Considering a first deconstructionist approach to teaching German Literature in Taiwan

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Abstract

German literature teaching has traditionally worked with a method that is based on hermeneutics as a theory of comprehensive understanding and practice of interpretation. Although the hermeneutic methods of Germanic studies developed into critical didactics after the historical hiatus by the National Socialism, and then has been critically evaluated by theorists such as Habermas, traditional hermeneutics still stands against the backdrop of many parts of Germanic studies in research as well as in teaching. However, language is a communication system that is never quite unequivocal in its linguistic terms. This was already pre-thought by Nietzsche, and since the 1970s, it was emphasized in the thoughts of French philosophy, particularly the thoughts of deconstruction by Derrida. The difficult theoretical and ethical implications of deconstruction require a demanding reading of Derrida's writings: this would overwhelm learners of foreign European languages. Therefore, my considerations focus on the question of whether and how far the thinking of deconstruction can be made fertile as a particular literary theory approach in Taiwan. What could a potential approach of literary didactics that is influenced by the thinking of deconstruction look like? What kind of advantages and problems are evoked? Based on an analysis and criticism of a literature teaching approach for German native speakers, I will consider a first deconstructivistic approach to literature teaching in the field of teaching German as a foreign language in Taiwan.

Keywords: Teaching Foreign Language and Literature in Taiwan, Deconstructionist Thinking, Hermeneutical Thinking, German Didactics

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Considering a first deconstructionist approach to teaching German literature in Taiwan

German literature teaching has traditionally utilized a method that is historically based on hermeneutics as a theory of comprehensive understanding and practice of interpretation. Since the 19th century, the method of hermeneutics used in German studies has been influenced considerably by the methodology of Wilhelm Dilthey (Bogdahl, 2003, p. 34). For an interpretation, this approach also requires, among other things, comprehension of the author's biographical situation. Even though, after the historical hiatus due to National Socialism, hermeneutic methods of German studies have developed into critical didactics and have been then critically evaluated by theorists such as Jürgen Habermas (Habermas, 1996, p. 28), traditional hermeneutics still stands as the backdrop of many fields of German studies both in research and in teaching, including teaching foreign language literature classes in Taiwan.

However, language is a communication system that is never quite unequivocal in its linguistic terms. This was already previously discussed by Friedrich Nietzsche, to whom words have been always metaphorical (Nietzsche, 1988, p. 880). This perspective has been enhanced by French philosophical thinking (Simons, 2009, p. 60) since the 1970s. In particular, the open thinking of deconstruction can be traced back to the philosopher Jacques Derrida (Derrida, 1996, p. 301). His postmodern philosophy of deconstruction as a strategy aims at a critique of metaphysics with supposedly fixed terms in language, binary oppositions, and their implicit hierarchies. Therefore, in the center of my considerations is the question of whether and to what extent deconstructivist thinking can be made fertile in the field as a pedagogical approach for teachers and learners of German as a foreign language ("DaF") in Taiwan. Equally important seems the question what complications may lay behind some of the teaching difficulties

for Western Teachers in an East Asian surrounding like the one on Taiwan. Is it possible to find a suitable approach to teaching literature to students in Taiwan that is based on the philosophy of deconstruction? What could it look like? What kind of advantages and difficulties for learners and teachers would be involved? I will attempt to consider a first deconstructionist approach to literature teaching in the field of DaF in Taiwan while making a comparison between hermeneutical and deconstructivist thinking from the perspective of a place of in-between. However, I warn that those who expect to find a simple solution to this problem might be disappointed.

1. Complexity. The local context

A few decades ago, a language that is spoken mainly on the other side of the globe seemed just too far away to be of interest to young people. In current times, the Internet certainly has helped students of European languages, literatures and cultures in East Asia to get closer to these foreign languages. However, the didactics and educational practice for foreign European language teaching in East Asian contexts seem to have been unable to fully address the particular needs of the students in East Asian countries including Taiwan. That is why there is a need to look for another kind of approach to teaching foreign European languages, literatures and cultures in Taiwan. As literature is generally a part of culture, teaching literature may be included into a program of teaching German language and culture in any East Asian country. However, there are some issues associated with it, including time constraints, the ever present requirement to test and evaluate the students, the large size of classes, the general complexity of a foreign literature, and the alleged property of the history of literature to be boring to students – all of these often do not contribute or promote teaching both language and literature at the same time. Some teachers consider them as a burden and dismiss literary texts as unsuitable or inappropriate for teaching German language. What complications may be behind these teaching difficulties? In his article about the failure of communicative language teaching in Taiwan Nigel Daley (2009) demonstrated the significance of the complexity of the local context for teaching. In his paper, various

key issues are displayed which have a great impact on learning and teaching, e.g. the influence of the Chinese imperial examination history on the psycho-cultural construct of people in Taiwan, traditional cultural norms of education in and outside the educational system, the socio-political framework, and the teacher-student roles (Daley, 2009, p. 13). Following Deleuze/Guattari, Daley (2009, p. 18) described this as a nested teaching complex, "an assemblage of two systems". The education in Taiwan seems to show a co-adapting of teaching and curricula, educational policies, and cultural dynamics which are intertwined with each other, and with other levels like the individual students, globally propagated theories, local beliefs, and cultural formations as well.

It is important to mention the complexity of the local context and the interdependence in this nested teaching complex because it gives an insight into the differences of starting points and motivation. So, for example, in Germany the aim of education traditionally would be described with the German word 'Bildung', a metaphorical term that originated from botanical language and was formed by German philosopher, Prussian minister of education and founder of the Berlin University Wilhelm von Humboldt; it describes a form of personal maturity and humanity, self-determination, the ability to participate in discussion, to have a personal opinion and unfold individuality through education. Although the Confucian ideal of education shares with Humboldt the aim of improving human beings, yet not with the intention of producing enlightened citizens. Unlike Humboldt's idea, the collectivist tradition of China rather intends to bring harmony to the community.

