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Blanchot, Derrida, Gadamer, and the An-archy of Style.

Mario Aquilina

This dissertation examines the possibilities of thinking and reading style *non-teleocratically* through the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Maurice Blanchot, and Jacques Derrida. The title evokes the non-foundational aspect of style—style as that which is not conceptualisable and which defies categorisation by previously established rules. Chapter 1 shows how traditional theories and definitions of style are essentially *teleocratic* in being always directed towards some external function. Style is considered as a signifier of social, biographical or political signifieds, or else it is discussed as a representation of linguistic, generic, formal, or cognitive structures. Style as an *event*, on the other hand, cannot be fully understood theoretically but must be encountered always singularly and in performance. Style as an event does not simply represent something that exists before it but creates the possibilities of its readability. Style is then also *anachronic*, suspending teleocratic conceptions of the temporality of style in terms of original and more essential sources. It is oriented towards the future, the aleatory, that which is always still to come. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 explore the subject through successive, focused discussions of the thinking and performance of style in Gadamer's, Blanchot's, and Derrida's work. Each chapter finishes with a discussion of the respective thinker's *encounter* with Paul Celan's poetry, which, it is argued, *demands* non-teleocratic readings. For comparative purposes, in Chapter 5, these readings are contrasted to teleocratic theories of style by Fredric Jameson and by various contemporary stylisticians. What results from this comparison is not a new *method* to be applied in an improved theory of style but an *ethical* consideration of the singularity of every reading of style marked by moments of interruption and intensification that arise in the performance of style.

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and
the An-archy of Style.**

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2012

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	5
<i>Abbreviations</i>	7
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	12
CHAPTER 1: TELEOCRATIC THEORIES OF STYLE	18
1.1 Terminology and Etymology of Style.....	18
1.2 Style as Exteriority	20
1.3 Stylelessness.....	23
1.4 Style, Subject Matter, and the Dichotomy of Form and Content.....	28
1.5 Style in the Image of Man.....	40
1.6 Style as Prominence and Style as Deviation	49
1.7 Style and Politics.....	51
1.8 Style in the Reader	57
CHAPTER 2: GADAMER AND STYLE	66
2.1 Introduction	66
2.2 Unity and Normativity: Style and Genre	67
2.3 Style and the Proper	72
2.4 Style and Translatability	76
2.5 Style and Temporality	83
2.6 Style and Freedom.....	86
2.7 Style, Justice and the Law.....	91
2.8 Style and Invention	95
2.9 Reading Style: Gadamer's Encounter with Celan.....	97
CHAPTER 3: BLANCHOT AND STYLE	110
3.1 Introduction.....	110
3.2 Style and Subject Matter	112
3.3 Style and the Proper	115
3.4 Style in Practice: Blanchot, Char and the Fragmentary	118
3.5 Style as Genre	126
3.6 Style and the Rational: From Philosophy to Poetry through Plural Speech .	131
3.7 Style, Politics and Freedom.....	139
3.8 Style, Invention, and the Time of Anachrony.....	145
3.9 Reading and Translating Style: Blanchot Reads Celan.....	148
CHAPTER 4: DERRIDA AND STYLE	162
4.1 Introduction.....	162
4.2 Style, Truth, and Philosophy.....	163
4.3 Style and the Proper	168
4.4 Style and Invention	178
4.5 Style and the Law.....	181
4.6 Style and Temporality	187
4.7 Style and the Aleatory.....	191
4.8 (Derrida) Countersigning Style (in Derrida).....	194
4.9 Reading and Translating Style	201
4.10 Derrida and Celan: Style as Interruption.....	209

CHAPTER 5: NON-TELEOCRATIC READINGS OF STYLE	218
5.1 Introduction	218
5.2 Counter-textual Reading I: Jameson on Style in Conrad	218
5.3 Teleocratic Conceptions of Style in Contemporary Stylistics	224
5.4 Counter-textual Reading II: A Stylistic Approach to Celan's "Flower"	227
5.5 Of Stones and Flowers: Towards Non-teleocratic Readings of Style	238
CONCLUSION	247
BIBLIOGRAPHY	249

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Sincere gratitude is also due to Ivan Callus, my M.A. supervisor at the University of Malta. Despite no longer officially being his student, I can say that in Ivan I have found a mentor and a role model who has contributed priceless guidance not only in relation to my writing but also to my career and more. He has been interested in my work more than he has had to, and this out of friendship more than duty.

While I mention them last (as per stylistic conventions of the acknowledgment section), my wife, Anita, and my son, Elias, perhaps deserve the greatest thanks. If I have managed to remain sane and very well grounded over the last few years, combining intense and long hours of studying with a full-time job and a family life, it is largely due to Anita's listening, encouragement, and understanding. Without her help, I would definitely not have been able to complete my studies. Elias has accompanied my writing for the last two years and a few months, contributing more to it than he may ever know or imagine.

For
Anita, Elias,
the future.

Abbreviations

Adorno

- AT *Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Newly Trans. and Ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London and New York: Continuum, 2001.
- DE and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Bakhtin

- DI *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Barthes

- RL *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989.
- WZ *Writing Degree Zero*. Trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Blanchot

- BC *The Book to Come*. Trans. Charlotte Mandel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- BE "The Beast of Lascaux." Trans. Leslie Hill. *The Oxford Literary Review* 22 (2000): 9–18.
- BR *The Blanchot Reader*. Ed. Michael Holland. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- DSR "Le Dossier de 'La revue Internationale' 1960–64." *Lignes* 11 (1990): 161–130.
- F *Friendship*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- IC *The Infinite Conversation*. Trans. Susan Hanson. Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- LS "The Last to Speak." *A Voice from Elsewhere*. Trans. Charlotte Mandell. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. 53–93.
- PW *Maurice Blanchot: Political Writings, 1953–1993*. Trans. Zakir Paul. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.
- RC "René Char." *La part du feu*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949. 103–114.
- SL *The Space of Literature*. Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.
- UC *The Unavowable Community*. Trans. Pierre Joris. New York: Station Hill Press, 1988.
- WD *The Writing of the Disaster*. Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- WF *The Work of Fire*. Trans. Charlotte Mandel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Celan

- Celan *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*. Trans. John Felstiner. New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2001.

De Man

- BI *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* 2nd Ed. London: Routledge, 1983.
- IS “Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image.” *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. 1–18.
- SR “Semiology and Rhetoric.” *The Allegories of Reading*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979. 3–19.

Derrida

- AC “Aphorism Countertime.” Trans. Nicholas Royle. *Psyche: Inventions of the Other Volume II*. Ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008. 127–42.
- ATS and Maurizio Ferraris. *A Taste for the Secret*. Trans. Giacomo Donis. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001.
- A *Altérités*. Paris: Éditions Osiris, 1984.
- AD *Arguing with Derrida*. Ed. Simon Glendinning. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- BIO and Peggy Kamuf. “Biodegradables Seven Diary Fragments.” *Critical Inquiry* 15.4 (1989): 812–873.
- BL “Before the Law.” Trans. Derek Attridge et al. *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1992. 181–220.
- CC “Che cos’è la poesia?” *Points ... Interviews, 1974–1994*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Ed. Elizabeth Weber. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995. 288–299.
- CF *Circumfession*. Bennington, Geoffrey and Jacques Derrida. *Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- DB and Geoffrey Bennington. *Derridabase. Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- D *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone Press, 1981.
- DNT “Post-Scriptum: Aporias, Ways and Voices.” Trans. John P. Leavey Jr. *Derrida and Negative Theology*. Ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay. Albany: New York University Press, 1992. 283–323.
- DC “Deconstruction. A Trialogue with Geoffrey Hartman and Wolfgang Iser.” *Mishkenot Sha'ananim Newsletter* 7 December 1986. Jerusalem.
- EO *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*. Ed. Christie McDonald. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.
- FW and Elizabeth Roudinesco. *For What Tomorrow... A Dialogue*. Trans. Jeff Fort. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*. Trans. John P. Leavey Jr. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.
- GT *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- GL *Glas*. Trans. John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.
- ISI “Interpreting Signatures (Nietzsche/Heidegger): Two Questions.” *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. 58–71.
- LI *Limited Inc*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- MO *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. Trans. Patrick Mensah. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998.

- N *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*. Ed. and Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- NA “No Apocalypse, Not Now: Full speed ahead, Seven missiles, Seven missives.” Trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis. *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. Vol. 1. Ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007. 387–409.
- OG *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- OR *The Other Reading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*. Trans. Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- OS “On Style (A Question to H. Cixous and J. Derrida).” Trans. Laurent Milesi. *The Portable Cixous*. Ed. Marta Segarra. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004 (2010): 199–206.
- P *Positions*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- PA *Parages*. Ed. John P. Leavey. Trans. Tom Conley et. al. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011.
- PS “Psyche: Inventions of the Other.” *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*. Vol. 1. Ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007. 1–47.
- QQ “Qual Quelle: Valéry’s Sources.” *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances*. Ed. Julian Wolfreys. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1998. 196–230.
- S *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*. Trans. Barbara Harlow. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- SEC “Signature Event Context.” *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982. 307–330.
- SP *Signéponge/Signsponge*. Trans. Richard Rand. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- SQ *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.
- SI “This Strange Institution Called Literature: An Interview with Jacques Derrida.” *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. New York and London: Routledge, 1992. 33–75.
- T “Des Tours de Babel.” *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. 102–134.
- TJ “Two Words for Joyce.” *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*. Ed. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 145–160.
- TP *The Truth in Painting*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- WB “Women in the Beehive; a seminar with Jacques Derrida.” *Men in Feminism*. Ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith. New York and London: Methuen, 1987. 189–203.
- WD *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- WM “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy.” *New Literary History* 6.1 (1974): 5–74.

Gadamer

- AE "Aesthetics. A Conversation with Carsten Dutt (1993)." *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*. Ed. and Trans. Richard E. Palmer. Yale University Press, 2001. 61–77.
- AWI "Artworks in Word and Image: 'So True, So Full of Being!' (Goethe)." Trans. Richard E. Palmer. *Theory Culture Society* 23.1 (2006): 57–83.
- B "The Boundaries of Language." Trans. Lawrence K. Schmidt. *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics*. Ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000. 9–17.
- CON "The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment." Trans. T. Wren. *Philosophy Today* 16 (1972): 230–240.
- DEB and Richard Kearney. "Hans Georg Gadamer: Text Matters." *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* 3rd Ed. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004. 167–191.
- ET "The Eminent Text and Its Truth." Trans. Geoffrey Waite. *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 13.1 (1980): 3–10.
- GE *Hans Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry and History: Applied Hermeneutics*. Ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson. Trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- OTW "On the Truth of the Word." Trans. Lawrence K. Schmidt and Monika Reuss. *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995. 135–155.
- PH *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans. and ed. David E. Linge. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.
- PL "Philosophy and Literature." Trans. Anthony J. Steinbock. *Man and World* 18 (1985): 241–259.
- RAS *Reason in the Age of Science*. Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983.
- RB *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi. Trans. Nicholas Walker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- TI "Text and Interpretation". Trans. Dennis J. Schmidt and Richard Palmer. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. 21–51.
- TM *Truth and Method*. 2nd, rev. Ed. Trans. revised Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York and London: Continuum, 2004.
- WHO *Gadamer on Celan: "Who Am I and Who Are You?" and other essays* Ed. and trans. Richard Heinemann and Bruce Krajewski. Albany: State University of New York, 1997.
- WT "What is Truth?" *Hermeneutics and Truth*. Ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1994. 33–46.

Heidegger

- E *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*. Trans. Keith Hoeller. New York: Humanity Books, 2000.
- OWA "The Origin of the Work of Art." *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. 15–86.
- QT "The Question Concerning Technology." *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1982. 3–35
- WTL *On the Way to Language*. Trans. Peter D. Hertz. New York: HarperOne, 1971.

Jameson

CH “Criticism in History.” *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–1986 Volume 1: Situations of Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988. 119–136.

MF *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971.

PHL *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972.

PU *The Political Unconscious*. London and New York: Routledge, 1981.

Levinas

OTB *Otherwise Than Being: Or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press Pittsburgh, 1998.

INTRODUCTION

Introducing his study of metaphor in Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, Giuseppe Stellardi confronts an aporia that his text will run into immediately: “We are indeed called upon to clarify what metaphor and philosophy are *before* we start. But this is precisely the core of the question and can certainly not be given a priori.”¹ This dissertation will have to negotiate similarly circuitous paths in attempting to broach the question of style without a ready-made definition. Indeed, one of the issues that it will highlight—as suggested by the word “*an-archy*” in the title—is precisely the difficulty faced by any attempts to define style, that is, to bound it within limits or to reach a definite end in the matter. Nonetheless, to avoid stopping at a static acknowledgment of the difficulty of passage, one must take the risk of a plunge, a leap into a structure not completely unlike that of the hermeneutic circle. As Stellardi puts it, “we must enter the circle somewhere,” and one way to do this is to provide “provisional, operative notions” that may be qualified or deconstructed later.²

The title, with its play on *an-archy* and *anarchy*, evokes the non-foundational aspect of style—style as that which is not conceptualisable and which defies categorisation by previously established rules. More specifically, this an-archic aspect of style (“*arche*” in Greek [ἀρχή] means “beginning,” “origin” or “first cause”; thus “an-archic” would be a refusal of “*arche*”), its resistance to being rooted in any appeals to origins or determining authority, is brought to the fore, in different ways and with varying degrees of intensity, in the work of Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Their work problematises traditional conceptions and definitions of style—exemplified by E.D. Hirsch’s claim that style is a “linguistic phenomenon [that is] conceived as a vehicle for some further meaning”—which are essentially *teleocratic* in being always directed to some external function.³ “*Teleocracy*” denotes an organisation meant to fulfil a specific function. Such an organisation is instrumental, subject to programmability, and oriented towards an external function. On the contrary, it is precisely a resistance to teleocratic appropriation—its being *anti-teleocratic*—that Timothy Clark identifies as a potential “founding principle of what [he calls] the

¹ Giuseppe Stellardi, *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor: Imperfect Thought* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000) 21.

² Stellardi 21.

³ E. D. Hirsch Jr, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976) 57.

‘poetics of singularity’.”⁴ In this dissertation, it is argued that style is heavily implicated in the singular resistance of certain kinds of discourse, especially the literary. As Clark puts it, while the literary is “based on certain conventions and rubrics, [it] may also exceed being understood in terms of any pregiven linguistic or political or cultural norm.” Style poses precisely this challenge to a series of theories that have sought to define it, theories functioning, for instance, along formalist, political, thematic or cognitive lines. In its resistance to absolute conceptualisation, style shares in and contributes to the way certain kinds of language are an “event,” that is, “something that cannot be fully understood theoretically but must be engaged in its specific performance” and that may “be capable of transforming the conventions of understanding which made up its initial readability.”⁵ Style, in relation to the literary—but also, it is argued, in relation to the philosophical—exceeds what Derek Attridge describes as “the limits of rational accounting.”⁶

Teleocratic notions of the literary are characterised by an instrumental attitude, which, as Attridge puts it, treats a text “as a means to a predetermined end,” an object which can be used to assist a certain “project,” be it “political, moral, historical, biographical, psychological, cognitive, or linguistic.”⁷ Texts become *signifiers* of social, biographical or political *signifieds*, or else they are discussed as examples of linguistic, generic, formal, or cognitive structures. While Attridge argues that “instrumentalism has become unusually dominant in the academy in recent years,” this instrumentality is dominant in most theoretical accounts of style, starting from those which go back to classical rhetoric and ending with contemporary cognitive stylistics.⁸

Chapter 1 will show how teleocratic parameters are evident in early theories in which style is primarily understood as a strategic aspect of oral communication. In this context, style is a tool of persuasion. As long as it respects the laws of decorum or appropriateness, style may be used instrumentally to attain pre-established discursive aims. Subsequently, with what David R. Olson describes as the advent of “literal meaning”⁹ brought about by the proliferation of writing around the seventeenth century, style starts to be more commonly understood as an individualising expression of personality—style as the image of man. Significantly, when discourse of expression is

⁴ Timothy Clark, *The Poetics of Singularity: The Counter-Culturalist Turn in Heidegger, Derrida, Blanchot and the later Gadamer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005) 35.

⁵ Clark, *Singularity* 3.

⁶ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 3.

⁷ Attridge 7.

⁸ Attridge 9.

⁹ David R. Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

suspended in imitation, pastiche or parody, style still remains that which points beyond itself to anterior sources, not unlike a mask that re-presents—perhaps ironically—another face. In New Criticism and the formalist theories that appeared in the early decades of the twentieth century, the teleocratic structure is not rooted in the writer as origin but is still dominant. Within these parameters, style is an aspect of form, one side of a dichotomy with subject matter or content. Style becomes that which reflects or creates the content. Formalist theories may prioritise style as the source of literariness through defamiliarisation: style thrills the reader; it gives pleasure through deviation from the norm. This pleasure—a consequence of style or that towards which style is oriented—is partly the reason why the philosophical tradition tends to renounce style. In positing itself as a model of rationality, philosophy is often wary of style and warns about the dangers of seductive dresses that superficially adorn but also obscure that which is substantial—the truth. Similar warnings arise from political theories of literature, through which style may appear as teleocratically rooted not in man but in the social reality and the ideologies that underlie it. In cognitive theories of literature, including Cognitive Stylistics and related disciplines embracing the recent “cognitive turn” in linguistics, style is understood either as a reflection of the mind of the author or as an aspect of language that has an effect on the previously existing conceptual schemata of the reader. In short, treated as expression, representation, cultural strategy, or an index to cognitive structures, style is traditionally conceived teleocratically.

