. Aesthetic form can maximize the preservation of sensible specific heterogeneous experience, as a free force to liberate the aesthetic consciousness, and thus has a certain resistance to reality. The commitment of artworks can not be directly understood as the external political conditions, but it is intended to show that the aesthetic form is produced in a certain

<sup>29</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p. 128

<sup>30</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society" in *Notes to Literature*(Volume One), New York:Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 39

political situation. The fate of art depends on whether art can raise its reflection and critique of social reality to the level of form, rather than empty political slogans or ideology. In Adorno's view, the unity of aesthetic form is just the rational expression of artistic logic. The truth content of artworks avoids sliding to both the pure sensible empiricism and the post-modern deconstruction by insisting on form. Although the form always lags behind the actual movement, art's formal criticism of phenomenon and reificationalized reality can not completely change the reality, this attitude of continuous negation breeds hope. Of course, Adorno does not demand that art become the Savior of reificationalized reality. He hopes that reason can return to the track of enlightenment and complete human's reason with the help of art.

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