In an East Asian culture like Taiwan with its Chinese heritage the practice of teaching could rather be described as capitalizing the upbringing, filial piety, and education that traditionally produces a stronger focus on knowledge-centered examinations less than process-centered examinations on the part of the institutions, teachers, and parents alike. This means that the feared and celebrated examinations play a far greater role in the society of Taiwan because they generate order, and a traditional German teaching approach has difficulties meeting

the expectations toward teaching in Taiwan. From the perspective of the latter, any communication with the teacher seems unnecessary to reach the target of writing a successful exam. As a result, teachers in Taiwan experience students who fail to attend a 3-hour-lecture, and afterwards expect the teacher to give them access to the entire content of the lecture via Internet. These students are accustomed to a practice that does not differentiate between interacting in a classroom and reading alone at home. In a product-focused structure, interaction is not necessary, and these practices make sense to students when they are in a traditionally Chinese cultural heritage society because its emphasis is on reproducing the exact same form, which does not require much thinking and reflection. Learning appears to these students to be an individual and competitive experience, which requires of them only to study hard for the exam, but not to engage in interactive communication or in processual thinking and creativity. However, this way of thinking misses the point when the lecture is process-focused. A process-activating input and training in thought call for something different that needs interaction and communication, which cannot be provided via reading some keywords that students just memorize. From the view of traditional German didactics, rote learning is not the goal for any studying. A classical-humanistic trained German teacher probably may consider this kind of learning futile. As a result, the old goal of teaching might have to be partially replaced in favor of enhancing the students' skills to read texts, and try to prepare them for a contact with the unknown (e.g., a cultural exchange abroad that will change their construction of identity, and give them a broader horizon[1]).

2. Questioning teachers?

When looking at the structures in education, it can be noticed that the structures in Taiwan do not encourage questioning. In Germany it is widely accepted that one should give the young generation a chance to learn anything by ways of questioning their surroundings.

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1   Elsewhere (Leipelt-Tsai, 2012, p. 239) I have suggested that identity construction undergoes a shift after exposure to the "foreign".

Characteristic of this idea was the introduction of the German version of the old children's TV series "Sesame street". In the entrance song, the children always sang "Who? How? What? Why? Whoever does not ask remains stupid!" (in German it has an easy-going alliteration: "Wer? Wie? Was? (…) Wieso? Weshalb? Warum? Wer nicht fragt, bleibt dumm!". In this way, in Germany questioning as such was promoted among young children as an indispensable quality of their mental make-up, and this way of thinking has already become part of the German people's collective memory. This encouragement to question almost everything already at a young age demonstrates one impact of education in Germany. As a result its practices produce a more open atmosphere in regard to questioning in general. Moreover, German teachers praise their students not only for intelligent answers, but also for intelligent questions. Unlike in East Asian countries like Taiwan or Japan, in Germany information flows more openly, and even the Master craftsmen are willing to share responsibility for the learning of their apprentices, and most of them usually try to explain everything to them. So it seems that Germans generally are used to a different practice in education compared to people in East Asian countries.

In East Asian cultures it can be noticed that the position of the teacher often corresponds partially to hierarchical structures found in the former historical mandarinate. That may be a reason why in this kind of societies people seem less inclined to question their surroundings openly. One important example is visible by anyone who watches one of the many traditional Kung Fu movies from Hong Kong: their narrative refers explicitly to the very high position of teachers in traditional East Asian cultures.[2] Confucius, as a prototypical teacher, is regarded as moral authority and a role model for harmonious dealings with other people. His teaching and influence preserves the teacher's high social position. Still, the Chinese educational system is probably more influenced by the traditional elitist system of official examinations, and Confucius himself should not be considered to be the sole agent for the creation of this ideology of education.[3] To obtain harmony, it

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2   The genealogy of teaching can also be observed in a more sophisticated form in modern movies, for example in Chen Kaige's (陳凱歌) film "Sacrifice" (2010, 趙氏孤兒).

3   In an email to the author Dr. Cay Friemuth (13 Oct. 2012) emphasizes that when claiming Confucius

seems particularly important to avoid conflicts and contradictions in this type of society. Disobedience and opposition to elders, teachers, and parents are considered impolite or audacious. Traditionally the position of teachers would come very close indeed to that of a parent. For pupils and students, copying and reproducing variations was seen as a practice of humbleness and reverence. Most of the time, the pupils in these societies still may not get much opportunities to learn how to ask questions since they usually only have to memorize instead of communicating dialogically, and they may not get enough space to gain educational experience with others to acquire a method of how to deal with processual knowledge. However, to quote Gordon Wells, "We need to see teaching, (…) not as the transmission of pre-existing knowledge to passive recipients, but rather as the provision of opportunities for children to continue to exercise their in-build drive actively to make sense of their experience" (Wells, 1986, p. 29).

In a society where teachers traditionally demand respect, loyalty, and absolute obedience from their students, questioning by their students seems almost impossible. This means the socio-cultural background and the function of teachers is different than in a Western society that is influenced by the Platonic principle of dialogue considering the position of teachers. Although there are differences between the position of a teacher at a school and a professor at a university, as well as between every singular school and every singular teacher, in what follows I will try to compare the general position of teachers in the two cultures. In Taiwan, teachers are held responsible for the learning performance of students, and they, as an instrument of mediation, are expected to provide all the knowledge that is needed. Teachers in Taiwan occupy a position in which they are able to control the progress of learning;

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universally as only influence for East Asian cultures, this would correspond to a claim that European culture could be traced back to a general "Christian culture", or a "Platonic culture". Actually allegedly Confucian or sanctioned by Confucius texts existed mainly in memorization –sacred texts, whose claim to validity is the European equivalent of the Bible. The claim to power of the elites in Asia was based –as in clerical Europe– on the fact that the texts needed correct interpretation by the elite's own monopoly to interpretation. In this respect things in Europe and China were not that different –except that back then in Europe the Enlightenment led to a rediscovery of the ancient authors and their free thinking, a reappraisal of the individual as a rational subject who thinks for itself instead of memorizing. Now, this enlightenment separates Europe from the Islamic world as well as the East Asian cultures –even though some scholars believe to find the first model for the Enlightenment in China (Friemuth, 2012, p. 10).

what a teacher says should always be right and is not questionable. They symbolize the authority of knowledge, so to teach seems not just an occupation, but rather a kind of ethic-/moral work. According to Cheng (2011, p. 180), former president of National Chengchi University (政治大學, NCCU), a teacher in Taiwan should not be the only person who holds power over knowledge. He points out that in former times, teachers refused to be taught or challenged, and they did not have interactions with their students. They insisted on teaching knowledge instead of teaching students how to think (Cheng, 2011, p. 181). So it seems that such hierarchically mediated knowledge leads to fixed structures of knowledge that in modern times turn out to be rather resistant to variegation and processes of knowledge.