Derrida’s argument about writing in *Of Grammatology* is pertinent here in that style can be said to have been treated through analogous processes of “secondarity” (OG 7). Within a phonocentric tradition that prioritises speech, writing is described as “secondary and instrumental [in] function: translator of full speech that was fully *present*” (OG 8). From an Aristotelian perspective, “the written signifier is always technical and representative. It has no constitutive meaning.” It can be said that teleocratic conceptions of style make it seem equally “derivative,” a “signifier” whose existence depends on a “signified” (OG 11). Within a phonocentric logocentrism—which Derrida believes has dominated philosophy since Aristotle—writing is a mediation of speech which, in turn, is a mediation of thought. Analogously, style has traditionally been understood in terms of mediation, but, as Derrida shows in relation to writing, “there is no linguistic sign before writing,” or, without style there is no subject matter or content (OG 14). To think of style teleocratically is thus to miss the always-already-constitutive force of style in language. In this respect, it is important to emphasise that the de-marginalisation of style proposed in this dissertation is not an

endorsement of a postmodernist misappropriation of Derrida and other deconstructive thinkers in cultural-relativist terms through the belief that deconstruction turns to style because it has lost faith in truth and meaning. Style, rather than being an outlet for and embodiment of a relativism that has supposedly overcome truth and meaning, has a conceptual force that is in itself meaningful and creative of meaning. Style should not simply be associated with *meaninglessness*, and deconstructive thinking does not see style as a replacement of meaning. What is problematised is not meaning as such but the metaphysical assumption of a prior meaning existing independently of language and which is then conveyed through language as an instrument or tool of expression—with style being reduced to an inessential and secondary aspect of expression.

The work of Derrida and Blanchot—as well as Gadamer, in a different way—allows us to think of style differently, as an *event*, something which cannot be anticipated, formalised or completely categorised. Style is thus *non-teleocratic* or *anti-teleocratic*, in the various senses evoked by Clark in discussing the common “impetus” of *singularity* that cuts across the work of Heidegger, Blanchot, Derrida and the late essays of Gadamer.¹⁰ The anti-teleocratic is that which, as Heidegger understands it, “can never be verified or derived from what went before.”¹¹ It is, politically, the “absolute refusal” and the anarchic in Blanchot, or, what Dana Richard Villa describes as Hannah Arendt’s “desire to think political action and judgment without grounds.”¹² It is a reaction to the Aristotelian conception of *praxis* as guided by reason directed towards a pre-determined goal and sustained by the will. However, to think of style anti-teleocratically is also to be open to the conceptual force of style. Style means. It does not merely reflect or express thought; it also performs or creates thought. As will be seen in this study, style is implicated in fundamentally paradoxical structures that cannot be easily frozen in time through conceptualisation. Style is not just marked by *anarchy*—a refusal to submit to authority—but also *anachrony*; it suspends what may be held as teleocratic conceptions of the temporality of style, such as, style as that which reflects an original and more essential source (be it a writer’s personality or subject matter). Style, lacking an essence, is relational, always shifting position, making definition improbable but also—to quote Clark on singularity—it can “give something

¹⁰ Clark, *Singularity* 2.

¹¹ Clark, *Singularity* 34.

¹² Dana Richard Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 116.

for nothing, [...] speak volumes” and “convey a sharp effect of which it is the only possible statement.”¹³

It is not just that Derrida, Blanchot, and Gadamer are crucial players in what is often called the *linguistic turn* in philosophy but also the more specific possibility of thinking style as an *event* and as *singular resistance* that brings Derrida, Blanchot, and Gadamer together in this study. Like Heidegger, the three chosen thinkers, sometimes in overlapping but often diverging ways, show a particular interest in language and, more specifically, in literature or the *poetic* as a fundamental locus of thinking which resists instrumental modes of thought. None of these thinkers can justifiably be described as a literary critic; however, their work provides an essential challenge to literary criticism, urging it to reassess some of its most central assumptions and widely held notions, including, I will argue, style, but also its core practices of reading.

What Derrida, Blanchot and Gadamer offer to literary criticism, it must be emphasised, is not an alternative *method* or a literary *theory* that can then be *applied* to any literary text. This dissertation is not aimed at developing a more effective or reliable procedure to use in analysing style; if it were, it would be actualising a teleocratic attitude that it problematises. As Villa argues, “the split between theory and practice,” the idea that the philosophical leads to practical action, is fundamentally implicated in “the reduction of action to an instrumentality” that characterises Western metaphysics.¹⁴ What one finds in Derrida, Blanchot, and Gadamer is a greater awareness of what it means to read in a way that is attentive to the singularity of the poetic.

While none of Gadamer, Derrida or Blanchot would fully subscribe to Heidegger’s “asymptotic [...] ideal”¹⁵ of “every interpretation [...] disappearing, along with its elucidations, before the pure presence of the poem” (*E* 22), it can be said that they all share, to a certain extent, Heidegger’s interest in “this resistant proximity to the very letter of the text [that] renders Heidegger’s reading only partly generalisable into some transferable mode of reading.”¹⁶ This awareness of singularity—the demand to perform the “pas” (“step/stop”) of reading—is at work in their encounter with various writers, but Paul Celan stands out as a poet whom all of them consider fundamental primarily because his work *demand*s such an approach. For this reason, an attempt will be made to show how their different readings of Celan prompt a re-evaluation of teleocratic ways of reading style.

¹³ Clark, *Singularity* 8.

¹⁴ Villa 116.

¹⁵ Timothy Clark, *Martin Heidegger* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 102.

¹⁶ Clark, *Heidegger* 102.

This dissertation investigates the possibility of reading style in a way that responds to the singular demand of the poetic. In this respect, it is also implicated in what can be called an *ethics* of reading, with *ethics* being understood in the Levinasian sense of an obligation for the other that precedes me absolutely. Emmanuel Levinas's work, particularly his recasting of ethics in terms of the alterity of that which is not reducible to the Same, is traceable, to different degrees, within the work of Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida in the form of a concern with reading which escapes exclusively formal, thematic or cultural interpretation or closure.

CHAPTER 1: TELEOCRATIC THEORIES OF STYLE

1.1 Terminology and Etymology of Style

As Berel Lang rightly points out, a frequently recurring strategy in “the study of style” is to “start anew, returning each time to the ‘beginning’ of the concept.” This seemingly compulsive return to origins is arguably symptomatic of the definitional problems associated with the term and one asks, with Lang, if “such resistance to a systematic foundation may not be rooted in the concept of style itself.”¹

The difficulty of establishing a definite meaning of the term “style” may be constitutive. Even if etymology is meant to be the science of truth, in the case of “style” it fails to provide an incontestable foundation, a perfect correspondence between signifier and signified. The earliest recorded uses of the word in English go back to Middle English, at which time “style” is spelled “stile” and carries a variety of meanings, namely, a designation or official title, a manner or mode of expression, as well as a stylus. The word in English comes from the Old French “estile,” meaning “a stake” which, in turn, derives from the Latin word “stilus,” which refers both to the iron instrument used by the Romans to write on wax tablets and to the manner of writing. The modern spelling of “style” is probably a consequence of the influence of the Greek word “stylos,” which refers to a pillar or column. The spelling is thus marked by an error with the Indo-European root of the word “*-sti: to prick, hence sting, stimulus” being replaced by “sty.” Retracing the history of the word in search of its origins, one finds polysemy, slippage and a series of metonymic transfers. From the instrument of writing (the stylus), the word moves to the activity of writing (style as a manner of writing or mode of expression) and also to the product of that activity (for instance, style as an identifying characteristic of the work of art). The word can also refer to an official title, someone’s designation. Style, therefore, connotes, simultaneously and sequentially, identification, materiality, peculiarity, similarity, and designation.

The polysemy of the term remains obvious today in the way “style” carries seemingly diametrically opposed meanings. Style is “a *distinctive* manner of expression,”² or “a *particular* procedure by which something is done.”³ However, the term also suggests *similarity*, uniformity, following a pattern, as in “a *convention* [...] in

¹ Berel Lang ed., *The Concept of Style* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987) 14.

² “style,” <www.merriam-webster.com> (my emphasis).

³ “style,” <oxforddictionaries.com> (my emphasis).

writing.”⁴ Style is “double” or “twofold,” and this duality is also noticeable in the way the term is used in poetics; as Richard Wollheim reminds us, one can talk of either “general style” or of “individual style.”⁵ The word “style,” it seems, connotes *distinctiveness* and *conformity*. Style is *singular* but also *iterable*, an iterable singularity. It unifies and disperses, embodying centripetal and centrifugal forces: a singular style becomes recognizable through repetition both in an oeuvre as well as in pastiche, imitation, or parody.

The paradoxical status of style is also discernible in the way it is alternately deemed to be *essential* or *inessential*, ineluctable or dispensable. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for instance, thinks of style as something which guides our perception, allowing for meaning to happen. Discussing the art theory of André Malraux, Merleau-Ponty defines style as “an exigency” that is there as soon as there is “perception.” While the audience may see style as a matter of choice or even as optional, for the painter, style is that which allows painting in the first place. For Merleau-Ponty, the necessity of style is not limited to art, and he conceives style as an individual “relationship to being,” an ineluctable component of existence.⁶ On the other hand, expressions such as “doing something in style” suggest that certain kinds of action show style—they are *in* style—while others are styleless—they are *out* of style. As Linda Singer explains, “style has served both a categorical [descriptive] and an evaluative function.”⁷ The term is used to identify an author, a genre or a period, but it is also used to distinguish the extraordinary from the pedestrian.

Faced with this dichotomous and inherently oxymoronic term, how does one proceed? George Kubler desires clarification since “style,” he says, “is a word of which the everyday use has deteriorated in our time to the level of banality.”⁸ However, in view of the fact that, as Lang reminds us, style “has been elusive as it has been insistent in its various historical stages,”⁹ Kubler’s desire for definitional clarity may be misguided. While the attempt to establish a definition a priori presupposes that style is fully categorisable and definable, it may be argued that style is relational as it points in different directions in different contexts. Style is that which marks distinction and uniqueness while only being identifiable through repetition.

⁴ “style,” <www.merriam-webster.com>.

⁵ Richard Wollheim, “Pictorial Style: Two Views,” in Lang ed., *The Concept of Style*, 183–202 (183).

⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 39–83 (54).

⁷ Linda Singer, “Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style,” *Man and World* 14.2 (1981): 153–163 (153).

⁸ George Kubler, “Toward a Reductive Theory of Visual Style,” in Lang ed., *The Concept of Style* 119–128 (119).

⁹ Berel Lang, “Looking for the Styleme,” in Lang ed., *The Concept of Style* 174–182 (176).

Different theories of style choose to stress different nuances of the term in ways that reflect radically different assumptions. However, what the traditional theories discussed in this chapter have in common is a teleocratic conception of style, which Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida urge us to reconsider.

1.2 *Style as Exteriority*

In “On Style,” Susan Sontag claims that “talk of style must rely on metaphors. And metaphors mislead.” Her point is not that we have to find a non-metaphorical way of discussing style—what would possibly amount to a *styleless* discussion of style—but that already existing metaphors of style—“practically all [of which] amount to placing matter on the inside, style on the outside”—are misleading.¹⁰ Indeed, style seems to be inherently inscribed in metaphoric discourse. However, rather than a source of perplexity, this may be seen as indicative of the non-essentiality of style, its anti-teleocratic non-essence that resists absolute conceptualisation. Taking as a premise Roland Barthes’s claim that “style is never anything but metaphor” (*WZ* 13), and following Laurent Milesi, we may deduce: “if metaphora is always already, in our western heritage, another name for transport and trans(-)lation,” then style “leads us astray or seduces us.” Alternatively, we may ask: “if style is metaphor and being what withdraws itself from it, how can style ‘be’ something and how can one answer the aporetic question: ‘What is style?’”¹¹

Using the dichotomous terminology employed by I. A. Richards,¹² one may say that a body, a face, a mask, a signature, a dress, a soul, the outside surface of a container, and a part of a living organism are just a few of the metaphoric vehicles employed to discuss style, the tenor of these metaphors. However, in matters of style, distinguishing between tenor and vehicle is problematic, and style challenges neat distinctions between concepts and their expression. Trying to determine what style is without using metaphoric discourse and aiming at an ostensibly direct and clear identification of the concept means forgetting the way style infiltrates all discourse, including that which purports to be styleless. To see the problem in another way, one may say that trying to define style by removing metaphor means, ironically, relegating

¹⁰ Sontag, “On Style,” in *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1961) 15–37 (17).

¹¹ Laurent Milesi, “St!le in Deconstruction,” in Ivan Callus, James Corby, Gloria Lauri-Lucente ed., *Style in Theory: Between Literature and Philosophy* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013) 217–248 (241).

¹² I. A. Richards, “Metaphor,” in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) 89–114.

style to what Rodolphe Gasché calls “a status of metaphoric secondariness”—styled language conceived as being at one remove from styleless, objective language, whatever that may be.¹³ Indeed, within linguistic or literary “mimetologism,” style is deemed inessential, ornamental, misleading or simply reflective of an anterior and independent concept or subject matter. Like metaphor, style may be considered supplementary by certain discourses—especially philosophy intent on distinguishing itself from literature—but, as Derrida shows in his reading of Immanuel Kant in “The Parergon” (*TP* 37–82), distinguishing between the central and the marginal—as in the attempt by Kant to posit philosophy as mastering art—will expose the abyssal structure that implicates the one in the other, thus risking collapsing the distinction altogether.

Metaphoric language, a stylistic staple of discourses on style, reveals the assumptions at the basis of theories of style and allows certain concepts of style to arise. To use a questionable dichotomy, style, in theoretical and philosophical discourses of style, is internal even when these discourses may metaphorically present it as an external supplement.

Style is discussed in terms of exteriority in various texts of classical rhetoric, as in *Dialogus de oratoribus* (*Dialogues about Oratory*), attributed to Tacitus. In a debate about the best oratorical styles, Messala, one of the interlocutors, clearly expresses his distaste of certain styles through a series of metaphors:

if I must put on one side the highest and most perfect type of eloquence and select a style, I should certainly prefer the vehemence of Caius Gracchus or the sobriety of Lucius Crassus to the curls of Maecenas or the jingles of Gallio: so much better is it for an orator to wear a rough dress than to glitter in many-coloured and meretricious attire. Indeed, neither for an orator or even a man is that style becoming which is adopted by many of the speakers of our age, and which, with its idle redundancy of words, its meaningless periods and licence of expression, imitates the art of the actor.¹⁴

Oratorical style is plotted metaphorically on a scale of manliness and effeminacy as well as in terms of dresses with different colours and decorations. Too much decoration is not natural and “becoming” for a “man” but something fit for the stage. By adopting certain styles, Messala insinuates, orators demean themselves to the level of artists—

¹³ Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1986) 256. For Gasché, from a mimetological perspective, literature is always secondary to the message it conveys.

¹⁴ Tacitus, “Dialogues about Oratory,” in Moses Hadas ed., *Complete Works of Tacitus*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: The Modern Library, 1942) 735–770 (XXVI.755).

who, presumably dwell in style—and, therefore, the less tangibly decorative the style of a speech the better.

This passage exemplifies the classical conception of style as the dress of thought—recurrent to the point of having attained what Tzvetan Todorov calls a “canonical” status—which can be traced back to at least the fourth century BC in Aristotle.¹⁵ While an immediately recognisable variant of the word “style” does not exist in Ancient Greek, classicists translate *lexis* (λέξις) as style though its meaning is closer to “word choice” or “diction.” *Lexis* is frequently ascribed the same metaphors used for style by the Latin rhetoricians.¹⁶ Aristotle writes that choosing a style “is like having to ask ourselves what dress will suit an old man” and that in such circumstances the choice should “certainly not [be] the crimson cloak that suits a young man.”¹⁷ The Aristotelian dress metaphor conceives of style as exterior to thought. If style is a dress, then it is separate from and comes after an anterior body that must wear it. Moreover, style is regulated by decorum: it is a choice which might be appropriate or inappropriate. In Aristotle’s words, “it is not enough to know what we ought to say: we must also say it as we ought.”¹⁸ *Decorum* is also central to Cicero’s work on style. A good orator “knows to adapt to his pleading the words that have the happiest effect upon the ear” depending on the circumstances.¹⁹ Style has the instrumental function of affecting the audience.