On the other hand, in Germany, unlike in Taiwan, a teacher is a respected but ordinary person in everyday life. German teachers generally are only showing the way how to learn and develop oneself, and they are not assumed to be the only resource one can learn from. So German students are expected to learn from many other resources by themselves. In Germany, the students' learning achievements are considered only from an individual condition and situation. In order to learn and figure out different issues, a German student may sometimes try to question the professional opinion of a teacher in an open discussion.[4] Also, it seems that in a traditional East Asian culture that is influenced by the old system of official examinations much more is expected of a teacher than in Western cultures: a teacher has not only to be good at what he does but has to lead a somehow 'morally impeccable' way of life which seems even more important than his/her ability to teach. In addition, when being an advisor (導師) in a culture like Taiwan, much more is expected of him/her than in Germany; this task includes being able to respond and to responsibly provide counsel regarding almost every aspect of a student's life, even when they are already grown up (Advisor guide, 2012, pp. 3-5).

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4 It might be little-known but seems a very characteristic example that in Germany often the mandatory two advising university professors of doctoral students, both in technical sciences and in humanities privately recommend in their advisory discussion-hour to their doctoral students two contrary or mutually exclusive suggestions about the approach to be taken. In this way, the doctoral students are forced to decide for themselves which background and way of thinking will influence their doctoral thesis.

In addition, the interconnected communication structure and the social behavior seem more complex than in European countries. For example, the valuation of losing face is somewhat different in Europe than in Asian countries.[5] Whereas in Taiwan a loss of face should always be avoided, in Germany the concept of losing face in public is also known; however, in connection with the acceptance of criticism it is usually weighted differently (Leipelt-Tsai, 2009, p. 92), especially when the result is an important learning experience. Though in other social units (such as in manufacturing, or in the military) a more steep social hierarchy increases the speed of response or output and is therefore desirable, a steepened social hierarchy at schools and universities does not help to create the perfect learning environment for students. For example, due to their fear of losing face, they may sometimes not be willing to speak in a foreign language, and remain silent with the result that a very small number of students dominate classroom proceedings. For students who want to learn a foreign language, a different atmosphere with a less steep hierarchy that possibly achieves a verbal culture of debate is more desirable. However, to touch the question of education means to question one of the basic outlines of a culture that is influenced by its traditional system of official examinations.

2.1 Interlinking

In Leipelt-Tsai (2009, p. 86) discussing appropriate teaching targets for German speaking instruction of literature in Taiwan, I have already pointed out, following Walter Benjamin's thesis about the amplification of a new form of perception and reception in modern times (Benjamin, 1977, p. 165), that the modern technology changes the sensory perception of humans. Social stress and intensive pressure are changing the human receptivity with a tendency to be less filled with rapt attention but more unsettled and fractured (Leipelt-Tsai, 2009, p. 87). I have linked this with the reading process of modern society, especially that of contemporary youth in Taiwan, and interpreted this as an adaptation to the changing perception that consequently looks for another gratification. Looking

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5   For remarks about the concept of face in Western culture, e.g. the Swiss and the American, see Locher, M. A. (2010).

from the viewpoint of the young adolescent students in Taiwan in times of the new media, the complication to read many difficult literary texts in a foreign language without a first translation seems far too difficult. Their leisure practice seems to have changed, and the trends of the reading culture has changed. Applying Benjamin (1977), one may say that the modern perception tends to a kind of reading process that searches for shock effects. The need for ongoing attracting irritations and provocations increases more and more. This lack of contemplation complicates the reading for students, making the reading process with its generation of meaningful sense more difficult. The practice of reading tends to be now more dispersal rather than contemplation and consideration. Unlike someone who centers oneself and concentrates on the text while reading, now, instead of becoming engrossed in the text, the modern human engrosses the text in oneself. Simultaneous multiple stresses and exposures to new information technologies can slow the mental processing down, that is why one might sometimes have to consider a reduced intensity of the reading process. Of course, this differs individually from student to student. Still, it is especially evident in a society like Taiwan which is strongly influenced by new media.

I would suggest that Western teachers should try to develop a hybrid approach. Teachers of DaF in Taiwan could consider another didactic option to apply a relatively new way of thinking and to combine an awareness of temporary knowledge with processual thinking and creativity, thus, a didactic approach that follows the philosophy of deconstruction. However, if teachers of DaF in Taiwan try to integrate the postmodern ideas into their classes, a new teaching challenge may occur, because a corresponding form of deconstructivist didactics seems very difficult to find. To define deconstruction would mean to rely on an ontological procedure that would ascribe it a deliminating identity. As Wolfreys/Robbins/Womack quoted Derrida's words, "deconstruction, if it is anything, is an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring" (Wolfreys/Robbins/Womack, 2006, p. 30). To unlock the difficult theoretical and ethical implications of deconstruction requires a lengthy and concentrated reading of Derrida's writings, so this could overwhelm any learner not yet

acquainted with deconstruction in his/her mother tongue. I argue that with deconstructivist thinking, a thinker – this includes any teacher as didactician – has to consider that the human mind is limited and not capable of cognition; therefore, (s)he is not at all able to say what (s)he knows. This means one cannot produce knowledge; one is only able to say what one does not know or has to remain silent. So, if a didactician tries to produce positivist unrestricted knowledge with the thinking of deconstruction, his/her didactics have already failed because, by defining targets and fixed notions, (s)he exerts ideological power, which stands against deconstructivist thinking. Deconstructivist thinking doubts and questions this kind of establishing (positivist) knowledge since it is an imposition of power and hierarchies.

In order to teach that humans are not able to know any supposed truth, using questions and negations could be one possible way of teaching deconstructivist thinking. In doing so, the teacher will only say what it is not and cannot say what it is, because the limited capability of human cognition makes it impossible to produce this kind of positive knowledge. This corresponds to the fact that, according to Culler (1999, p. 27), Derrida follows with the utmost austerity the structuralist principle that there are only differences in the linguistic system, and no positive terms. Another way to teach deconstructivist thinking could be by means of showing how it works in practice and aiming for a more process-focused, instead of product-focused teaching. So, when trying to use a teaching approach that corresponds to the Derridean thoughts of deconstruction as a strategy aimed at a metaphysical critique of supposedly fixed terms in language and their implicit hierarchies, instead of verbally stating alleged truths that produce an ideology, a teacher may use a strategy of performance (i.e., by deconstructing a notion, and showing narratively what is not definable in order to expose to sight the indeterminate). I suggest that this didactician will tend to use negations in many situations, e.g., even when a student is asking about his/her written paper, the didactician would ask questions or talk about what (s)he has not written and not about what (s)he has written. From the students' perspective, especially students with Western cultural backgrounds who are used to simple logocentrical thinking, they may get frustrated when listening to negations and questions and

may long for a more simplistic way of thinking. Some students need more time to recognize that the negativity of didactics is not due to a teacher's personality, but due to deconstructivist thinking. The question remains open if it is possible to teach deconstruction in a didactically more appealing way without acting against its principles.

The access to deconstruction may need more time than just stating something in a one-sided simplistic logic. Although grasping the theoretical and ethical implications of deconstruction requires more time, this kind of non-ideological didactic would give students of German studies the opportunity to familiarize themselves with different ways of thinking – something students in other fields already have done (e.g., in English and French departments in Taiwan). Thus, an introduction to deconstruction might encourage students to follow the traces of meaning, to think creatively, to acquire new ways of thinking, and moreover, to question their surroundings independently. Derridean deconstruction is not only a postmodern theoretical approach that can be used for the teaching of literary works. Deconstructivist thinking works against hierarchies, such as those in language, and has a great 'potential to unsettle' (Flüh, 2012) as Peter Engelmann formulated it. In Germany the absorption of the French poststructuralistic theories were much delayed, and their application is still less common than in France, England, and the US. This applies to a great extent to German studies, and in consequence to didactics for German literature. Both of these fields often concentrate on utilizing the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (influenced by Adorno and Horkheimer) or the sociological Systems Theory developed by Niklas Luhmann. Paraphrasing Richard E. Nisbett's proposition that East Asian cultures are more relation-centered and might more often prefer to use a thinking in relationships (i.e. concentrated on the relationships of notions) and less a thinking in objects (i.e. concentrated on the singularity of objects; Leipelt-Tsai, 2009, pp. 82-86), deconstructivist and other poststructuralist thinking seem specifically suitable to the predominant thinking style in East Asian cultures. This is especially so since poststructuralistic[6] semiotic

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6   I would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that here, and throughout this paper, I use the ending '-istic' with the meaning 'in the way of...', so 'poststructuralistic', for example, means 'in the way of a poststucturalist'.

theories follow traces of meaning in language as difference (as with Jacques Derrida), and respective structuralistic semiotic theories see language as a chain of signifiers (as with Jacques Lacan), both of which would fit well with a more relation-centered thinking. In this way, the socio-geographic location may enable teachers to employ a deconstructivist teaching approach.

3. Impossibility

A book that tries to demonstrate a potential approach to German literary didactics influenced by deconstruction is Nicole König's *Dekonstruktive Hermeneutik moderner Prosa* (2003) with a theoretical outline and exemplary readings for German schools.[7] König applies her didactical approach only to the genre of prose texts. Looking at the title of her book, a newly coined term strikes the eye: the so-called 'deconstructivist hermeneutics'. At first glance, it seems to lead to a 'mission impossible' by combining hermeneutics with deconstruction. Some may ask: why does the term *Dekonstruktive Hermeneutik* sound impossible? In order to approximate the thinking of deconstruction and the thinking of hermeneutics for those who are not familiar with it, I will try to oversimplify the differences between these directions of thinking in a short overview.

Many have already heard of hermeneutics as a method of interpretation of texts and of Biblical texts that was already used in medieval times. More broadly, it can be described as a theory on the interpretation of texts and understanding. The hermeneutic circle describes the impossibility of knowing anything except through what is already known (Wolfreys, Robbins, & Womack, 2006, p. 50). The hermeneutic circle implies that singular parts of a text are only understood after reading and understanding the whole of a text, and at the same time, the entire text can be understood only through the comprehension of parts of the text. Over times, this paradoxical theory was supplemented and modified, but there was always the claim to an understanding behind

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7   For a historical outline of didactics in Germany, see König, pp. 134 et seq.

it. While the traditional German approach (e.g., by Wilhelm Dilthey) was to try recovering an 'original' intention of the author of a text,[8] in the 20th century, the most influential representative of philosophical hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, assumed language as a medium in which understanding can be accomplished (Gadamer, 1996, p. 29) by means of exploiting a supposed 'true' meaning of a text through asking questions in a dialogical conversation that in principle is not possible to terminate (*Der ununterbrochene Dialog*, Gadamer & Derrida, 2004). However, this positivistic concept of understanding was questioned when Derrida demonstrated that Gadamer's precondition of understanding – a willingness to understand – was, and still is, questionable (Gadamer, 1996, p. 104). Therefore, understanding – if it exists – has always a relational character.

With the open thinking of the differance (with an 'a'), and of the trace, the unity of philosophy is broken, and the other –which had been excluded– becomes an input to philosophical thinking.[9] Deconstructivist thinking cannot be thought of as a form of hermeneutics because this movement of thinking goes in another direction. To put it in a simplistic way, in hermeneutics, the interpretation of a text would analyze a plurality (for example a novel) in order to simplify, reduce and summarize it. Accordingly, hermeneutical thinking would extract only a supposed essence out of it. This reduction and simplification of meaning produces a final conclusion that brings the movement to an end. Hermeneutical thinking believes in a fixation of established knowledge and requires the reduction by means of definition. It needs narrowed notions, and it needs to build up dichotomies and hierarchies of these notions. A critique of hermeneutical thinking might be that it may oversimplify (which means, for example, that the distinctiveness and specifics of the form and content of a text may get lost).

Deconstructivist thinking, however, would move in the other direction of thinking. It is concerned about the different, the small and excluded,

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8 The starting point of hermeneutical reading is to ask about the intention of the author "*Was meinen Sie, was möchte der Autor damit ausdrücken?*", cf. Ehlers, Swantje (1992).