This understanding of style as exteriority almost invariably paves the way for distrust of style (or its overuse) and, eventually, its moral condemnation. Quintilian compares the use of a “variegated style [by] some speakers” to the depilation of a male body “in an effeminate fashion” which makes it “eminently repulsive by the very labour bestowed in beautifying” it.²⁰ Style, for Quintilian, must be “bold, manly and chaste.”²¹ Inappropriate style leads to perversion, an effeminate diversion from masculine truth. As discussed in Chapter 4, Derrida engages this metaphor and the notion of style as the *proper* in *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, but he also gestures towards its deconstruction in *Glas*, where we read, via a quotation from Jean Genet, how “Warda [“rose” in Semitic

¹⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982) 74.

¹⁶ See Raymond A. Macdonald, “Pluralism in Classical Style Theory: From Rhetoric and Poetics to Art History,” *Style* 26.2 (1992): 165–198.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Modern Library, 1954) III.1405a.14.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III.1403b.15–18.

¹⁹ Cicero, *M. T. Cicero De Oratore: Or, His Three Dialogues Upon the Character and Qualifications of an Orator*, trans. William Guthrie (Boston: R. P. & C. Williams, Cornhill Square, 1822) I.xlix.

²⁰ Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, VIII.Intr.19–20. *Rhetoric and Composition*. Web. Sep 2012. <<http://rhetoric.eserver.org/quintilian/contents.pdf>>.

²¹ Quintilian, VIII.iii.6.

languages] cleans her teeth, all day long, with a hatpin she calls her style. She is the one who does not believe in the truth" (GL 58b).

Clearly, the principle of decorum is a defining aspect of the conceptualisation of style in classical rhetoric. To avoid making his speech sound like the ramblings of a drunkard, Demetrius warns us in *On Style (De Elecutione)*, the orator must use style suitable to the subject-matter at hand.²² Anticipating formalist definitions of style in terms of deviation and defamiliarisation, classical theories give style the teleocratic function of pleasing through the beauty of language, specifically, through deviation from audience expectations since, as Aristotle puts it, "people like what strikes them, and are struck by what is out of the way." Still, and here Aristotle differs from the formalists, Aristotle qualifies his call for deviation by insisting that innovation should ideally not be so perceptible as to draw attention to itself to the detriment of the "subject-matter." The reason for this is that "naturalness is persuasive, [but] artificiality is the contrary."²³ Indeed, a style which is too densely "deviant" hinders the transmission of the message and weakens the effectiveness of the speech. Ultimately, for Aristotle, style is ineluctable, something "we cannot do without" because "the way a thing is said does affect its intelligibility," but it must be clear, appropriate and inconspicuousness enough to facilitate the audience's understanding of the subject matter. Style thus functions teleocratically both as a means towards an end and as a supplement, an artificial attachment, a dress that may or may not be decorous, that may please, persuade but also potentially deceive. Ideally, for Aristotle, "we ought [...] to fight our case with no help beyond the bare facts," that is, without recourse to style.²⁴

1.3 *Stylelessness*

Olson recounts an important historical shift in the way language is conceived which, it could be argued, has had important implications for the history of style. One of Olson's major claims is that the transition from an oral society to a "world on paper," in which there is widespread access to written texts, brought into light the notion of "literal meaning," which starts to be distinguished, for instance, from "poetic or metaphorical meaning."²⁵ Indeed, echoing Northrop Frye's claim that the possibility of analysing a

²² Demetrius, *On Style*, trans. T. A. Moxon, in *Aristotle's Poetics, Demetrius on Style, Longinus on the Sublime* (New York: Dutton, 1963) I.xv.

²³ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III.1404b.21.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III.1403b.35–1404a.12.

²⁵ Olson 155.

written document introduces a rift between “figured and literal language,”²⁶ Olson argues that “conceptualizing the distinction between literal meaning and metaphor depends [...] upon a scrutinizable text” whose relative fixity makes it more amenable to close reading than a speech.²⁷ While classical rhetoric clearly recognises metaphor as a figure, the different conception of language as having the potential to be “literal” leads to metaphor and other figures being marked as poetic or artificial and subsequently shunned in certain kinds of discourse so as not to allow them to “interfere with the transparency of description” and with the clear transmission of authorial intention.²⁸

Olson sees this hermeneutic shift (played out, most obviously, in changing ways of reading scripture) as having had far-reaching consequences not only on the way people read but also the way they write and perceive the world around them. For instance, the seventeenth century Dutch descriptive tradition in painting—prioritising representation over beauty—and the approximately contemporaneous birth of the British scientific tradition through the Royal Society of London—valuing what Francis Bacon described as the ability to keep “the eye steadily fixed upon the facts of nature and so receiving their images simply as they are” as opposed to “giv[ing] out a dream of our own imagination”²⁹—both reflect the concern with the “literal meaning” that characterises the hermeneutic practices of the time. Olson sees a shift between medieval discourses in which, as K. F. Morrison puts it, “a speaker said one thing so that another would be understood,”³⁰ and the emphasis on literal meanings in the Protestant reformation and associated modes of scriptural interpretation. A fundamental aspect of the new way of reading is to think of writing as creating “a fixed original objective ‘text’ with a putative literal meaning,”³¹ one consequence of which is that texts start to be seen as potentially “representational and suitable instruments for science, philosophy and history.”³² On the other hand, “notions like figurative language take on a pejorative sense.”³³

Thomas Sprat’s *The History of the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (1667) embodies this new stance. While praising the Royal Society, Sprat criticises the Schole-men (also called Scholastics or Schoolmen) for the

²⁶ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: Academic Press, 1982) 23.

²⁷ Olson 53.

²⁸ Frye 23.

²⁹ Francis Bacon, “The great instauration,” in S. Warhaft ed., *Francis Bacon: A selection of his works* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965 [1620]) 298–324 (323).

³⁰ K. F. Morrison, *History as a Visual Art in the Twelfth Century Renaissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990) 54.

³¹ Olson 57.

³² Olson 279.

³³ Olson 156.

“barbarousness of their style.”³⁴ Intriguingly, Sprat formulates this critique—primarily directed at the artificiality of their language—through an elaborate simile. He argues that the Schole-men, “like the *Indians*, onely express’d a wonderful Artifice, in the ordering of the same Feathers into a thousand varities of Figures.”³⁵ On the contrary, the experimental scientists of the Royal Society are praised for “their manner of discourse”³⁶ which is, according to Sprat, characterised by “a constant Resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver’d so many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*.”³⁷ What Sprat calls the “Ornaments of speaking” have “degenerated from their original usefulness”:

They make the *Fancy* disgust the best things, if they come sound, and unadorn’d: they are in open defiance against *Reason*; professing, not to hold much correspondence with that; but with its Slaves, the *Passions*: they give the mind a motion too changeable, and bewitching, to consist with *right practice*. Who can behold, without indignation, how many mists and uncertainties, these specious *Tropes* and *Figures* have brought on our Knowledge? How many rewards, which are due to more profitable, and difficult *Arts*, have been still snatch’d away by the easie vanity of *fine speaking*?

Sprat’s tone becomes louder as he admits that he is “warm’d with this just Anger” and that he “cannot with-hold [him]self, from betraying the shallowness” of this kind of discourse.³⁸ Ironically, however, Sprat’s condemnation is overflowing with the same tropes and figures of speech he condemns. The style of his adversaries is personified as being “in open defiance against Reason” and as appealing primarily to the “Slaves” of “Reason,” that is, “the Passions.” Tropes metaphorically cloud our vision like “mists,” and the “vanity of fine speaking” is personified as acting wilfully to “snatch [...] away” potential benefits from us. Similar claims that seem to invoke what Barthes would call a “degree zero of style”—“when men deliver [...] so many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*”—often involve such blindness to the way style is a defining aspect of the wording of the call for styleless writing. Perhaps, it may be said that the only kind of stylelessness that may be achievable is not so much the absence of style but the opposite of stylishness, or, to echo Singer’s distinction, stylelessness in an evaluative rather than

³⁴ Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (London: J. Martyn, 1667) 16. Spelling and punctuation unchanged from original in all references.

³⁵ Sprat 15–16.

³⁶ Sprat 111.

³⁷ Sprat 113.

³⁸ Sprat 112.

a descriptive sense. Indeed, the stakes of style are perhaps nowhere as high as where it is deemed to be inexistent or curtailed.

Nonetheless, style is often condemned for alienating us from the truth. If style is conceived as a collection of figures, it becomes something that needs to be forgotten in order to get to the literal or styleless meaning of discourse. It is in this context that one may understand the demonisation of style in discourses like Sprat's or of philosophers and scientists who seek to present their work as valid beyond their subjectivity. In this respect, it is significant that Jean-Paul Sartre—a novelist if also a philosopher—claims that “in philosophy we do not need style [and o]ne must even avoid it.”³⁹ As Manfred Frank sees it, Sartre equates style with that “dark profusion of sense proper to literary texts,”⁴⁰ or, more precisely, to poetry, since in *What is Literature?* Sartre envisages a kind of literary prose written in styleless language with a socio-political purpose—*littérature engagée*. For Sartre, words become “sick” when they draw attention to themselves and their own materiality, and he calls for a “clean” discourse free from literary ornamentation.⁴¹

Sartre's comments about words drawing attention to themselves—the very opposite of the concept of the degree zero of style—are somehow symptomatic of the aversion to style that certain politically oriented forms of literature and literary theories express. In contradistinction to classical rhetoricians, for whom style had a practical political function as it allowed for clarification and persuasion, proponents of *littérature engagée* like Sartre insist that literature that seeks to make a political statement about the world should be as free from style as possible—here understood as inessential decoration and indirectness. George Orwell makes a rather similar point in *Why I Write*, calling for an avoidance of “purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug.”⁴² Both Sartre and Orwell, conceiving literature in teleocratic terms, desire the erasure of style in favour of a purity of language that will facilitate their cause of assuming responsibility through action in words.

It can be argued that, rather than stylelessness, what Orwell and Sartre call for is actually a different style free from artificiality and ornament. It is this thinking of style as choice, as the wilful and free action of the writer, that Blanchot radically calls into question. As discussed in Chapter 3, for Blanchot, it is actually the *refusal* of literature

³⁹ J.-P. Sartre and P. Verstraeten, “L'écritain et sa langue,” *Situations IX* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972) 40ff as cited by Manfred Frank, “Style in Philosophy: Part 1,” *Metaphilosophy* 30.3 (1999) 145–167 (147).

⁴⁰ Frank, “Style in Philosophy” 147–148.

⁴¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949) 284.

⁴² George Orwell, *Why I Write* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005 [1946]) 10.

to work in the service of instrumental aims that makes it political and a form of contestation. Literature, as an absolute, legitimates itself without any exterior considerations, and it becomes reductive to think of style as a superficial complement to the transmission of preconceived content or as a tool aimed at creating specific reactions in the readers in an attempt to bring about social development.

If political literature has an uneasy relationship with style, philosophy often defines itself, precisely, on the basis of an opposition with style, which it sees as a primarily literary rather than philosophical concern. However, as Frank points out, the linguistic turn given to philosophy by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Derrida, and Adorno, among others, problematises “the generic distinctions between philosophic argumentation and stylistic *écriture*.”⁴³ These borders or margins, separating philosophy from its others, are “threatened” by the question of style.⁴⁴ Indeed, following Dorothea Franck, one may say that the project to achieve “styleless” or “neutral” writing in philosophy rests on “illusory foundations.”⁴⁵ In attempting to achieve an absence of style, one creates styles of absence that become highly conventional and imitable. The choice to write in a flat or “neutral” way is a stylistic choice in itself rather than a means of purging language of style. Derrida above all, but also Blanchot, operating on the borderlines of philosophy, highlight style as an other that is always already inalienable, inescapable and defining of the same. In this way, philosophy spills into and is contaminated by poetry, by *écriture*, by literature, and by those kinds of discourses that may be used to define or delimit philosophy through distinction. Style makes Derrida’s and Blanchot’s writing veer towards the poetic and it thus resists the imposition of rigid generic borders between philosophy and literature or poetry.

To claim that a text is without style is to mistake style for an accumulation of figures or deviations from plain or more ordinary idioms—other styles. In this respect, one of the legacies of poststructuralism is the awareness that in any kind of discourse style is ineluctable. Indeed, with poststructuralism, style returns as a subject of discussion in philosophy in a way that severely problematises quests for an “ideal,” logical and completely intersubjective language that is intertwined with a metaphysics of unequivocal, pre-linguistic reference.⁴⁶

⁴³ Frank, “Style in Philosophy” 147.

⁴⁴ Frank, “Style in Philosophy” 146.

⁴⁵ Dorothea Franck, “Style and innocence—lost, regained—and lost again?” in Caroline Van Eck, James Mcallister and Renée Van de Vall ed., *The Question of Style in Philosophy and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 220–234 (226).

⁴⁶ In this context, Jack Selzer reminds us that for centuries scientific discourse was considered to be “a special kind of discourse operating outside the realms of rhetoric” and “a rhetorical analysis of scientific

In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Derrida unfolds the logic of supplementarity, of the other that is excluded while always remaining within the same. Intent on reconstituting “its unity,” Plato’s ideal polis “violently exclude[s] from its territory the representative of an external threat or aggression.” The *pharmakos*, a character representing evil and the outside, is a scapegoat who is ritually and violently sacrificed and his ashes dispersed for the well-being of the body of the polis. However, as Derrida notes, while the *pharmakos* represents otherness, he is “nonetheless constituted, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside” (*D* 133). There seems to be a “contradiction” that, Derrida notes, replays itself in the conception of writing as *pharmakos*. Any such proposition can only be in opposition to itself— “[t]he relation-to-self of diction as it opposes itself to scription, as it chases itself (away) in hunting down what is properly its trap.” This contradiction, for Derrida, is not “contingent” but constitutive, and it reappears, again, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau and in Ferdinand de Saussure, both of whom devalue writing in relation to speech. Style undergoes a similarly contradictory dynamic in its relation to philosophy. Like writing in relation to speech, there is “the simultaneous affirmation of the being-outside of the outside [style] and of its [style’s] injurious intrusion into the inside” of the body of philosophy, but also of scientific discourse and of kinds of literature—often self-pronounced “realist” or “political” texts—that would reach a degree zero of style (*D* 158).

1.4 *Style, Subject Matter, and the Dichotomy of Form and Content*

In a letter, Gustave Flaubert confesses he would like to write “a book about nothing, a book lacking all manner of support apart from itself, a book which through the sheer inner force of its style maintains stability, [...] a book that would be practically devoid of theme.”⁴⁷ While such a pronouncement retains the problematic dichotomy of style and theme, it reverses its usual polarities and goes against the desire to transcend style in order to reach the transparency of truth that is implied, if not always stated, in some fundamental assumptions of traditional literary criticism. The marginalisation of style in philosophy—style as the ornamental, inessential, deceptive other of philosophy—and

prose would have been impossible to imagine” until the 1970s (*Understanding Scientific Prose* [Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993] 4).

⁴⁷ Gustave Flaubert, “Letter to Louise Colet, 16 February 1852,” in *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1830–1857 Vol. 1*, ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller (Harvard: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980).

the seemingly opposite view that, in literature, style is an aspect of form that reflects the subject matter are both fundamentally rooted in a mimetic understanding of language that conceives style as supplementary, inessential, and secondary. Within the mimetologism that has dominated literary criticism for centuries, the value of literary language is judged in terms of its re-presentational capacities and style in terms of whether it allows this re-presentational process to function appropriately. Style, in both philosophy and literary criticism, is thus rooted teleocratically in an anterior reality, concept, or truth which it may express or obscure.

As Michael Toolan points out, the standard treatment of style, in accordance with a dominant linguistic model, has been “bi-planar,” assuming a system in which forms are mapped onto meanings or the underlying semantic content and in which “surface forms are systematically and predictably relatable to underlying abstract semantic contents.”⁴⁸ Irrespective of whether critics conceptualise style as somehow detachable from subject matter or as inextricably bound to it, they are still upholding a dichotomy, in which, as Attridge puts it, “content or meaning is opposed to the physical materials and their shape or structure.” The text is thus conceived as a “static” object, a fixed creation that can be accessed, analysed and interpreted at any time in ways which elucidate what the text is about, different aspects of its form (including style) and the relationship between its form and its content.⁴⁹

It is this dominant dichotomy that de Man questions in “Semiology and Rhetoric.” Like the notion of style as dress of thought, the form and content dyad has also been dominated by metaphoric discourse and, as de Man puts it, “[m]etaphors are much more tenacious than facts.” The metaphoric description of literature as “a box that separates an inside from an outside” (SR 5) results from the attempt to “reconcile the internal, formal, private structures of literary language with the external, referential, and public effects” (SR 3). In this essay, de Man’s first formulation of the dichotomy treats form as the inside and content as the outside or “external” reality, but de Man rightly notes that the dichotomy may also have its polarities inverted—indeed, they often are— “[w]hen form is considered to be the external trappings of literary meaning or content.” In both cases, if style is understood as an aspect of literary form, it suffers the same fate as form in being deemed “expendable.” On the one hand, taken as the outside, form and, consequently, style are “superficial,” and the job of the “reader or critic” becomes

⁴⁸ Michael Toolan, “Stylistics and its discontents; or, getting off the Fish ‘hook’,” in Jean Jacques Weber ed., *The Stylistics Reader: From Roman Jakobson to the Present* (London: Arnold, 1996) 117–135 (121).