9 In the suppression, and combating of the proliferation of deconstruction in German speaking countries, the influence of philosopher Jürgen Habermas also had its share.

the other. Deconstructivist thinking –if it has a start– would start from one concentrated point, for example a word, and try to unfold the many meanings of this word. This could be done by analyzing the context or by going back to historical meanings that are still connected to the word. For example, when reading the old German proverb *Lesen bildet* some might say it means 'reading forms'. With deconstructivist thinking one would try to unfold this, e.g., by looking into an etymological dictionary, where one would find the entry

> "bilden Vb. 'formen, gestalten, hervorbringen, darstellen, sein', übertragen 'die geistigen Anlagen entwickeln'." (Etymologisches Wörterbuch. A-L, 1993, p. 137)

So the verb *bilden* can be unfolded into different meanings like 'to form, to make up, to shape, to produce, to represent, to be', and in a figurative sense 'to educate, and to develop the mental abilities'. One can go even further and connect this word with the Middle High German word *bilden*, which means 'to decorate with pictures, to shape, to reproduce, to imagine' (*Etymologisches Wörterbuch. A-L*, 1993, pp. 137f.). In this way, deconstructivist thinking as a process gives different perspectives onto one term, paradoxically all at the same time. It shows many readings and different possibilities of meaning. Deconstructivist thinking is not able to produce a conclusion; instead, in its dissemination it produces temporary answers and an openness for the other (e.g., the openness of a new question). It follows traces, differentiates very carefully, is interminable and indeterminable. Deconstructivist thinking does not believe in a fixation of knowledge (such as a prescriptive constraining definition) since change always produces new knowledge, and old knowledge is not recognized anymore. It would not state that something 'is'; rather, it would describe something by saying what it is not. It breaks open dichotomies and hierarchies of notions, and tries to dismantle them, even the notion of being a deconstructivist.[10] A critique of deconstructivist thinking might be that one may say it creates meaning, maybe even meaning that another reader is not able to read.

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10   That is why someone who says (s)he is a deconstructivist is not really a deconstructivist: deconstructivists would never fix this notion by saying that. Hence, they should be nowhere to be found.

As a result, hermeneutical thinking as a method will produce oneness, while deconstructivist thinking as a strategy will produce a plurality. For example, the notion of a human being in terms of hermeneutical thinking would be an undivided individual, while deconstructivist thinking would consider it as a subject, subjected to forces inside and outside of its mind.

Only from the perspective of a one-sided simplistic logic the allegation against deconstructivist thinking as being not (one-sided) logic (in German: *nicht ein-fach*) seems admissable because it is not unilateral, and it may be characterized as a pluralistic logic that is impossible to grasp by simple logocentrical thinking. The accusation of a possible random arbitrariness by hermeneuticists shows they have not grasped deconstructivist thinking because deconstruction deals foremost with accuracy. For example, while reading one has to pay attention to every point, dash, and blank space. Undecidability is just a first step that will give way to a precise reading through an exact analysis of the context(s), so arbitrariness is not at all given; when a text is read in this way (e.g., with the method of close reading) any difference becomes important to the reading. Therefore, deconstructivist thinking seems more difficult and time-consuming than hermeneutical thinking because it has to consider every small detail in a text, and, unlike hermeneuticists**,** even has to consider what is not in the text. Instead of isolating and concentrating on only one way of thinking deconstructivist thinking has to consider many possible ways. It seems difficult to capture that the concepts that are used by simple logic are not suitable for deconstructivist thinking. If someone who is used to hermeneutical thinking expects a full examination of the entire works of a writer, (s)he will be disappointed because there is no longer a belief in unity and therefore no concept of works in the sense of a totality. As the text is only a supposed unity, so are the collected works of a writer. Hermeneuticists and those who look for simple positivistic knowledge in a deconstructivist reading or deconstructivist lecture will be disappointed, and they might feel confused and discontented because they cannot follow and cannot take unrestricted knowledge home in the way they are accustomed to do.

4. Alternating movements of thinking

In light of this simplified background, it seems impossible to adapt deconstructivist thinking to hermeneutics as proposed by König (2003). However, as I have already suggested elsewhere (Leipelt-Tsai, 2008, p. 73) in discussing the aesthetics of reader reception , when reading a text the human mind uses most of its time engaging in both ways of thinking. Readers have to proceed on the necessary assumption that they can find a meaning in a text, otherwise most of them would not start reading. Therefore, in spite of the text's indetermination, they would usually not stop reading until they found a kind of meaning because they are driven by their desire for meaning (even if as a result they find the meaning that the text has none, for example, in advertising). The readers' preliminary draft of meaning in the reading process is constantly changing by means of adaption of the text that was just read to new meaning, and the readers will time and again try to discover a consistency in the signifiers and falsely assume of the differance (with an 'a') that it would be a constitutive relation. Despite the play of differences in a text, any reader tries to find a singular meaning for at least a short amount of time. In a possible second reading (for example, of the same reader when young and when old), the meaning may have changed. Nevertheless, at the same time, the reading process as a movement of fluctuation works again and again against a closed structure of meaning.

Though the two movements of thinking exclude each other, I argue that this exclusiveness does not mean that they cannot be thought of sequentially in an ever-alternating succession. I would suggest that they are followed by the readers in an exchange of views in an open process of reading. It is not possible to adapt deconstructivist thinking to hermeneutical thinking. However, in order to combine both ways of thinking, from this new perspective of reception theory there is one way that could describe the reading process that consists of a double-structured follow-up of reciprocating movements of an 'either – or'; it is a thinking that commutes and never meets. I suggest that a reading process is not one-sided but divided. It could be read as a position of thinking with multiple tracks, i.e., a way of thinking that occupies two

places at once and is constantly moving, similar to the doubling of the central instance of the psychoanalytic concept of a fetish we can find in Derridean thinking[11] and with reference to other deconstructivist concepts that are thought of as moving.[12] According to Derrida, a fetish incorporates and combines self and other, and (s)he unites this ambivalence in her/himself. As an excluded other it interrupts any binary system and determines the heterogeneous association in a place of in-between. Its typical structure connects the contrary, preserves and simultaneously conveys the conflict between the position of having and lack (Leipelt-Tsai, 2008, p. 330).

Inspired by König's book title, I propose a transferring of the Derridean doubling of the central instance to the process of reading. I suggest calling this kind of thinking – one that involves thinking in double-structured reciprocating movements that shows an alternating movement of thinking of opening and closing in the reading process – a 'stereoscopic thinking'. In the process of reading, the concluded meaning moves back and forth, from a reducing and enclosing kind of thinking to a opening and multiplying kind of thinking, and vice versa. Denial of difference as well as recognition of difference can be found in the reading process. An effect can be unfolded which tries to mediate power over the meaning of the text. Through reduction and restriction of meaning the readers try to enable an approximation to temporarily stabilize the outcome of the reading and give meaning a phantasmatic unity, and the frightening lack of coherence is denied. Still, this movement never rests because in the reading process no final connection between both directions of thinking – hermeneutical and deconstructivist – is possible.