⁴⁹ Attridge 107.

that of opening “the lid in order to release in the open what was secreted but inaccessible inside.” On the other hand, understood as “a solipsistic category of self-reflection,” form and style are deemed claustrophobic and self-oriented, and “critics cry out for the fresh air of referential meaning,” especially if they have an overt political agenda (SR 4).

It is difficult not to agree with de Man when he writes that whichever way the inside/outside metaphor is understood, the metaphor itself “is never being seriously questioned” (SR 5). In this claim, de Man echoes Heidegger, who, in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” describes the distinction of matter and form as the dominant concept in art theory and aesthetics. However, it may be argued that de Man’s own work, together with that of Blanchot, Derrida, Heidegger, Gadamer and others, calls for a different critical practice and a reassessment of staples of literary criticism, such as the inside/outside or form/content dichotomy. In fact, one of their main contributions is the radical suspension of that dichotomy formulated, for instance, by Matthew Arnold as “the substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other.”⁵⁰ They all question, some more radically than others, the traditional conceptualisation of writing as a portrayal of meaning in terms of what Blanchot refers to as the “signifying-signified” unity which “today has replaced, in the distinctions of linguistics [...] the old division of the form and the formulated” (IC 261).

At this point, it is important to propose a working distinction between style and form, two easily conflated terms. Sontag notes the proximity of the two words: “an artist’s style is, from a technical point of view, nothing other than the particular idiom in which he deploys the forms of his art. It is for this reason that the problems raised by the concept of ‘style’ overlap with those raised by the concept of ‘form’.”⁵¹ For Sontag, what distinguishes style from form is the element of particularity or distinctiveness in the deployment of form. Meyer Schapiro proposes a similar though not identical distinction when he claims that “[b]y style is meant the constant form—and sometimes the constant elements, qualities, and expression—in the art of an individual or group.”⁵² Schapiro and Sontag share the association of style with recognisability, with recurrence that allows for the identification of something singular and individual. Thus, while form, as a descriptive literary term, may be said to refer to aspects of a work that may,

⁵⁰ Matthew Arnold, “The Study of Poetry,” in Hazard Adams ed., *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971) 600–603 (600).

⁵¹ Sontag, “On Style” 34.

⁵² Meyer Schapiro, “Style,” in *Anthropology Today: An Encyclopedic Inventory* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1953) 287–312 (287).

in turn, be used to describe someone's style—in Schapiro, for instance, this happens when that formal element recurs—style implicitly presupposes an element of distinction and exclusiveness—even if not absolute—that is unnecessary in a discussion of form. In other words, form is a purely *descriptive* term while style is also *relational*.

The element of distinctiveness or particularity is emphasised by theories that define style as a formal property originating in conscious or unconscious choices among a series of alternatives. Style comes to be seen as the “image of man” and the choices made are taken to be indicative of the writer's mind or personality. The definition of style as choice is often based on the distinction between what a text is about and how it is written or between the content and the form of a text. Richard Ohmann speaks for many when he claims that “if style does not have to do with ways of doing something, then it is not worth talking about style in the first place.”⁵³ Along the same lines, Lang suggests that “style presupposes choice” and that “only where there are two styles is there one.”⁵⁴ Style, as a concept, would thus be a matter of distinction or distinguishing, that is, of choosing among (not necessarily consciously) numerous alternatives.

The notion of choice—thought within the framework of the form and content dichotomy—is closely related to synonymity or synonymy in meaning, which Hirsch defines as “the expression of an absolutely identical meaning through different linguistic forms” or different styles.⁵⁵ In this respect, two questions formulated by Lang are particularly pertinent. Firstly, if style is a matter of choice, “can the content of a given work of art be articulated in different styles?” Secondly, “can a single style articulate different or contradictory contents?”⁵⁶ Answering these questions in the affirmative is only possible from a position assuming the theoretical separation of style from content.

For instance, both *synonymity* and *separability* of style and content are basic premises of late twentieth century approaches to style stemming from Transformational-Generative Linguistics that conceive of language as a system which involves the transformation of deep structures into a variety of surface structures corresponding to a range of different styles. Applying transformational grammar, Ohmann argues that “[f]or the idea of style to apply [...] writing must involve choices of verbal

⁵³ Richard Ohmann, “Prolegomena to the Analysis of Prose,” in Harold C. Martin, ed. *Style in Prose Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) 1–24 (2).

⁵⁴ Lang, “Looking for the Styleme” 178.

⁵⁵ Hirsch 51.

⁵⁶ Lang, “A Checklist of Questions about Style,” in Lang ed., *The Concept of Style*, 299–304 (301).

formulation.”⁵⁷ An underlying argument of transformational grammar is that there is something unified, whole, fully translatable that can then be formulated or expressed in different ways and it is the choice among these different possibilities that determines style. In other words, different styles may express the same underlying meaning. Synonymity and separability are also key factors in conceptual metaphor theory. As will be seen at the end of this chapter and in Chapter 5, the work of Mark Turner, George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and others on *mental schema* leads to a conceptualisation of style in terms of synonymity and secondarity, that is, in terms of a particular *expression* or triggering of more stable and universally shareable concepts.

One way of thinking about style which, at least superficially, is diametrically opposed to synonymity but is ultimately subject to similar teleocratic structures is that of style as determined by the subject matter and, therefore, not as a matter of choice but as a necessary reflection of an antecedent concept or thought. In this case, stylistic features are expressive of the whole and different styles are inextricably related to different kinds of content. August Wilhelm Schlegel’s contrast between mechanical and organic conceptions of literature sheds light on this organic model. A. W. Schlegel uses botanical imagery to speak of the work of art as an organism in which there is a motivated relationship between form and content or matter. This relationship is not arbitrary, whereby form would be superadded onto content, but necessary and determined by the content itself. In a famous lecture he states that:

Form is mechanical when, through external force, it is imparted to any material merely as an accidental addition without reference to its quality [...]. Organical form [, on the contrary,] is innate; it unfolds itself from within [...]. In a word, the form is nothing but a significant exterior, the speaking physiognomy of each thing, which [...] gives a true evidence of its hidden essence.⁵⁸

Form is an external surface that grows naturally out of a hidden essence, and while form and matter are deemed to be inseparable, their “prior theoretical separation” is presupposed.⁵⁹

Todorov argues that the idea of the organic self-sufficiency of the text culminates in German Romanticism, where, as opposed to the classical concept of expression as the external “dress of thought, [...] thought is no longer divorced—or

⁵⁷ Richard Ohmann, “Generative Grammars and the Concept of Literary Style,” in Donald C. Freeman ed., *Linguistics and Literary Style* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970) 258–278 (264).

⁵⁸ August Wilhelm Schlegel, Lecture XXII, in *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2004) 283–284.

⁵⁹ Attridge 108.

even distinguished—from expression.”⁶⁰ However, while Todorov’s description may be appropriate for certain pronouncements by A. W. Schlegel, this organic model is more dominant in British Romanticism than the German Romanticism of Friedrich Schlegel to which Derrida and Blanchot return to frequently in their work. As will be seen in their respective chapters, Derrida and Blanchot show a concern with the *fragment* through their fragmentary style of writing—a concern that echoes the German Romantic interest in the fragment as that which can never capture or coincide completely with that which is to be said and hence opening an infinite space of non-coincidence and non-unity between style and thought. For instance, Blanchot writes about the “infinite relation” between signifier and signified or between “what one calls form and (erroneously) content.” While what Blanchot calls “culture” tries to propose unity and sees “content” as the “work’s signification,” Blanchot speaks of a disjunction between signifier and signified or form and content that “prohibits all synthesis” (*IC* 400). On the other hand, M. H. Abrams recounts the substitution, by William Wordsworth, Thomas De Quincey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and others, of the metaphor of language as the dress of thought typical of rhetoric by the metaphor of “body-and-soul” (language as the “incarnation” of thought) that suggests what Wordsworth calls “a vital union” as opposed to an artificial connection.⁶¹ For the British romantics, style should be a natural *incarnation* of thought rather than an artificial and removable *dress* of thought.

The metaphoric rhetoric of natural organicism was again particularly dominant in the first half of the twentieth century with the rise of New Criticism and the methods of *practical criticism*. In such approaches, which prioritise Cleanth Brooks’s “principle of unity,”⁶² one finds that even though “content” or “subject matter” may not be prioritised as in thematic criticism, style is still understood in terms of its teleocratic integration or otherwise of form and content particularly due to the fact that the author is not considered important for interpretation and the emphasis is placed on the words on the page. Style is consequently treated as an aspect of form and evaluated in terms of its relation to the *meaning* of the work. As Schapiro explains, if aspects of form are seen as being integrated with content, “investigation of style [often becomes] a search for hidden correspondences explained by an organising principle which determines both the

⁶⁰ Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol* 80.

⁶¹ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 290–292.

⁶² Cleanth Brooks, “The Heresy of Paraphrase,” in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947) 192–214 (195).

character of the parts and the patterning of the whole.”⁶³ Murray Krieger arrives at a similar conclusion in his study of organicism: even though there are counter movements within organicist theories that frequently turn organicism against itself, organic theorists (though not necessarily the theories themselves) tend to exhibit a drive towards “a principle of structure that would serve a totalizing functionalism,” according to which “any particular element of a text” has a function within the whole.⁶⁴ It is a consequence of or path towards something internal and hidden.

Brooks’s landmark new critical essay on “The Heresy of Paraphrase” raises another fundamental issue in relation to style and subject matter. Brooks rejects the possibility of paraphrasing the *content* or *meaning* of a poem because he believes that the poetic aspect of a poem lies in its *pattern* or *structure*, which refers not to form in a dichotomy of form and content but to a harmonious integration of various aspects in the poem according to a “principle of unity.”⁶⁵ He criticises attempts to restate the content of a poem as committing the “paraphrastic heresy,” which is to be blamed for the critics’ distinction between form and content.⁶⁶ For Brooks, the relation between different elements of a poem is organic, not expressive, and hence one cannot bypass aspects such as imagery or rhythm to get to meaning.

If poetry is a harmonious equilibrium of parts rather than expression of content through style, and no rephrasing of the work can do justice to the text, then poetry is also untranslatable. In this respect, Brooks follows Benedetto Croce, whose thesis of *intraducibilità* (*untranslatability*) is central to New Criticism. Croce writes that “[w]e cannot transform that which already has its own aesthetic form into another such form. Every translation, in fact, either diminishes or spoils the original, or the translation creates an entirely new expression.”⁶⁷ As Krieger explains, “in Croce it is the indissoluble intuition of the inner vision that gives to the poem its unique status, its inviolable quality which renders it un-approachable by any language other than that created by the irrepeatable intuition.”⁶⁸ It follows, then, that if style is a defining aspect of the “language” of a poem and it cannot be separated from the totality within which it

⁶³ Schapiro 292.

⁶⁴ Murray Krieger, *A Reopening of Closure: Organicism Against Itself* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) 3.

⁶⁵ Brooks 195.

⁶⁶ Brooks 200.

⁶⁷ Benedetto Croce, *The Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and of the Linguistic in General Part 1*, trans. Colin Lyas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 76.

⁶⁸ Murray Krieger, “Benedetto Croce and the Recent Poetics of Organicism,” *Comparative Literature* 7.3 (1955): 252–258 (254).

serves a harmonious function, then the style of a particular poem is, like the poem as a whole, untranslatable.

How to think style within these parameters? How to comment about it if it is always absolutely singular and untranslatable? The conceptualisation of style as absolutely untranslatable creates a problem that might seem insurmountable. If translation is understood in the wider sense of “transfer” and, therefore, as also encompassing the meaning of “commentary,” then, the belief in the absolute untranslatability of style would extinguish, a priori, the debate about style. However, the very description of style as “untranslatable,” its naming as absolutely singular, always already triggers the divisibility of the singular. As de Man argues, even if we were to think of writers having a singular style, we would have to consider how such writers are similar in having a singularising trait. As such, to speak about a singular style is always already to show its multiplicity; it must share an element of commonality with something else (*BI* 81). Style, like Georges Poulet’s notion of an authentic “point of departure” for an author, “serves at the same time as a principle that unifies and as a principle that differentiates” (*BI* 82). The inscription of the singular into the system of language exposes the originary split that allows for its iterability. Style is singular and distinctive but—like the singular—not just always open to repeatability but also constituted by its repetition. If it were absolutely untranslatable, it would erase itself from the possibility of being read. In this respect, style will have to be thought in relation to what Derrida calls the iterable singular and “the economy of exemplary iterability” (*SI* 43).

In summary, organicist conceptions of literature, while acknowledging style, still seek to erase it. Or, to posit the matter in the vertiginous language of Blanchot, the form/content (or signifier/signified) composite is “a duality always ready to become unified and such that the first term receives its primacy only by immediately restoring it to the second term into which it necessarily changes” (*IC* 261). Ultimately, for organicists, what really matters is the “truth” of the unique and absolutely singular work of art, and style is judged in terms of its role in expressing this truth.

Like organicism, thematic criticism and its implications for style are also problematised in this study. Thematic criticism, seeking what Blanchot terms the “seizing of a presence” (*IC* 261), is contested by Derrida for the way it carries out what he calls a “transcendental reading [and] search for the signified” (*OG* 160). Thematic criticism focuses on themes and subject matter, and, in so doing, bypasses the signifier or what it perceives as external (like style) in search of truth. However, as Derrida

stylishly argues in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, style highlights, precisely, the suspension of “the decidable opposition of true and the non-true” (*S* 107). In Nietzsche—but also elsewhere—style contributes significantly to the disturbance of an easy resort to “sense” and “meaning.” As indicated by the fragmentary forms he adopts, Derrida shows how style and sense may not always coincide and, in this respect, his work is a consistent and most unrelenting deconstruction (not an absolute negation) of mimesis, and, by implication, of the form/content model of literature. Derrida does not claim, as simplistic accounts of deconstruction would make us believe, that language is meaningless. In fact, texts cannot resist transcendent readings absolutely because absolute singularity ultimately means annihilation. However, texts, to different degrees and in different ways, challenge and “suspend ‘thetic’ and naïve belief in meaning or referent” (*SI* 45).

Derrida critiques representation and the closely related notion of truth as correspondence or *adaequatio*. Like Heidegger, he problematises widely held beliefs about truth, but Derrida also deviates from Heidegger in very significant ways, particularly in terms of the notion of truth as *alētheia* (*unveiling*). Both thinkers reconceive truth through the poetic (more precisely, *Dichtung*,⁶⁹ in Heidegger's case), and what Clark says about Heidegger could also be applied to Derrida. Heidegger

demands that we leave behind that familiar kind of reading that tries to extract some kind of philosophical or religious ‘content’ from out of the texture of poetizing [because] such a mode of critical attention [...] would destroy in advance the possibility of hearkening to what is essential and singular in the poetic

However, in relation to Derrida, words and phrases like “leave behind,” “essential,” and “singular” would take on significantly different meanings.⁷⁰ Heidegger does not think of the literary word as unified “object” that our consciousness can scan, analyse and dissect—an approach that is at the basis of formalism, organicism and fundamentally mimetic theories of literature that relegate style to form in a dichotomy with content. Indeed, Heidegger's thinking runs counter to instrumentalist approaches that analyse literature in terms of the problem of meaning or interpretation.

For Heidegger, the work does not simply fulfil a function or convey a meaning. It is not a symbol or sign whose significance is teleocratically rooted in an external

⁶⁹ In English, *Dichtung* is perhaps closest to “poetry” but, as Clark explains, it “is a strongly evaluative term, naming a work of language which has all the features of a genuine work of art” [Clark, *Heidegger* 101].

⁷⁰ Clark, *Heidegger* 103.

source. Rather, the work presents its own singular mode of being that cannot be decoded by using pre-existing analytical frameworks. The singular work *is* something rather than being *about* something and this annuls the dichotomy of form and content and the ancillary dyads of what and how, subject matter and style. Heidegger's non-teleocratic conception of the being of the artwork—a variation to Kant's *purposiveness without purpose*—suggests that “[t]he work belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm that is opened up by itself.” Giving the example of a Greek temple that, in its original context and time, creates a world and makes the world around it (air, light, rock) emerge and rise, Heidegger thinks of the work as the happening of truth rather than as a representation of an antecedent truth. The temple “portrays nothing,” and “the same holds for the linguistic work” (*OWA* 40). While “that which is spoken [may] appear as if it were cut off from speaking and the speakers, and did not belong to them, [...] in fact it alone offers to speaking and to the speakers whatever it is they attend to” (*WTL* 120). Quoting Georg Trakl's line “the venerable saying of the blue source,” Heidegger understands “saying in terms of showing, pointing out, signalling.” Language does not re-present an already existing phenomenon, which would entail a separation of conceptuality from language. “Signs” within language “arise from a showing within whose realm and for whose purposes they can be signs” (*WTL* 123). Rather than being a “linguistic expression added to the phenomena after they have appeared”—a representational structure that, as seen above, leads to style, as a mode of expression, being considered secondary and inessential—“all radiant appearance and all fading away is grounded in the showing Saying” (*WTL* 126). In Heidegger's phenomenological approach, objects come to presence and appearance through language. This leads to a paradoxical structure in relation to being. In disclosing or making something apparent, the movement of disclosure, or of making something apparent, disappears. As Clark puts it, “[i]n what is disclosed disclosure itself is erased.”⁷¹ Language is thus not present but it gives presence; it lets be. This interest in language as *Saying* turns Heidegger to poetry as authentic discourse, as something that does not use language instrumentally but makes language possible.

From a Heideggerian position, therefore, style cannot be simply understood as an aspect of expression which reflects or portrays what the text is about or as an effective tool through which the text transmits its “message,” “content,” or “truth.” Neither can it be conceived in formalist terms as deviation. Style is also not part of the

⁷¹ Timothy Clark, “Being in Mime: Heidegger and Derrida on the Ontology of Literary Language,” *MLN* 101.5 (1986): 1003–1021 (1009).

outer layers of a text which have to be unwrapped for the content to be unveiled. What a Heideggerian analysis of style would require is a rethinking of style in terms of how, in *Dichtung*, it contributes to the setting up of a world, as it were, in the form of a leap from nothingness. Like the imagery in Trakl's poems, one might consider style in terms of what Clark calls "a covering that obeys the unique structure of withdrawal/unveiling."⁷²

As will be seen in more detail in their respective chapters, the three thinkers being discussed, in different ways and to different extents, are engaged in a dialogue with Heidegger in their thinking of style and subject matter. Following a distinctively Heideggerian path in discussing the ontology of "the word" in literature, Gadamer thinks of truth as *alētheia*, where the word "raises and fulfils a claim to being by itself" (*OTW* 136) and thus cannot be simply restricted to "the content to which it points" (*OTW* 147). Truth comes to be in "the word," or, more specifically, the word that "stands" (*OTW* 135). Unlike everyday language which "points to something beyond itself and disappears behind it" (*RB* 67), poetry "seems to originate in itself" (*TI* 42) and "the word in a work of poetry is more saying than elsewhere" (*OTW* 144). The poetic calls for a different kind of *attunement* from the reader. Indeed, it is in the sense of a dimension of the work that makes the reader tarry and which lets its *saying* come to the fore that style contributes to Gadamer's Heideggerian conception of the work of art. Gadamer rejects purely formalist approaches to poetry since "[s]aying is not isolated in itself, but says something." Assuming the inextricability of the "what" and "how" in literature, especially poetry, Gadamer thinks of the work of art in terms of the elevation of "the concrete content" of the work "to such absolute presence by the art of the language" or "the how of its being said" (*OTW* 148). As will be shown in Chapter 2, this leads to an ambivalent conception of style in Gadamer's work. Ultimately, for Gadamer, style supersedes itself, vanishes and gives way to the self-presence of the work of art. Style, understood in terms of normative or generic requirements, that is, as formal elements or "modes" that bring together different works of art, would be part of that which contributes to the word becoming "more saying" (*OTW* 152) and to presence increasing "in being" (*OTW* 152) only to then be erased, precisely, to let-be this same being.

It is a similar attachment to truth as *alētheia* that Derrida critiques in his reading of Heidegger. Derrida, like Heidegger and Gadamer, questions mimeticism in literature, and he argues how, rather than representation, what happens in literature is—in

⁷² Clark, *Being in Mime* 1013.

Attridge's words—"an event of referring" and a "staging of referentiality."⁷³ As Derrida shows through Stéphane Mallarmé's *Mimique*, literature performs a structure of mimetic play that does not really capture anything present (*D* 206). Mallarmé's mime is a double without an original as he "imitates nothing that in any way preexists his operation: neither an act [...] nor a word" (*D* 198). At the same time, the miming act is not "originary" either since it is, in itself, a structure of imitation. While, as Clark points out, with Heidegger "it becomes necessary to conceive an element in language that is, paradoxically, an originary mirror, a re-presentation that nothing will have preceded,"⁷⁴ Derrida undermines the very possibility of distinguishing between an originary origin and a copy, a presence in the present and a representation after it. As will be seen in Chapter 4, this urges a rethinking of style in terms of iterability or of the signature always marked by the countersignature and its openness to the aleatory.

Blanchot's critique of mimetic theories of literature is also in dialogue with Heidegger. Echoing Heidegger's consideration of the "earth" and "world" strife in the work of art, Blanchot thinks of the work as something alien and uncommunicative, rather than as a "thing" which conveys meaning or which represents an anterior reality. For both Blanchot and Heidegger, literature is not *about* something but "is—and nothing more" (*SL* 22); however, as Clark shows, whereas Heidegger speaks of the mutual affirmation of world and earth in their strife, Blanchot sees the work as inhabiting primarily the earth and as not entering "except by violent misappropriation, into the world's space, i.e. the realm of meaning, disclosure, cultural debate and truth."⁷⁵ For Blanchot, art is a *limit-experience*, outside culture, outside history and never simply reducible to meaning. Blanchot's correlation with Heidegger but also their differences are perhaps nowhere as clear as in their common interest in Hegel's thesis about the end of art.⁷⁶ As Leslie Hill argues, while Heidegger interprets the end of art as a lamentable "exteriority to world, work, or truth," Blanchot sees it as a "chance for art." While Heidegger sees modernity as being unable to heed the truth of art and thus seeks to think truth as *alētheia*, Blanchot speaks of art's radical "refusal" to enter in a relation with truth as the absence from which art, paradoxically, arises. Blanchot's *nomadism*—his interest in *worklessness*, *absolute exteriority* and the *essential solitude* of the work—is thus a counterpoint to Heidegger's "rootedness of art within the

⁷³ Attridge 96.

⁷⁴ Clark, *Being in Mime* 1005.

⁷⁵ Clark, *Heidegger* 148.

⁷⁶ See G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art Volume 1*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 593ff. For Blanchot's reading of Hegel, see *BC* 195–201.

classical past.”⁷⁷ Style, through Blanchot, may be thought in terms of the an(-)archic eventhood of the work in its refusal of the Heideggerian “world.”

The sidestepping of the form and style dichotomy is one of the ways in which Blanchot contributes to the thinking of style. Style, after Blanchot—but also after Heidegger, Gadamer, and Derrida—cannot be thought of exclusively as a teleocratic expression of an anterior essence, be it the writer’s personality or some kind of meaning or content. And yet, this does not make style unimportant. On the contrary, as will be seen through a discussion of Blanchot’s and Derrida’s styles, as well as the style of Celan’s poetry, it can be argued that style has a substantive, performative and creative role, bringing into being conceptuality which, paradoxically, it also expresses.

1.5 *Style in the Image of Man*

Buffon’s maxim, which he pronounced in a 1753 speech at the Académie Française—“le style est l’homme même”⁷⁸—is one of the most frequently quoted definitions of style. Translatable literally as “style is the man himself,” Buffon’s words crystallise a tradition that predates him and remains strong after him. The association of style with man—style as a reflection of man (“man” being understood here both in the sense of the speaker or author in whom style originates, but also, in the sense of “not woman”)—goes back at least to Demetrius who claims that, apart from moral excellence, “all literary composition enables the reader to see the character of the writer.”⁷⁹ What a man creates reveals who he is. Ben Jonson retains the idea, while not referring to style directly, when he writes that language “is the image of the Parent of it, the mind” and that “[n]o glasse renders a mans forme or likeness so true as his speech.”⁸⁰ One’s speech is thus a mirror that faithfully reflects one’s image. George Puttenham’s formulation makes the association between character and style more direct as he holds that the continuous “course and manner of writing and speech sheweth the matter and disposition of the writers minde” and, thus, style can be called “the image of man.”⁸¹ What Puttenham’s formulation suggests is more than the Platonic requirement of moral soundness encapsulated by Strabo’s claim that “he only can become a good poet, who is

⁷⁷ Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 123.

⁷⁸ Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon. *Discours sur le style: A Facsimile of the 12^{mo} Edition*. Intr. Cedric E. Pickford (Hull: Hull French Texts, 1978) xvii.

⁷⁹ Demetrius, *On Style* iv.227.

⁸⁰ Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson’s Timber: or, Discoveries*, ed. Ralph S. Walker (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1976) 46.

⁸¹ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Edward Arber (London: Bloomsbury, 1869 [1589]) 160.

in the first instance a worthy man.”⁸² Indeed, Puttenham’s view is that one’s words are a mirror of one’s character, irrespective of one’s moral qualities. Thus, Puttenham continues, if a man is “grave, his speech and stile is grave; if light-hearted, his stile and language also light.”⁸³ The theory of style as reflection of man—an aspect of what Abrams has called “literary physiognomy”⁸⁴—keeps eliciting reactions even after Buffon, as in Jacques Lacan’s citing of Buffon’s aphorism in the first line of *Écrits*.⁸⁵

If the dress metaphor is intimately related to the theory of style as exteriority, and that of the organism frequently conveys the view of style as an aspect of the text understood in holistic terms, the metaphoric presentation of style as a picture or image defines the view of style as a reflection of man. Sprat makes the connection clearly through a simile: “Style itself [...] for the most part [...] describes mens minds, as well as Pictures do their Bodies.”⁸⁶ Style is to man as a picture is to one’s body, that is, an external likeness or a duplicate. Rémy de Gourmont deviates slightly from Buffon’s famous maxim by focusing on one’s thoughts as being the source of style with “le style est la pensée même” (“style is thought itself”)⁸⁷ but Buffon himself makes a similar association when he states that “to write well [...] is to think well”⁸⁸ and that “style is nothing but the order and movement one puts in his thoughts.”⁸⁹ Irrespective of whether style is seen, generally, as an image of man or, more specifically, as a reflection of man’s singular thoughts, this theory of style depends on correspondence or duplication so that style arises, precisely, in this mirroring.

Style is the man, that is, style is a reflection or image of man. Or, to understand the maxim differently—but still in line with its use—style is a sign of being manly, of being virile. Milesi notes the “insistence on virility” by Edmond Arnould, who writes: “Purity, neatness, precision, and the vigour of lines appear in style only with civilisation in populations, with virility in individuals, that is to say, with the logical development of ideas and the art which regulates its expression.”⁹⁰ In a formulation that reverses the traditional association of style with woman, here it is implied that style can only appear if

⁸² *The Geography of Strabo, Volume 1*, trans. H.C. Hamilton and W. Falconer (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854) I.ii.5.

⁸³ Puttenham 160.

⁸⁴ Abrams 230.

⁸⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005) 3.

⁸⁶ Sprat 36.

⁸⁷ Rémy de Gourmont, *Le Problème du style: Questions d’art, de littérature et de grammaire, avec une préface et un index des noms cités* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902) 154.

⁸⁸ “bien écrire, c’est [...] bien penser” (Buffon 15).

⁸⁹ “Le style n’est que l’ordre et le mouvement qu’on met dans ses pensées” (Buffon 6).

⁹⁰ Edmond Arnould, *Essai d’une théorie du style* (Paris: Hachette, 1851) as cited and translated by Milesi 220.

the individual is blessed with virility. In this sense, Madame de Staël and “madame Sand” are exceptions in being women endowed with style as defined by Arnould because they “have brought to the common work truly virile qualities of spirit and wealth of imagination, tempered by this delicacy of meaning and this penetrating softness which belong only to their sex.”⁹¹ Style, then, suggests masculine potency but also female delicacy and, as Derrida demonstrates in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* through formulations that are not free of sexual nuances, style is related to stilettos, rapiers, and umbrellas that can penetrate or parry blows, leaving their indelible marks.

Abrams and Genette both associate the theory of style as a reflection of personality with the transition away from classical rhetoric. As Genette points out, while classical critics tend to give generic constraints a central role in their theories of style, more modern criticism “has accentuated individual and sometimes sociohistorical aspects of style.”⁹² However, such a distinction is not absolute but one of degree—as seen, for instance, through Demetrius’s and Strabo’s claims about the way writing reflects character. Abrams’s argument that “the distinctive characteristic in the applied criticism of many romantic critics [...] is the extent to which this general approach to literature superseded others” suggests that what is unique in this stage in literary history is not the actual attribution of style to personality but the regularity with which this association is made.⁹³

Style, from this perspective, is something that reflects character. It *particularises* and *distinguishes*, that is, it points to itself as *unique* while highlighting the *difference* from others. As Abrams argues, if style is the man, that is, if style is a reflection of the writer’s character, “there is an individuality about a man’s writing which distinguishes his work from that of other authors.”⁹⁴ In this respect, one may be tempted to compare style with *signature*, the stylised inscription of a name used to identify the signatory as an author of a statement or as a witness to a statement. Seymour Chatman’s description of style as having “identificatory power” and as being “an author’s characteristic way, manner, [or] fashion of writing” that distinguishes him from others and makes his work clearly identifiable as his could also be applied to signature.⁹⁵ However, while style and signature overlap in their individualising trait and in their recognisability—they suggest uniqueness by, paradoxically, being repeated—they are distinct. Both style and

⁹¹ Arnould, 54 as cited and translated by Milesi 222.

⁹² Gerard Genette, *Fiction & Diction*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993) 128. The “Virgilian Wheel” is a classical theory of style based on generic decorum.

⁹³ Abrams 228.

⁹⁴ Abrams 230.

⁹⁵ Seymour Chatman, “On the Theory of Literary Style,” *Linguistics* 27 (1966): 13–25 (14, 24–25).

signature are descriptive terms but only style connotes or attracts evaluative judgments. Nelson Goodman, for instance, argues that only those aspects that associate a work with “one rather than another artist” can be *stylistic*. As such, style “serves somewhat as an individual or group signature.” Style allows us to answer “Who? When? Where?”⁹⁶ Nonetheless, not all signatory aspects are stylistic and, for Goodman, only those identificatory aspects of a work that are “properties of the functioning of the work as a symbol” can be deemed to be stylistic. Similarly, Wollheim argues that stylistic features, unlike non-stylistic signature effects, work in the holistic context of the text and “interrelate with the structural or integrative principles of the artist’s work.”⁹⁷ Recalling the evaluative distinction between style and mannerism that is common in German aesthetics, Wollheim suggests that recognising a signature involves discovering recurrent traits, while deeming a textual or artistic element to be stylistic requires first recognising its relation to the work as a whole.

This difference between style and signature clarifies the role of computer analysis in terms of style. Rather than *style*, what stylometrics, corpus stylistics and other associated disciplines investigate is *signature*. Computers allow wide scale quantitative analysis of texts, and available software makes it possible to, for instance, determine the frequency of certain words, grammar and punctuation choices, as well as average syllables per word, words per sentence and words per paragraph in a particular text. Researchers can also run automatic analyses of corpora that identify statistically significant recurring traits and compare results in search of statistical deviations. Computer-assisted stylistics may thus be used, for instance, to isolate “authorial fingerprints,”⁹⁸ identify linguistic similarities among given texts or authors—as in *stylogenetics*, which groups authors on the basis of a stylistic genome⁹⁹— as well as determine the chronology of certain texts by a particular writer. This is done, mostly, through analyses at the level of word choice and frequency distribution. It is undeniable that such approaches can be very effective in attribution studies. However, Michael McCarthy’s admission that corpus linguists (or stylisticians) can “never [offer] the total sum of linguistic features that characterize a style” but “a contribution to that sum,” suggests that style is understood as an accumulation of features, more specifically, as a

⁹⁶ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Pub Co Inc, 1978) 34.

⁹⁷ Wollheim 197.

⁹⁸ Michael McCarthy, Introduction to Michaela Mahlberg, “A Corpus Stylistics Perspective on Dickens’ *Great Expectations*,” in Marina Lambrou and Peter Stockwell ed., *Contemporary Stylistics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007) 19.

⁹⁹ See, for example, Kim Luyckx, Walter Daelemans, and Edward Vanhoutte, “Stylogenetics: Clustering-based stylistic analysis of literary corpora,” *Proceedings of LREC 2006 5th International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation* (Genoa: Istituto di Linguistica Computazionale, 2006) 30–35.

sum of features that somehow deviate from norms through their abnormal irregularity or regularity.¹⁰⁰ Such a definition of style conflates style with signature as it is limited to *description* and *identification*.

Other implications of the signature metaphor for style are that while a signature identifies and distinguishes, it may also be rehearsed or forged. Bypassing this issue, there is a tendency in theories of style as an image of man to think of style as a biological or biographical *necessity* and, hence—on the contrary to the notion of style as choice—as inevitable and beyond the writer’s control. Louis T. Milic, for instance, calls the process of composition “unconscious, determined and habitual.”¹⁰¹ Similar claims are made by Barthes, whose *Writing Degree Zero* overflows with biological metaphors and, as Blanchot puts it, details style as “ours by birthright and by organic inevitability” (*BR* 147). Barthes claims that style has “its roots only in the depths of the author’s personal and secret mythology” and is thus physiognomic in origin and inevitable. It has a “biological or biographical [...] frame of reference” and it is a “natural product” of the writer’s body, that is, of the “person as a biological entity”; it is “a germinative phenomenon, the transmutation of a Humour” (*WZ* 11). “[I]n no way the product of a choice or of a reflection on Literature” (*WZ* 13), style for Barthes is thus what Blanchot describes as a “necessity” which gives the writer’s “language as distinctive an accent as his own recognisable demeanour gives his face” (*BR* 146).