However, this proposed moving 'non-position' of reading cannot be called 'deconstructivist hermeneutics' because the movements of thinking are

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11   Such as in his concept of a writing mode called "hymen's graphic" as well as the concept of the "pharmakon", poisonous and healing (Derrida, 1979, p. 99).

12   There are other concepts based on deconstructionist thinking that are thought of as moving, e.g., the "double vision" of migrants in the postcolonial theory by Homi K. Bhabha (1994, p. 8), or the pendulum-position of the "diabolic gender" Sarah Kofman describes (2000, p. 151). Kofman called the ever-moving *ecriture* with double-columns a "diabolical gender" that breaks all oppositions and hierarchies.

in the opposite direction. Hermeneutics loses its identity and its name when trying to change into deconstructivist thinking. When trying to use both ways alternately, I suggest naming it a 'deconstructionist approach' for teaching literature. König (2003, p. 23) suggests an approach that is based on Hans Robert Jauß's reception theory and dominated by the concept of dialogical 'understanding' of a text that at the same time is always a 'non-understanding'.[13] This cannot be called deconstruction. The question of the otherness of understanding (Jauß, 1994, p. 11) and the understanding of otherness remains extremely problematic. This is particularly the case since Derrida, who cannot underline the possibility of understanding, persists in saying that there is no given homogeneous space of communication (Derrida, 1988, p. 293) and indirectly asks to be read in a certain way.[14]

5. Didactics of the indeterminate?

According to König, modern prose texts demonstrate a devaluation of the story, the narrator's uncertainty, gaps, alienation, and a repeal of causality, e.g., breaking up the linearity of narration, discontinuity, and instability (König, 2003, p. 1).[15] König's term *Dekonstruktive Hermeneutik* does not fit her writings because she does not use the kind of open thinking that would show a deconstructivist reading process, and her approach emphasizes understanding as appropriation of the foreign (König, 2003, p. 23), which a deconstructivist thinking could not follow since deconstruction works against any appropriation. König does not deconstruct prose texts in exemplary readings but uses postmodern terminology with hermeneutics for her didactical goal of teaching

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13   König writes: "alles Verstehen ist zugleich immer ein Nicht-Verstehen" (König, 2003, p. 23).

14   Due to limited space and time, the difficult problem of understanding cannot be analyzed further and has to be discussed elsewhere. The hermeneuticists Bogdahl/Korte admit that the term 'understanding' is problematical (p. 111 et seq.).

15   König chose German prose texts that are said to belong to modernist times and before. This is seemingly the reason why she uses the notion of 'modernity' not in terms of a historical but as a phenomenological concept. Consequently, her concept of modernity can be used to question the naming of postmodernism as something that comes after modernity. When one reads 'modernity' literally, the naming of the concept 'postmodernism' should be impossible because there cannot be anything more modern than modernity. Of course, some may say the name 'postmodernism' follows the playfulness of its content and seems to be a witty pun.

literary texts[16] without reflecting the implications of deconstruction in her practice[17] that, at its best, could lead to a performative reading. From the view of deconstructivist thinking, a reading should not just state that a subject is deconstructed but should ask questions, e.g., how and in which ways the subject is described in the text. Instead of showing in practice how deconstruction works, König fixes and limits her view in a hermeneutical manner.

However, of great didactical interest is König's recognition that the goal of reading should be less to capture a unifying meaning and more to question how metaphysical contradictions contribute to prose texts and how protagonists and their relations lead to an aporetic logic. According to König (2003, p. 18), this causes a change in perspective; meaning is therefore no longer thought of as the origin of language but as the product of language. König's 'didactics of the indeterminate' (2003, p. 132) recognize that modern prose texts neither follow traditional models of writing nor do they follow the expectations of 'one' (supposed) reader who is used to a kind of fiction that can be easily processed. She states: 'the more versatility replaces linearity and causality, the more the reader and thus the didacticist has to part of his logo-centric interpretation' (König, 2003, p. 132). In this way, her didactics of the indeterminate become the central parameter of teaching literature. Based on a dynamic understanding of texts, König's goal is not only to break open the (supposed) cohesion of the prose text and its inherent hierarchies. To her, this also changes the 'comprehension' of the process of cognition and understanding. This questioning of any conceptualization leads to a focus on aspects of ambiguity, transgression of boundaries, and shifting of meaning. The claim to understand becomes brittle, and as a consequence, when cognition is thought in its particularity as well as in its plurality, it loses its claim to universality. Subsequently, according to König (2003, p. 132), the insight into the existence of indeterminacy,

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16   König's rhetoric is a mixture of different theoretical backgrounds that seem incompatible with each other (p. 117, 132). Missing an overview of the differences in various postmodern theories, she claims that Derrida would be like Lacan, with both committed to structuralism (ibid., p. 103, 117). Lacan may be described as structuralist, but Derrida goes a step further and uses other concepts like dissemination to describe a kind of dispersion of meaning instead of a chain of signifiers.

17   In order to fit into the outline of this book this article also cannot actively practice deconstruction (as in its earlier version), and stays rather historically narrativistic.

fragmentation, metafiction, and discontinuity causes a confrontation with non-comprehension. Therefore, one has to emanate from a basic configuration of unreadability of literary texts. In other words, a unifying reading is not possible. The aim is therefore to disclose the modes of operation of the text and to address the difficulties which pose obstacles to a comprehension of the literature. Hence, the readers' attention will shift from the question of meaning to the question of constructedness of the text. I argue that the outline of this didactical approach (König, p. 132-150) can actually be called a deconstructionistic approach and seems applicable to teaching literature in the field of DaF. Following the 'Didactics of the indeterminate', it becomes important for readers to focus on peripheral elements, fractures, and discontinuities in the texts. Particularly the unspoken, the omitted, and the repressed will be of interest. In the following, the questions of how and why these elements of the texts are repressed by the dominant systems become an issue, as well as how they operate. This can be accomplished through an approximation by multiple readings, which neither resolve contradictions nor adapt any plurality of meaning to a unity. Without any preliminary understanding that guides the reading, it is not aimed at a consensus on a single meaning of the text. Differently to a hermeneutical approach that starts with several readings from the indeterminate to the determinate, in a deconstructivist approach one reads from the determinate to the indeterminate.[18] Instead of only asking about the production of meaning, now the question of how meaning is prevented comes to the fore.