Critics who assume that style is expression often turn the text into empirical evidence to be used in psycho-literary incursions. Building on the premise that style is an unconscious expression of personality, Ohmann applies transformational grammar to the study of style. Starting from a linguistic analysis of the choices made by different writers, Ohmann claims that a “classification of writers is possible according to which kind of verbal and semantic order they favour.”¹⁰² The “ways” in which the deep structures of language are expressed are seen as a matter of choice and as characterising the style of individual writers. For instance, George Bernard Shaw’s writing seems to be propelled by a frequent use of “in short” and other similar connectives which link items by their similarity. From this descriptive conclusion, Ohmann then shifts to interpretation and claims that Shaw’s “penchant for similarity” is linked with his Marxism and “his belief that, throughout history, ‘human nature remains largely the

¹⁰⁰ McCarthy 19.

¹⁰¹ Louis T. Milic, “Rhetorical Choice and Stylistic Option: The Conscious and Unconscious Poles,” in Seymour Chatman ed., *Literary Style: A Symposium* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 77–94 (84).

¹⁰² Richard Ohmann, *Shaw: The Style and the Man* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1962) 4.

same’.” The thesis is that “stylistic preferences reflect cognitive preference” and that, on the basis of this assumption, one can conclude that “Shaw’s cognitive system is centred on similarity and neat, lawful categories.”¹⁰³ Roger Fowler’s concept of “mind style”—the idea that systematic linguistic choices reflect the workings of individual minds and “distinctive linguistic” features can represent “an individual mental self”—is built on similar premises but extends the analysis from authors to narrators and characters.¹⁰⁴

A limit of physiognomic conceptions of style is that such theories make it difficult to account for kinds of works—such as pastiches, parodies, imitations—in which one does not expect to find the authentic voice of an author. It becomes difficult for those who root style only in individuality and recognisability of the writer to account for a novel like James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which highlights what Karen Lawrence describes as the “arbitrariness of all styles.”¹⁰⁵ Oulipo is another case in point. Palindromes, lipograms, and mathematical formulae pose defining constraints, making the attribution of style to the author’s personality somewhat limiting. Raymond Queneau’s *Exercices de Style*, in offering a proliferation of variations to the same theme, not only performs stylistic permutations that identify the text as typical of Oulipo and of Queneau’s writing himself but also points outside itself, to the myriad genres and styles it imitates as well as the figures of speech that give a direction to each variation of the theme.

Another problem of thinking of style as *le propre* (“one’s property” and “appropriate”) is the paradox highlighted by Blanchot that while style “should be closest to us, [it] is also what is least accessible to us” (BR 147). Style, it is often claimed, is invisible to the writer himself. Franck, for instance, argues that style “shares with the body the fact that we cannot see our own face.”¹⁰⁶ However, it is perhaps Derrida who outlines most exhaustively the implications of one’s blindness, or, perhaps more appropriately, deafness, to one’s own style. Asked by Mercedes Coll to “define, explain or justify” his own “style,” Derrida feels that the question is both “difficult” and “necessary.” It is difficult because while style, “no matter how singular and inimitable it may remain, is made up of rules, [...] of recurrences [...] regularities, returns” that make style “recognizable,” it is “by definition accessible only to the other.” Here, Derrida follows a logic that recurs in his work:

¹⁰³ Ohmann, *Shaw* 22.

¹⁰⁴ Roger Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* (London: Methuen, 1977) 103.

¹⁰⁵ Karen Lawrence, *The Odyssey of Style in James Joyce’s “Ulysses”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 9.

¹⁰⁶ Franck 229.

What returns as the same or as what looks similar in a very different text of mine, which I sign, can be legible, visible, sensible only for the other and not for me [...]. The idiom, idiomaticity—if there's any—is what can't be reappropriated; *idiom* means in Greek what is proper: *idiotès*. I would set down as an aporia and logical necessity that what is proper can't be appropriated, what is proper to me is what I can't reappropriate. In other words, I would be the last one to be able to see my style, in a way. (OS 200–201)

What Derrida contests through the problematisation of style as one's property is the idea of having complete control over one's language, one's style, and of being able to use language instrumentally. This accounts for Derrida's allusion to the permutations of style as a pointed stiletto or sharp rapier explored in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, through which Derrida responds to Coll's question about his style: if style is what Derrida “would call a phallogentric insistence, which consists in thinking that writing is a gesture of inscription with a decisive, incisive point, and that where this decisive, incisive, cutting, sharp point is lacking, there's no style,” then he would “rather not have style.”

Derrida's “Qual Quelle: Valéry's Sources” is an early discussion of the possibility of being in control of one's style. Derrida reads Paul Valéry reading René Descartes, whose famous “I think therefore I am” and reflections on the Cogito are seen by Valéry as being carried forward more than anything else by their powerful and “admirable style,” that is, by Descartes exposing himself on the stage of his own thought. Descartes's style is that which, for Valéry, allows him to deal decisive blows, “assert himself, posit his mastery” (QQ 214). Valéry associates style with timbre, that aspect of voice that suggests presence and that cannot be imitated; he suggests that style is the written version of timbre, of the singular event that is unrepeatable and inimitable. However, like one's timbre, which one almost invariably fails to recognise if, for instance, it is played back to oneself, Derrida interrupts Valéry with the claim that “the style of my writing [is] that which for (a) me never will have been present. [...] If my style marks itself, it is only on a surface which remains invisible and illegible for me. [...] I am blind to my style,” and, therefore, paradoxically, the “pure initiality of an event”—of an inimitable style—can only emerge if it does not “present itself to itself.” In a formulation that captures Derrida's logic, he writes that the event is “a source which cannot present itself, happen to itself,” that is, it cannot have self-presence even if it suggests presence (QQ 215). Thus, style, rather than marking “autonomy” and “appropriation”—style as the proper—marks, like timbre, “hetero-affection” and “heteronomy” (QQ 216). It then follows that style, for Derrida, as we will see in

Chapter 4, is always (at least partly) the domain of the other, not mine in my self-consciousness.

The theory of style as an image of man differs from organic models in that it opens the text to the influence of the author. Style is, in this sense, not just a reflection of meaning or content but primarily of the origin from which the text comes. However, as de Man puts it, views like those of the semanticist Stephen Ullmann, who “postulates a continuity between the initial subjective experience of the writer and characteristics that belong to the surface dimensions of language”—the idea that the author’s “psyche” is reflected in measurable stylistic aspects of a text—are ultimately based on “presuppositions about the nature of literary language” which take the “continuity between depth and surface, between style and theme, for granted” (*BI* 22–23).¹⁰⁷ In other words, by positing the mind, soul, nature, or personality of an individual as the inside, while the stylised body of work is seen as the outside which can lead back, through interpretation, to the inside, such theories are teleocratic, based on the notion of style as reflecting, capturing or reproducing something that exists before it. Style is an image or picture, and therefore secondary and duplicitous, of man, the source and origin.

Clearly, the question of style, if it is to be thought in terms of origins, is also a question of *temporality*. This is one way in which de Man approaches the issue in a discussion of the work of Poulet and, in particular, “of the ambivalences, the depths and uncertainties” in his criticism (*BI* 81). Poulet’s critical method involves the asserted vocation of unearthing an authentic and singular “point of departure, an experience that is both initial and central and around which the entire work can be organized.” This point of departure, for Poulet, defines the author in his individuality and acts as an organizing principle in all his work. As de Man writes, this point—both source and centre—“can function as a temporal origin, as the point before which no previous moment exists [...] a moment entirely oriented toward the future and separated from the past.” However, this genetic or temporal dimension of “the point of departure” stands side by side with a “structural and organizing principle [...] co-ordinating [...] events that do not coincide in time.” An organising principle can allow for a link between different temporalities and thus, “in temporal terms, a center cannot at the same time also be an origin, a source” (*BI* 82). If the concept of “source” is to have “generative power,” then it is implicated in temporal relations that clash with the temporality of a spatial understanding of a centre as organising principle. If one were to translate this to

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Ullmann, *Style in the French Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957).

the theory of style, one could say that there is a disjunction at work in considering the author as the source of style (style is a reflection of the author) and the author's style as characterising a particular work or a whole oeuvre.

This contradiction, for de Man, is not only irresolvable but also significant in itself "in the unending narrative of literary invention." A similar situation arises in "the complex relation in Poulet's work between the author and the reader of a given text" (*BI* 94). On the one hand, and in line with the emphasis on the point of origin, Poulet thinks of the critic as a "mediator who gives presence to an originating force" so that he conceives of himself as responding, through identification, to an anterior mind, that of the author. In this respect, the "complete surrender to the movement of another mind is the starting point of the critical success." It may be said that the quest for the mind behind style as its image follows such temporal patterns and power relations. It is through conceiving of oneself as a "passageway" for another person's mind and thoughts that the author can appear as an absolute origin (*BI* 95). However, Poulet's own *practice* as a critic goes in a different direction because "he does not content himself with merely receiving works as if they were gifts, but [...] he participates [...] in the problematic possibility of their elaboration." In trying to identify with the point of origin of someone's work, Poulet adopts the point of view of a writer more than a critic and, thus, a different temporality comes into action: no longer one based on an anterior mind that the critic is a passageway for but one which "is experienced from the inside," that is, an internal encounter (*BI* 97).

While Poulet does not point this out explicitly, de Man reads the situation as bringing into play the medium that allows this contradiction to emerge: language and the relation between a subject and literary language. Language disrupts the linear temporality involved in thinking of literature as reflecting a moment in the past as it introduces the element of futurity—the writer depends on the future of the work—that creates a "disjunction within the subject" (*BI* 98). While Poulet goes on a quest for the source, this source is "the moment" at which "the self accepts language as its sole mode of existence." Therefore, the self is not the absolute source; but neither is language a source: it is "the articulation of the self." In a paradoxical logic, de Man concludes that "each [self and language] is the anteriority of the other" (*BI* 100). The self would be annihilated if language were the absolute origin; language would be destroyed if the self were the absolute origin.

The problematisation of the author as the source of the work is crucial in Heidegger, who, as Véronique M. Fóti puts it, "hypostatizes" the art-work by rendering

it essentially independent of human activity and culture.¹⁰⁸ For Heidegger, in fact, in great art “the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge” (*OWA* 86). Gadamer echoes this in speaking of “the occasionality of the author” (*OTW* 139). As will be seen in Chapter 2, the truth of the word, for Gadamer, is not an aspect of “an activity or self-expression of someone or something” (*OTW* 137) but has “the temporal character of uniqueness and of an event” (*OTW* 138). If the literary text does not speak for someone else but only “of itself,” style as an expression of the self is a trivial matter; if style is to have a role in Gadamer’s and Heidegger’s thinking, it will thus have to be considered in relation to the eventhood of language.

“Style is the man” may perhaps be understood by reversing the usual chronology: not man as a source of style but style as a source of man—of content or meaning. Still, this would retain the teleocratic element in theories of style—even if in the form of an inverted structure. Style, in this sense, would not be reflective, submissive to something anterior, but that which creates and determines something which follows it, such as in formalist theories in which style creates the perception of literariness by the reader. Therefore, thinking of style in a non-teleocratic way cannot happen through a simple reversal of chronological relations but through a suspension or an aporetic problematisation of linear temporality.

As will be seen in Chapter 3, Blanchot problematises the author as an origin of the work by positing the disappearance of the writer as an inherent part of the economy of the work where the writer does not precede the text in a relationship of chronological anteriority. Instead, Blanchot weaves a concern with literary genesis in terms of an impossible logic that suspends linear temporality, and which allows us to think of style otherwise and not just as a reflection of an anterior source, be it content, meaning, or man. Blanchot enacts a movement of oxymoronic anachrony in thinking of the space of literature as both *genesis* and *result* of the work. For Blanchot, it is only the absence of the origin that allows the work to appear. However, if this is so and the work originates in its absence, it becomes difficult to see how the work can exist at all. The question of the origin and possibility of literature in Blanchot, quickly turns into a realisation of its impossibility.

1.6 *Style as Prominence and Style as Deviation*

¹⁰⁸ Véronique M. Fóti, *Heidegger and the Poets: Poiēsis/Sophia/Technē* (New York: Humanity Books, 1992) 45.

In “Style and Its Image,” Barthes remarks how style theory seems to be unable to move away from dichotomous formulations (*RL* 90–99). Style, he argues, is thought of within binary systems: style as exteriority, as expression, as disguise of content, as the inner or the outside, the male or the female. Another opposition, which is central to stylistics and formalist theories of style, is that between norm and deviation. This dichotomy—implicit in Aristotle’s call for controlled *unfamiliarity* in style as an effective rhetorical tool—is a recurring concern in Russian Formalism, Contemporary Stylistics and related schools of thought which refocus the quest for the essence of *literariness* or the *experience* of literature from content to formal aspects of a text.

One consequence of this transition from what Peter Steiner describes as the understanding of form as “a mere auxiliary mechanism necessary for expressing content, but completely dependent upon it” to form as that which distinguishes art from non-art is that “literariness” comes to be thought of primarily in terms of *deviation*.¹⁰⁹ Viktor Shklovsky, for instance, argues that art is meant to change the mode of the reader’s perception from practical to artistic by making perception difficult and unfamiliar. From such a perspective, style, as a collection of literary devices, has the teleocratic task of changing extra-aesthetic material into art through *defamiliarisation*. The more defamiliarising a literary device the more it contributes to the aesthetic thrill of the reader according to what Steiner calls a “law of maximal effort.”¹¹⁰ One clear weakness of formalist theories of style is that, as Genette points out, they “can also privilege (even involuntarily) a mannerist aesthetic for which the most remarkable style is one that is the most highly charged with features. The risk is that the most mannerist of stylists thus become the greatest writers” and the bizarre is equated with beauty.¹¹¹

The notion of deviation brings together a range of formalist and stylistic disciplines, and what is understood by the term may vary. It may refer to deviation from norms of language as a whole, norms of literary composition, and even norms established within a particular text. The common problem is that determining what constitutes the norm is crucial but practically impossible. Another problem is temporality. If art is an effect created by formal defamiliarisation, how can literature written at a time when certain devices were new still retain its effect when these devices have become conventional? If literariness or the poetic is simply a matter of stylistic innovation, the poetic loses its singular force once the innovative is recuperated.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984) 47.

¹¹⁰ Steiner 50.

¹¹¹ Genette 124.

In an attempt to sidestep the problems presented by deviation, several formalist theorists and stylisticians define style in terms of formal perceptibility that arises irrespective of deviation from external norms. In such theories, which follow in the footsteps of Roman Jakobson's work on the "poetic function" of language as the message's emphasis on itself, "for its own sake,"¹¹² the focus is not on "a departure from a norm" but on "the attainment or establishment of a norm," and style is defined as the formal perceptibility of language, or what M. A. K. Halliday calls the "highlighting" of linguistic aspects in discourse.¹¹³ This highlighting may result from the establishment of certain consistencies and patterns within a text. However, Halliday argues that what is important in "style in language" is not simply linguistic regularity but "significant" linguistic regularity. The perceptibility of style results from the foregrounding or "prominence" given to specific linguistic devices which are "motivated" by being related to the "meaning of the text as a whole."¹¹⁴ Thus, rather than focusing on a pre-established norm which observed language patterns are deemed to deviate from, Halliday urges us to identify those stylistic patterns that are highlighted and foregrounded by the role they play in relation to the whole of the text. As Ronald Carter and Peter Stockwell have noted, the focus in contemporary stylistics has shifted to "norms and patterns that [are] internally marked in the literary work" and this may be at the root in the current emphasis being put on the application of computer-assisted methodology (such as corpus stylistics).¹¹⁵ However, while it is claimed that the focus is not on deviation but *consistency* within a text, the focus on *marked* elements is still based on an understanding of style in terms of difference, that is, in terms of formal elements foregrounded against a background.

1.7 *Style and Politics*

Taking a political approach in their encounter with literature and language, theorists working along Marxian lines problematise purely formal and linguistic approaches to

¹¹² Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics," in Thomas A. Sebeok ed., *Style In Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960) 350–377 (365).

¹¹³ M. A. K. Halliday, "Linguistic function and literary style: An inquiry into the language of William Golding's *The Inheritors*," in Weber, ed. 56–91 (65).

¹¹⁴ Halliday 64.

¹¹⁵ Ronald Carter and Peter Stockwell, "Stylistics: retrospect and prospect," in *The Language and Literature Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) 291–302 (295–296).

style and criticise characterisations of style as self-expressive or as individualising signature. Style, in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Theodor Adorno, is discussed not as a neutral, immanent or exclusively formal dimension of textuality but as a formal dimension crucially traversed by the ideology inherent in all cultural products, including literature, and, therefore, as something that cannot be studied without due importance being given to its social, historical and economic basis.

Karl Marx establishes the basis upon which such an understanding of literature and style could develop when he introduces his materialist understanding of human life and human products:

The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.¹¹⁶

After Marx, it becomes possible to think of literature as being determined or at least critically affected by the way production is organised in society. Literature starts to be perceived as a cultural product that, together with other social, cultural and political forms, is part of the “superstructures” of society that arise from the “base” or “economic structure,” that is, the “sum total” of the relations of production in society.¹¹⁷ The superstructures of society, including literature, bear the marks of the economic structure. However, in turn, these superstructures may also challenge or legitimate the base itself and the social class which owns the means of production. Therefore, from a *traditional* Marxist perspective, literary works are tinged with and arise from “ideology” that spreads through all levels of society and its cultural products, even when it is ostensibly imperceptible.¹¹⁸

For politically oriented critics, it is untenable to study a literary text as a self-sufficient and organically integrated object or to consider a literary text as an embodiment of its writer’s feelings, thoughts or personality. On the contrary, Marxian literary criticism starts exploring the complex relations between particular works and their ideological milieu, relations which may not always be as obvious as in the subject

¹¹⁶ Karl Marx, Preface, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1904) 11–12.

¹¹⁷ Marx 11.

¹¹⁸ Raymond Williams gives three definitions of “ideology”: a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group; a system of illusory beliefs (false consciousness); the general process of the production of meanings and ideas. (“Ideology,” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 55–71.

matter or thematic concerns of a text, but which are often embodied in what comes to be called the “content of the form.”¹¹⁹ Marxist criticism tends to be essentially teleocratic in its understanding of literature as “not complete in itself,” a “gesture,” a sign, or an indication coming from elsewhere in response to something external, historical or social (*MF* 377). This has clear implications for theories of style. Often seeing style as an ideologically determined aspect of form, Marxian theorists tend to think of style as indicative of the ideological basis of the text being studied and the historical phase from which it arises.

Early, orthodox Marxist critics—proposing the idea that the base directly affects the superstructure and in essence, determines its existence—sideline form, which they deem superficial. However, later Marxian thinkers like Georg Lukács, Bakhtin, Eagleton, Jameson and Adorno look into the relations between literary form and ideology rather than simply moving from form to ideology. For Eagleton, the question is not so much how to reveal the ideological content of literature but how to account for the embodiment of ideology in forms which are “historically determined by the kind of ‘content’ [they have] to embody.”¹²⁰ Eagleton does not sideline form as he argues that it embodies the ideological force of the text itself. Even so, in describing form as an embodiment of content, he echoes other Marxian theorists in still upholding “the primacy of content in determining form.” Form is posterior and subservient to content while, conversely, “‘content’ is [...] prior to ‘form’”.¹²¹ The prioritisation of content in a dialectic of form and content is in the spirit of Hegel’s *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, where Hegel claims that every definite content determines a form suitable to it.¹²² As Jameson argues, Hegel revolutionised the way form is conceived in the sense that while in an Aristotelian perspective one starts from *form* as a kind of mould for the *matter* of which something is made, with dialectical thinking form becomes the “final articulation of the deeper logic of the content itself” (*MF* 328). Within this dualistic understanding of form and content, form is “the working out of content in the realm of the superstructure” (*MF* 329). This prioritisation of content over form as well as the proposed cause and effect dynamic of the dichotomy lead to an understanding of style as a product of what Jameson calls “social raw material” (*MF* 165). Style is determined by its relationship to content, not simply textual but mainly social and historical. It is

¹¹⁹ See Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

¹²⁰ Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1976) 22.

¹²¹ Eagleton 22–23.

¹²² G. W. F. Hegel, *The Introduction to Hegel’s Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co. 1886)

determined by a social dimension which originates outside the text but which is, at the same time, pervasively present in every text.

Deeming history and the social to be ineluctable, Marxian theorists are suspicious of traditional stylistics. Jameson, for instance, expresses “reservations” not because style is unimportant—on the contrary, he claims that any “concrete description of a literary or philosophical phenomenon [...] has an obligation” to come to terms with the “shape of the individual sentences” (*MF xii*)—but because of the ahistoricism of stylistics and its failure to recognise “the economic substratum of genuine historical change” that determines style in the superstructure (*MF* 235).

Bakhtin shares these concerns about the ahistoricism of stylistics, especially in his work on *dialogism*. Bakhtin provides a bridge between Formalism and Marxism because, while approaching literary texts with detailed formal analyses, he does not see form as an exclusively linguistic phenomenon but as an embodiment of a multiplicity of ideological worldviews. For Bakhtin, style in prose cannot be separated from ideology, and he criticises the emphasis given in stylistics to “private craftsmanship” that invariably leads to ignoring the “social life of discourse outside the artist’s study.” For Bakhtin, the focus on style as signature or expression is misplaced because style always comes from elsewhere, speaking voices which are not the writer’s. This also leads to questioning the conception of style as an “abstract linguistic discourse,” a formalist notion that Bakhtin criticises for ignoring the “fundamentally social modes in which discourse lives.” Style is not monological, since “several stylistic unities” work simultaneously at different levels in a text making style dialogic, multilayered, and not reducible to any one of the voices that traverse it (*DI* 261).

Bakhtin does not deny that style is often *perceived* by readers as being peculiar to a writer; however, he accounts for this stylistic recognisability by attributing it to distinctive, orchestrated combinations of a polyphony of styles rather than a monophonic chant sung by its author. The various voices that infiltrate the language of a text are “orchestrated” by the author but they “do not belong to [his] language” (*DI* 415). The writer is a ventriloquist speaking myriad voices, including that of the author himself, but also of the narrator, incorporated genres, voices which are parodied, imitated or stylised, as well as other social voices and perspectives. For Bakhtin, stylistics is “deaf” to the interplay of voices or “dialogization” in the novel. Several “externally oriented styles,” such as the stylised, the polemical, and the parodic, seem to be clearly addressed at something outside themselves and this problematises a hermetic

understanding of style (*DI* 273). However, Bakhtin goes even further as he asserts that the novel, as a genre, constantly and *inevitably* incorporates the “already uttered.”

Bakhtin’s work on dialogic style in the novel confirms the *teleocratic* orientation of political theories of style. Bakhtin believes that “the internal politics of style [...] is determined by its external politics” (*DI* 284). The conception of style as always oriented towards the “outside” and coming from “elsewhere” leads him to define style teleocratically, as something that “contains within itself indices that reach outside itself, a correspondence of its own elements and the elements of an alien context” (*DI* 284).

Adorno’s understanding of style, while being more complex and subtler than other Marxian versions of the concept, also works within teleocratic dynamics. Adorno takes a rather critical position on style, particularly in terms of its role in the culture industry. Starting from the traditional definition—common in German poetics—of “genuine style” as that which, unlike “artificial style,” is not “imposed from outside” but is based on “the reconciliation of general and of particular, of rules and the specific demands of the subject,” Adorno argues that the culture industry has overreached such distinction. Within the culture industry, style arises from the same source as the cultural machine that determines the subject matter and, therefore, “there is an absence of tension between the poles” (*DE* 102). What remains is thus a “caricature of style,” a radicalisation of it to the extent that everything which is expressed is subsumed through style into “the dominant form of universality.” For Adorno, style can be defined as “obedience to the social hierarchy” and, in this respect, the culture industry “has ceased to be anything but style.” Adorno opposes this conception of style to great art, which, in his view, is based on a “discrepancy” between style and content, the singular work and other mainstream works (*DE* 103), hence his interest in artists like Arnold Schönberg and Pablo Picasso, whose work goes against contemporary trends, and his criticism of Hollywood cinema and jazz for being stamped with “sameness” and suppressing any development which “does not exactly fit the jargon” (*DE* 101).

A defining aspect of the industry is, for Adorno, its obsessive control of style, more obsessive, in fact, than at any time before. The control of stylistic detail is extreme to the point of “stylised barbarism” (*DE* 101). Far from having led to the loss of style—understood as the “promise” of the subsumption of the expressed “into the dominant form of universality”—the culture industry urges remaining within the bounds of established patterns (*DE* 103). This it does through the paradoxical demand to “produce new effects which yet remain bound to the old schema,” a demand which serves merely

as another rule to increase the power of the “tradition which the individual effect seeks to escape” (*DE* 101). Thus, the requirement of constant change in the culture industry serves only for the reproduction of the same. One survives in the culture industry by being faithful to stylistic norms and even one’s particular deviation from the norm is ultimately recuperated by the industry. While before the ascent of the culture industry it might have been possible to distinguish between the great works of art, which achieved self-negation through a *clash* between style and content, and inferior works, which relied on their generic *similarity* with others, in the culture industry stylistic imitation finally becomes “absolute.” Empty style becomes dominant. Style, for Adorno, is thus not just an aesthetic phenomenon, and the conception of style as aesthetic consistency is a “retrospective fantasy.” Instead, “the unity of style” expresses the “different structures of social coercion” and style thus becomes a manifestation of social unfreedom (*DE* 103).

Adorno’s conception of style in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* is teleocratic. Understood in terms of decorum or convergence with dominant trends, style is described as both a trace and a means of social repression through art. Adorno focuses on slightly different aspects of style in *Aesthetic Theory*, in particular, the seeming emphasis on stylistic freedom and innovation in Modernism. Thinking primarily about artworks and art history, Adorno defines style as a “constraining element.” The notion of style collapses in the nineteenth century, together with the illusory idea of “the collective bindingness of art” and, for Adorno, the mourning for the loss of style is “nothing but an incapacity for individuation” (*AT* 206). While, after the loss of belief in style, the bourgeoisie promotes the notion of aesthetic freedom, Adorno argues that the demand for individuality and the seeming loss of aesthetic norms to follow are not complemented by the social freedom that is required for true aesthetic freedom. For Adorno, “artworks produced in freedom [or the illusion of it] cannot thrive under an enduring societal unfreedom whose marks they bear even when they are daring” (*AT* 206). Indeed, if one considers style as functioning at the level of the individual work that resists subsumption under existing stylistic conventions—what one may call “personal style”—one sees that the concept is vanishing. Even the idea of a nonconformist style ultimately becomes conformist, an inevitable aspect of “artworks as language” (*AT* 207). Modernism may thus promise stylistic individuality but this promise itself is ultimately the consequence of societal impositions. For Adorno, therefore—and, as will be seen in Chapter 5, the same may be said about Jameson’s

theory of style—style is always inescapably social even when it presents itself as autonomous and autotelic.

1.8 *Style in the Reader*

A recent development in theories of style has been the reorientation of the focus from the objectified text or the writer as origin to the role of the reader in relation to style. In this respect, however, two fundamentally diverging ways of understanding this relation may be identified. First, style is often defined as being dependent on given norms shared by the readers or audience. Over the last forty years, there has been an unprecedented interest in the way the reader contributes to the creation of meaning in literature. In style studies, this has resulted in developments within the discipline of stylistics, particularly through work in affective stylistics, contextualised stylistics and, more recently, cognitive stylistics. However, as will be suggested in the second part of this section and, more in detail, throughout this study, it is also possible to think of the way style *performs* its readers by *creating* the possibilities of its readability. In this sense, one thinks of style, along with Friedrich Schleiermacher, Blanchot, and Derrida, as an aspect of the eventhood of the work that escapes conceptualisation through given norms.

Prior to the recent emphasis on the reader in stylistics, the audience is also considered to be central in early, classical conceptions of style. Aristotle, for instance, blames the necessity of rhetorical style on “the defects of the hearers.”¹²³ Being unable to comprehend bare facts or to engage with geometrical language devoid of artifice, the audience requires the speaker to employ style. The demand for style also arises because the audience wants to be charmed and is attracted by an element of unfamiliarity in speech. Those listening to the speech are those at whom style is aimed and are thus the *telos* towards which style, as a means, is addressed in a teleocratic structure. The audience is also crucial in relation to the classical concept of *decorum*. While decorum is a quality of the speech, its parameters are set by the audience’s judgment. In the Renaissance, the classical concept of decorum was replaced by the emphasis on *taste* that characterises Renaissance and post-Renaissance audience-oriented aesthetic discourse.

¹²³ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III.1404a.3.

However, twentieth century stylistics puts an even greater emphasis on the reader with the claim that it is not only the case that the audience recognises style in the art object through a sense of taste but that the reader's encounter with the text contributes to the actual creation of stylistic effects. As Jonathan Culler argues in *Structuralist Poetics*, structuralism—the theoretical foundations of much reader-response theory as well as more recent developments in reader-oriented stylistics—undermines the notion that literary works are “harmonious totalities, autonomous natural organisms, complete in themselves and bearing a rich immanent meaning.”¹²⁴ Indeed, from a structuralist perspective, literature has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which readers and writers assimilate. Away from the specific author or specific text, the interest turns to the base structures of meaning creation, such as, for instance, Culler's notion of an internalised *literary competence*. This has the effect of potentially erasing style. Firstly, the focus in such theories is more on the general than the specific or *particular*, which is one of the defining marks of style. Secondly, style is considered in teleocratic terms as triggering or reflecting general structures. Thus, style, like the specific text, risks being reduced to an example of a general law.¹²⁵

In discussing Gadamer's reading of Celan's lyrics, Clark contrasts Gadamer's approach—which seeks to encounter the singular poem at a horizon that it leaves perpetually open to future readers—to the stylistic methods of Michael Riffaterre. Reading—or decoding—William Blake's “The Sick Rose,” for instance, Riffaterre speaks of the way a “natural reader” would understand the poem in terms of variant formulations of well-known stereotypes. Blake's poem, for Riffaterre—and in this it is an “example” of how poems are encountered by readers—“simply uses a lexicon and a collection of images, a sequence of representations that have been pre-arranged, ready-made, and tested for use.” Blake's images are “lexical variants of a structural invariant”¹²⁶ and “the maximal actualization of the structure” Riffaterre identifies.¹²⁷ Rather than “style” as an aspect of the text or as an identifying trait of the author, Riffaterre prefers to talk of “stylistic effects” on the reader that are produced by the deviation of certain passages from the ordinary patterns and context established within the text. Appealing to the dichotomies of content and style as well as norm and

¹²⁴ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 135.

¹²⁵ The problem of the *example*, the *exemplary*, or *exemplarity* in relation to style will be discussed in Chapter 5.

¹²⁶ Michael Riffaterre, “The Self-sufficient text,” *Diacritics* 3.3 (1973): 39–45 (40).

¹²⁷ Riffaterre, “The Self-sufficient text” 42.

deviation, Riffaterre argues that “the style device is an empty sign which stresses the meaningful linguistic elements it affects without modifying their contents, only forcing the decoder’s attention to them.”¹²⁸ Thus, in Riffaterre’s scheme, style functions as a reader-oriented *deviation*, a secondary means of stressing meaning while not being meaningful in itself, an effect evoked in the reader rather than anything substantial.

Riffaterre is echoed by Stanley Fish who also claims that “a stylistic fact is a fact of response.”¹²⁹ For Fish, meaning in a text is activated by what it does in relation to a process of reading. Fish has spoken of his work as a development on Riffaterre’s stylistics because while the latter separates style and meaning—“language expresses, style stresses”¹³⁰—Fish conceives everything within a text, and not only deviant passages, as evoking responses from the reader. Riffaterre posits a discrepancy between ordinary language and literary language, seeing style as a focus on the message itself that is perceivable by the reader in certain passages; on the other hand, Fish understands the encounter between the reader and text as continuously producing stylistic effects. Fish criticises traditional stylistics, which sees the world of the text as ordered and filled with significances that the reader is required to extract, and he suggests that interpretation itself determines what counts as the facts to be observed. For Fish, literature is in some sense about its readers and, therefore, the experience of the reader is the proper object of analysis.

Fish and Riffaterre paved the way for trends in stylistics that have been prevalent since the 1970s, and, as will be seen in Chapter 5, the contemporary “cognitive turn” in stylistics continues the redefinition of style undertaken by reader-response critics. A major premise they share is the understanding that, in reading, meaning arises from the activation or redefinition of pre-existing conceptual schemata and categories shared by writer and reader. This constructivist formula, when applied to style, turns our attention from the text to the reader as the object of analysis and, more specifically, to universal conceptual categories underlying and directing the reader’s experience of the world. Moreover, it posits the text as an object containing or triggering meanings that the reader can fully grasp, process and, subsequently, internalise.

¹²⁸ Michael Riffaterre, “Review of Ullmann (1957),” *Word* 15 (1959): 404–413 (409).

¹²⁹ Stanley Fish, *Is There a text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1980) 65.

¹³⁰ Michael Riffaterre, “Criteria for Style Analysis,” in Seymour Chatman and Samuel R. Levin ed., *Essays on the Language of Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967) 412–430 (413).