6. Intertwined in texts: Teaching literature and language

When considering the nexus between teaching foreign literature and teaching a foreign language one may ask: what is the difference between both teaching forms? Teaching a foreign language needs a form of text –usually a written text from everyday life– that has to be

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18   König's insistence on a hermeneutical interpretation could be transferred as a very first step in the process of reading since a 'deconstruction' can only be started if anything was constructed beforehand. In addition, König combines to her method of reading a didactics that derived from a German reception theory orientation towards dealing productively with texts. Understanding is therefore regarded as a form of co-producing (König, 2003, p. 136) and includes a subjective share.

read and analyzed in class. Similarly, teaching foreign literature needs a form of text – usually a text from a known or famous author– that has to be read and analyzed in class. There is no language teaching without text, and there is no literature teaching without text. What is the difference between a literary text and a non-literary text? The words that are used in contemporary texts of everyday life are often the same that are written in a literary text, depending on the language. For example, when one looks closer at the lyrics of modern pop music, which belongs to the genre of literary texts, one finds that the usage of language in a literary text is as (supposedly) 'authentic' as in any every day usage of language. Not limited to words in literary texts, any word was and still is metaphorical, and its semantics is constantly shifting (Leipelt-Tsai, 2008, p. 33). Thus, the only difference would be that a literary text does not pretend to describe a reality that the human mind actually cannot perceive. In consequence, it is not really possible to exactly differentiate between language teaching and literature teaching because they are intertwined.

How can a deconstructionist approach be used in class to teach reading of German literary texts in Taiwan? The first step could be simply to read the text aloud, which involves the whole body, in order to literally make a learning experience. Then, an opening up of a text by guiding key questions (and by more questions developed by the students) can produce a close reading that is followed by a textual analysis. It is expected that these readings provide many questions that should be followed by a plurality, i.e., more than one possible answer. If the students respond with only one answer, the teacher can try to unfold a second or third answer, and finally, instead of a closed end to the reading, they will find not one conclusion but an opening of more questions.

Without following the traces of words, it is not possible to analyze any text. So to unfold different possible meanings of words in foreign literary texts, students need to work with a dictionary. Instead of trying to define or narrow down any definition, the many meanings of a word will be unfolded. Still, after trying to disseminate the meaning of a word the students will be confronted with its context and learn how the meaning

of a word can be restricted by this context. This part of analysis consists of working with the vocabulary of the foreign language, resulting in students asking more and more questions about the text, and trying to analyze the relation between the text and the context(s), its inherent hierarchical structures, many different discourses going in reverse directions, intertextuality, and so forth. In this way, teaching literature through analysis of written texts is actually a form of language teaching. Lexical variants are applicable not only when learning vocabulary, but in the practice of reading as well.

7. 'Preschool of deconstruction'

This paper started out as an attempt to find a teaching approach for German literary studies in Taiwan that is rooted in deconstruction and would be applicable in the classroom. It is apparent that it is impossible to mix both ways of thinking (and reading) together at the same time, deconstruction and hermeneutics. Every text is heterogeneous and should be read and addressed singularly. For any reading with a deconstructionist approach, there cannot be one precise instruction for teachers and students which they simply have to follow. Still, the inspirational German professor Kaspar H. Spinner (1995) proposed operational procedures as a 'preschool of deconstruction' in his paper about 'Poststructuralistic reading in class – based on the example of Grimm's fairy tales.'[19] According to him, the statements of a text can create tensions with other possible, but unrealized, expressions in the text. In this way, the students obtain a more dynamic perspective, which would approximate a poststructuralist's perspective. One of Spinner's examples is the fairy tale of Snow White. Its first sentence starts with "Once upon a time in the middle of winter, there was …" (Spinner, 1995, p. 14). Tentatively, this sentence can be reformulated as a leave-out try: "Once in the middle of winter, there was…", a leave-out and rearrange try: "In the middle of winter, there was once…", or a replacement try: "Once in the middle of winter 1805, there was…". This demonstrates

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19   Spinner recommends operational procedures by which individual formulations or terms can be tentatively changed in a text (Spinner, 1995, p. 14).

that the words "upon a time", which had been replaced or omitted in the reformulation, try to produce a distancing from reality. A fairytale beginning seems to speak the opposite of what it says in its literal sense. What should have happened here once apparently never happened at all. It is stated as something, but by the expression "upon a time" (in German: *Es war einmal*), this statement also revokes its validity at the same time.

Besides these kinds of reformulations for dynamization, Spinner also suggests in his 'preschool of deconstruction' outlining inconsistent motives, e.g., in Grimm's fairy tale motives of pureness and the cannibalistic motive of eating lung and liver. From a structuralistic point of view this could be seen as two worlds standing in opposition to each other; from a poststructuralistic point of view, this could be seen as two conflicting tendencies, and it points out that the scary, demonic and archaic, as well as a transfigured picture of former times, seems typical of Romanticism. For teaching in a preschool of deconstruction, these two conflicting tendencies should not be closed in a harmonizing interpretation. Rather, the contradictory elements should be emphasized. Another suggestion offered by Spinner is using variations of narrations to emphasize different aspects of a text. This gives students a perspective on the heterogeneity of texts.[20] The contradiction lies in the texts of the fairy tales themselves. With *Little Red Riding Hood* (Spinner, 1995, p. 13), a teacher could emphasize moralizing, norm critical, and psychological readings by giving the text to the students without the ending in order that they can write their own endings. In applying Spinner's suggestion in East Asia, students in Taiwan could also write an opinion about the story from the view of a famous protagonist, such as Hua Mulan (花木蘭), cartoon characters like Nobita (大雄 / 野比大雄), or other known children's book characters (like the Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren's character Pippi Longstocking). Still, it seems important to mention that the goal of teaching should not be to summarize the content or arrange

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20 For example, when reading a fairy tale aloud, the teacher or the students could use either an amusing or a mythical romantic tone when performing, or (s)he could change the tenses used to those of modern colloquial language instead of the archaizing formulation of the brothers Grimm, etc. Spinner proposes comparing the fairy tales to one another or to previous versions in order to lead the students to discover the writing style of the brothers Grimm.

the ambiguity of the text in a hierarchy of significance. Instead, it is can be seen as a process, and the polysemy can be seen as a dynamic collision of different discourses.

One could also refer to the technical method of cyclic reading, based on Roland Barthes's notion of study, in Kremer & Wegmann (1995). Kremer & Wegmann (1995, p. 58) propose reading and re-reading a text in order to explore its structure. As a result, certain constructions will be found as effects of writing and reading modes. For example, after re-reading the novel Effi Briest, students will study discourses that are typically classified as belonging to the epoch of German Realism (Kremer & Wegmann, 1995, p. 75). This indicates that the re-reading of texts in class generates and unfolds deviations and differences of readings in a momentum that produces a not entirely predictable outcome. According to Kremer & Wegmann (1995), understanding becomes pluralized and is also turned reflexively into a topic of reflection for the students.

In other words, in a 'preschool of deconstruction', the path becomes the goal. Being without any firm ending or closure, this kind of didactics can also be considered a deconstructionist approach. Besides the never-ending oscillating between the multiple readings, the most important goal of this approach is to improve not only the students' ability to read in class, but also their overall deployable literacy[21] in any situation, even without a teacher. The opening of meaning by means of questioning the text destroys the idea of a positive knowledge of literature separated from a single specific text. Seemingly, with a deconstructionist teaching approach, any desire for practical suggestions as an application of abstract models into teaching practice cannot be met. Because there is no cognition to be found in the plurality of readings, the hope for any unrestricted positivist knowledge by demonstrating specific concrete instructions cannot be satisfied. However, it should not be forgotten when teaching German studies that playfulness is an important characteristic of postmodern theory.[22]

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21   Concerned with writing instead of reading, Kaluza (2009, p. 38) differentiates between literacy that is implicit and general (for text patterns) and literacy that is an explicit text competency and is processually acquired.

22   This playfulness that is already used in didactics by some teachers of German in Taiwan, such as

8. (Dis)advantage

The search for a new approach aiming to modernize the traditional didactics of teaching literature in the field of German as a Foreign Language in East Asia has just begun. Considering the issue that the students in Taiwan belong to a group whose thinking seems to be able to more readily detect structures in relations than individual concepts, the thinking of deconstruction comes to mind. A methodology that tries to follow the thinking of deconstruction would address particularly the thinking style of these students. Students in Taiwan live in a steeper hierarchical society than, for example, German students, which may lead to more difficulties when questioning their surroundings. Therefore, they may especially profit from these didactics. Since the rapid changes in culture and its interpretation are especially apparent in East Asian countries with relatively fast social changes, the aim of studying foreign literary texts would be rather to precisely analyze the form of language, and to be able to differentiate between the two directions of movements of thinking: to narrow or to scatter. However, the examination formats would have to be matched to this more student-centered and process-based didactical approach. The disadvantage, if it is one, may be that this kind of reading cannot be tested quickly (as in a multiple-choice examination), which stands against traditional teaching approaches. Still, teachers in East Asia could be interested in a didactical approach that emphasizes deconstructivist thinking when looking for another didactic possibility to apply old and new methods and to combine temporary positive knowledge with processual thinking, and creativity. Their focus might have to shift away from examinations as the aim of studying foreign literary texts and away from memorizing ever-changing knowledge to a processual thinking and a less product-focused knowledge that questions structures and interacts with a plurality of texts.

Based on an analysis and criticism of a theoretical literature teaching approach by König, I have considered a first didactical approach to

Mei-Chi Lin (林美琪, 2009), could be integrated into the class by playing with words and meaning while following the interconnected traces of the linguistic signifiers, e.g., the task to draw a rebus for the title of a lyrical text (see examples in Leipelt-Tsai, 2008, p. 374).

literature teaching in the field of DaF in Taiwan based on deconstructivist thinking. The theoretical background of deconstruction stands against didactics as a form of implementing ideology. In consequence, when teaching foreign literary texts, the aim of study should not be an integration and fusion of different approaches to texts, as König endorses it. Instead of trying to mix hermeneutical and deconstructivist thinking into one, as she implies, for less advanced students, I would advocate an approach that follows Spinner. In addition, students could first be taught an awareness that they can use two movements of thinking. In place of a hermeneutical reading and 'understanding' with pre-prepared working results that have to be met, foremost an individual, differentiating working on texts would be the new aim of teaching German literary texts, especially since the type of preliminary positive knowledge can be found in any reference book in the Internet, which limits the usefulness of memorizing this knowledge. To stay competitive, teaching and learning is not only about stockpiling positive knowledge anymore. So I suggest readings with a deconstructionist approach that leave sufficient room for students' individual questioning of the text. For advanced students, I would recommend an approach of 'either – or', i.e., a hybrid approach to reading literary texts in two steps for one text with two different results. The first step would be an approach coming from a hermeneutical tradition that seeks to reduce the texts to a closed unity and a oneness in meaning; the second step would be the 'daring' approach descending from postmodern theories (for example, from the views of deconstruction, intertextuality, discourse analysis, etc.) to unfold an interesting plurality of interpretations using intertextual linkages as well as opposing discourses that leave more questions than answers. Since this does not yet deconstruct notions, I call this didactics 'deconstructionistic' since it already includes deconstructivist thinking and can rotate with hermeneutical thinking. (This can be backed by my theorem of thinking movements in the reading process, emanating from Derrida's thinking of the two columns with stereoscopic view, see above.)

Searching for a 'truth' the students may discover that science and knowledge do not exist as fixed unities, but, the nature of science and

knowledge is something in transition that always changes its location. After any discovery there will be a new finding, and the already learned knowledge will be outdated and become obsolete. That is one of the reasons why it would be an advantage for students in Taiwan to learn about deconstruction. In the changing environment of a modern information society, a processual reading of literary texts is required. This produces not only reproduction but searches for instabilities, creativity, progress, and a new kind of narrative technique. Following Jean-François Lyotard (1999, p. 47), legitimation of education as a transmission of knowledge is accomplished by giving priority to performativity. Science remains a heterogeneous open process, and knowledge, unstable as always, will be replaced again and again by new knowledge.

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