It is this understanding of reading as internalisation, the encounter with the work of art as a form of possession and categorisation according to ready-made schemata that is problematised by the thinkers writing in defence of the poetic discussed in this study. Style, from their perspective, may be thought of as an aspect of the eventhood of the poetic that, rather than being activated by that which is already given in the reader, has the potential to institute its own readability. As Clark argues, despite lacking too many explicit references to Immanuel Kant, the thinking of the poetic in Derrida, Blanchot and others is in many ways a “radicalisation of his notion of ‘reflective judgement,’ of which the aesthetic was the purest example.”¹³¹ While in *determining judgement*, one applies already existing concepts, seeing particulars as cases of more general concepts, in *reflective judgement*, as Bowie puts it, one “goes in the opposite direction: its function is to arrive at a general concept, a rule for identifying, a series of particulars.”¹³² At the moment of reflective judgement we are not yet equipped with the conceptuality that would allow us to reduce the work of art to the status of an example or sub-category of that conceptuality. The work of art thus triggers the attempt to conceptualise; it sets judgement in motion rather than fitting within the ready-made categories of judgement.

The resistance—at least in its initial stages—of art to general rules is also a central tenet of Schleiermacher’s thinking about art, interpretation, and, more specifically, style as that which escapes codification according to pre-existing concepts that the reader may have. Schleiermacher starts from the premise that a loose hermeneutical practice of reading, in which understanding is sought automatically, will lead to misunderstanding and, therefore, one has to have rules of interpretation. However, as Bowie shows, Schleiermacher’s claim that there is such a thing as “complete understanding” is more a “regulative idea” than part of a project to develop a universal procedure that can be applied in the interpretation of any text.¹³³ Schleiermacher speaks of two aspects of understanding—the *grammatical* and the *psychological*—as being ideals which every reader’s interpretation must seek to “completely achieve.”¹³⁴ As Frank puts it, “Schleiermacher maintains that every linguistic expression [...] is doubly marked,” manifesting, on the one hand, the system

¹³¹ Clark, *Singularity* 5.

¹³² Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 59.

¹³³ Andrew Bowie, “The Philosophical Significance of Schleiermacher’s Hermeneutics,” in Jacqueline Mariña ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 73–90 (83).

¹³⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism: And Other Writings*, ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 229.

of the totality of the language that prescribes the grammatical parameters of utterances, and, on the other hand, the individual intervention of each speaker or writer, that which exposes the writer's style.¹³⁵ Thus, every author has a dual relationship to language. In Schleiermacher's words, "in part [the author] produces something new in [language], because every connection of a subject and a predicate which has not yet been made is something new [;] in part he preserves what he repeats and reproduces." On the other hand, language too has a dual relation to the author: "In the same way, by knowing the language area, I know the language to the extent that the author is its product and is in its power. Both are therefore the same, only looked at from a different side."¹³⁶

Rather than an expression of universally shareable concepts, the dual relation between the totality of language and the individual, the system and the particular, makes language what Frank calls "an individual universal," something that is mirrored in the dual requirements of hermeneutic understanding, the grammatical and the psychological.¹³⁷ These two aspects of interpretation are kept together by Schleiermacher and they provide a continuously oscillating movement between the general rules of language, which make any utterance attain a form of validity for others, and the individual dimension of language use, which expresses both the speaker's intention and his individual style. However—and this is one way in which Schleiermacher's argument posits a problem for reader-response theories and theories like cognitive stylistics that aim at formulating taxonomies of the conceptual schemata underlying our experience of language—the ideal of complete understanding can never be achieved in full as one can never have all the necessary evidence. Firstly, "no language is present to us in its entirety, not even our mother tongue;"¹³⁸ secondly, the complete determination of an individual's intention would require "a complete knowledge of the person."¹³⁹ As Bowie shows, Schleiermacher starts from the premise that, for ethical reasons, "truth must be presupposed,"¹⁴⁰ but his awareness of the impossibility of "grounding" that presupposition due to the "regress of judgement" means that he concedes that no theory can ever claim to guarantee complete understanding.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ Manfred Frank, "The Text and Style. Schleiermacher's Hermeneutic Theory of Language," trans. Richard Hannah and Michael Hays, *boundary 2* 11.3 (1983): 11–28 (19).

¹³⁶ Schleiermacher 91.

¹³⁷ Frank, "The Text and its Style," 22.

¹³⁸ Schleiermacher 14.

¹³⁹ Schleiermacher 11.

¹⁴⁰ Bowie, *From Romanticism* 109.

¹⁴¹ Bowie, *From Romanticism* 111.

Thus, one can never really step out of the circularity of the hermeneutic circle. One needs to always assume that one has understood something before attempting to explain something but the original understanding cannot be grounded without a prior assumption. This leads to an infinite regression. As Bowie shows, Schleiermacher “suggests vital reasons why determining judgement is inadequate as a basis for interpretation,” in the Kantian sense of the judgement of particulars on the basis of pre-existing general rules.¹⁴² All utterances are context-dependent and one can only consider an utterance to be an objective representation of something if one remains within the general system of language. However, every utterance incorporates also an individual dimension in the sense that it arises from the action of an individual. Thus, understanding cannot be exclusively grammatical but must take into consideration the individual intentionality. Still, getting to the heart of the individual dimension is impossible because even the individual writer or speaker “depends upon external influences and contexts for their identity.”¹⁴³

It is in the interface between the general and the individual that style arises for Schleiermacher. The individual remains within language through a combination of already existing elements. However, as Bowie explains, “these elements cannot really be prescribed in advance in terms of rules”—or, for our purposes, in terms of a taxonomy of conceptual schemata—and this is what leads Schleiermacher to the assertion that “there can be no concept of a style.”¹⁴⁴ This does not mean that style does not exist, that is, that there cannot be style, but that, contrary to the teleocratic project of structuralist stylistics, no style can be conceptualised or explained on the basis of existing rules. For Schleiermacher, style, unlike mannerism, which is “superficially learned or habituated or done for effect,”¹⁴⁵ is something that arises from “personal individuality” and is manifested in the way the individual intervenes in language through “individuality of presentation.”¹⁴⁶ Style, while arising from the individual’s interaction with language, challenges the totality of language with something new. As Frank explains, at this moment of the event of style—which anticipates in various ways what Blanchot will call the *interruption* or the *anarchic* in art—the individual’s style “has not yet been codified and is in this sense ineffable.” The particularity of style leaves its mark in the way that the language differs from any other combinations, and

¹⁴² Bowie, *From Romanticism* 112.

¹⁴³ Bowie, *From Romanticism* 113.

¹⁴⁴ Schleiermacher 96.

¹⁴⁵ Schleiermacher 91.

¹⁴⁶ Schleiermacher 95.

this cannot be explained simply through recourse to the already-existing rules and grammatical structures of the system:

It is true that syntax, semantics, and—as far as it formulates its own rules—pragmatics constitute the *conditiones sine quibus non* of language use, but none of these instances is thereby the *cause per quam* of the individual combination through which the free thought of the speaking subject manifests itself in its individuality—which is never necessitated and thus never completely schematizable.

Style does not contradict any existing rules but it “originally locates universal signs in relation to an actual meaning, the light of which illuminates the signs in this particular combination.”¹⁴⁷ How is it possible, then, to explain style through already existing concepts when style transforms the system in its appearance? It is specifically this insight that Schleiermacher refers to through the concept of “divination”:

namely, that language systems on their own never disclose in advance a particular interpretation of an actual use of language and that the individual meaning (prior to the codified semantics/syntactics of the sign chain which bears it) cannot be derived on the basis of discovery procedures of a deductive/decoding type [...]. What is made commensurable by the “comparison” cannot be the “new” [...] the as-yet incomparable of a phrase just heard, unless a conjectural hypothesis (“divination”) had already made the meaning, the individual combinatory manner of the author, commensurable or possibly open to divination, by a leap of the imagination or an originary “guess.”¹⁴⁸

To think of style after Schleiermacher and Kant is to leave open the possibility of the new, of invention in the Derridian sense of a *first time* that constitutes itself in opening itself to iterability. It is also to think, more radically and impossibly, of the Blanchotian anarchic moment of absolute freedom, that moment in which “there is a stop, a suspension [...], society falls apart completely. The law collapses: for an instant there is innocence; history is interrupted” (BR 205).

This critique of teleocratic theories of style, an instance of a wider defence of that which is singular in the poetic, can also be an *ethical* response to style in the sense given to the term by Levinas’s recasting of ethics as the putting into question of the *same* by the otherness of the other, *alterity*. From a Derridian and Blanchotian perspective, the reader has a role in the structure of the work’s emergence but, as Clark puts it, “[g]enuine reading [...] should be free of presupposition in its approach to its

¹⁴⁷ Frank, “The Text and its Style” 24.

¹⁴⁸ Frank, “The Text and its Style” 25.

object.” While, in Blanchot’s words, for the critic, “it is no longer the work that counts but only what is behind it” (*IC* 320), Blanchot, Gadamer, and Derrida show a concern with the eventhood of the singular encounter with the text.¹⁴⁹ From this perspective, style is not simply the triggering of a pre-existing concept but something that can create or perform its own readability while, at one and the same time, depending on the reader for its coming into being.

Jean-François Lyotard too highlights the responsibility that is demanded from the reader. For Lyotard, a deconstructive reading is necessarily an ethical reading that does not look for cognitive recognition and interpretative closure but which seeks to preserve the eventhood—the *it happens*—of the literary event. The openness to the other which puts a demand on the reader calls for an alternative way of studying style to teleocratic theories of style. The work is not simply a mediator of meaning. As Bill Readings explains, a deconstructive reading “pushes texts to the point at which they become events, happenings which disrupt any previously existing criteria by which they might have been ‘understood’, recognized, assigned a meaning.”¹⁵⁰ Reading is directed at the event in its singularity, its radical difference from all other events. Style, understood as that which escapes conceptualisation, accentuates the eventhood of the event, an opening to something unforeseeable which we do not know how to seize through understanding.

Responding to the eventhood of the event is not a refusal to read in order to preserve the absolute singularity of the work. Indeed, singularity is constitutively open to reading or, to think this through and with Derrida, the absolute singularity of a signature is always repeated and hence split by the countersignature—the “yes”-saying—that is necessary for its validation. The work presupposes reading and, while it is there before the reader, it is constituted by its openness to future reading: “it begins by calling for the co-respondent countersignature” (*SI* 70). To countersign style is thus not to apply already available knowledge to the text being read but to, at one and the same time, acknowledge the singularity of the other and inevitably depart from it. The countersignatory—or the reader—“does not exist” as an entity “before the work” as its “straightforward ‘receiver’.” On the contrary, there is something in the text which “produces its reader,” a reader “who does not yet exist” and hence “whose competence

¹⁴⁹ Timothy Clark, “The Impossible Lightness of Reading: Blanchot and the Communicational Model of Subjectivity,” *Southern Review* 28 (1995): 83–95 (86).

¹⁵⁰ Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 128.

cannot be identified.” The work invents the reader and it “teaches the reader to countersign” (*SI* 74).

CHAPTER 2: GADAMER AND STYLE

2.1 Introduction

“Style” (“Stil”) is not a word that appears very frequently in Gadamer’s work and, when it does, it is not a key term in his thinking. When writing on art and literature—especially poetry—Gadamer directs his attention to an ontological conception of art as a mode of “truth,” criticising the prioritisation of human expression or formal matters, which are, on the contrary, highlighted in traditional theories of style. At the same time, however, Gadamer insists on what he calls “the essential linguisticity of all human experience of the world” (*PH* 19). His hermeneutic interest in “truth” is essentially Heideggerian in orientation, with “truth” being conceived in terms of *alētheia* rather than *adaequatio*. Thus, he writes, in “the hermeneutic science, a verbal formulation does not merely refer to something that could be verified in other ways; instead it makes something visible in the how of its meaningfulness.” Language does refer to something that can be made visible but this “something” can only be verified through language itself. For Gadamer, the “how” of language—and here it is possible to think of “how” as “way” or, in one sense of the word, “style”—is not simply a derivative reflection of something that exists as a thing or object before its bringing to “meaningfulness” but a significant player in the unveiling of “truth” (*TM* 567).

Style has an ambivalent role in Gadamer’s thinking. Some aspects of style are deemed secondary; Gadamer, for instance, is not interested in an exclusively *aesthetic* consideration of style as a rhetorical device or as an essentially individualising way of writing. On the other hand, style—even if Gadamer may not specifically use this term—is deemed ineluctable in poetry, especially the lyric, in relation to which Gadamer speaks of poetic truth as a form of “saying” which elevates the content of the work to absolute presence (*OTW* 148). Gadamer warns against “overemphasis[ing] how a text is said” (*TI* 42) and directs attention to “the power of Being in the word” (*OTW* 152). Nonetheless, as an inherent part of the coming to presence of the poetic work, the word makes itself tangible in its texture, sound, rhythm and corporeality. Moving away from a mimetic tradition of aesthetics which, in Gadamer’s view, has not allowed poetry to reach its “full potentiality” of integration between beauty and truth (*OTW* 143), he argues that what comes to be in art or poetry, through the “how” of a text, is “self-presence” and not an expression of some kind of anterior truth. As Gadamer puts it,

“there are no poetic objects [;] there is only a poetic presentation of objects” (*OTW* 142).

This chapter argues that, for Gadamer, poetic truth, while transcending style, only arises through one’s patient *tarrying* with the words of the poem and what can be called their solidity or materiality rather than any transparent transmission of a pre-existing truth. In Gadamer, style functions within the paradoxical and circular parameters of “singularisation” as described by Clark.¹ Style is an aspect of that which, in the poetic, resists translatability, transference, or absolute conceptualisation. However, it is also implicated in a poetic dynamic whereby meaning arises or is brought to presence. Style crystallises the singularity of the poem, but it also leads to an intensification of meaning or what Clark calls an awakening of “the latent depth of [the poem’s] implication.”² As Gadamer puts it, “[l]iterature points out this emergence of words so that in it the irreplaceable uniqueness of sound and meaning can simultaneously hint at an indeterminate polyphony of meaning” (*PL* 254). In Celan’s lyrics, this singularisation enacts itself in a simultaneous obscurity or impenetrability, which has often led readers, including Gadamer, to speak of Celan’s modern and “hermetic” style, and a blooming of nuances and connotations that leave the poem perpetually open to and demanding of future readings.

2.2 *Unity and Normativity: Style and Genre*

Thinking of style in terms of the paradoxical dynamics of singularisation—style as a moment of resistance and, simultaneously, as opening a multitude of pathways to future readings—will involve countersigning Gadamer’s actual use of the term by, on the one hand, responding to the way it functions in his work and, on the other, extending its implications. Considering Gadamer’s insistence that “understanding” (“Verstehen”)—if it is going to be more than what Stanley Rosen designates as “the apprehension of facts, rules, inferential patterns, or formal structures”³—is a form of “fusion of horizons” (“Horizontverschmelzung”) which involves a return to tradition that is, however, always encountered in different, singular, future temporalities, it is not surprising that a detailed

¹ See Clark, *Singularity* 38–40. Singularisation is “(1) the pushing of received concepts [...] to the point at which they become circular, or are seen to rest on an unacknowledged dogmatism; (2) a tightening of that sense of circularity in such a way that the matter of the enquiry—language, the thing, the poem—becomes opaque in terms of received concepts, an interruption which may draw us towards a pre-conceptual space in which they may give themselves to our attention as newly questionable” (40).

² Clark, *Singularity* 69.

³ Stanley Rosen, “Horizontverschmelzung,” in Lewis Edwin Hahn ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1997) 207–218 (207).

investigation into Gadamer's pronouncements on style reveals that he tends to discuss style in terms of its *historical* development as well as in relation to how it can function within an *ontological* conception of the work of art. For Gadamer, the word traditionally connotes *normativity*—style as a prescriptive demand in terms of correctness or decorum—and *unity*—style as recognisability through recurrence, whether at the level of an individual artist or of a whole historical movement. Both the normative and the unifying aspects of style are inescapable but, in relation to Gadamer's ontology of the work, they are deemed insufficient or secondary in a consideration of the *truth* of the work. Indeed, it is the understanding of the term within an aesthetic separation of truth and beauty that has led Gadamer to be wary of “the concept of style” (*OTW* 143).

Frequently, as in “The Science of the Life-World,” Gadamer uses the term in a way that is more or less equivalent to a “way of doing something.” For instance, Gadamer talks about Edmund Husserl's “new style of scientific philosophy” (*PH* 185). Husserl's scientific philosophy, founded in the analysis of transcendental subjectivity, is presented as a “new style of science” (*PH* 194). Here, clearly, the term “style” is used to refer to a “way” of thinking or doing scientific philosophy. Likewise, Gadamer describes Heidegger as either a “neo-Kantian and logician basing his thought on ‘the fact of science’ in the style of Cohen or a phenomenologist of transcendental subjectivity in the style of Husserl” (*RAS* 55). Elsewhere in the same text, Gadamer uses the term to refer to a general characteristic of a given era. For instance, Gadamer speaks of Heidegger's *Kehre* or “turn” as “harmoniz[ing] with a new sensibility or style of the epoch, which, exhausted from the subtle sensuality of impressionistic enchantment, called out for a new, constructive objectivity” (*RAS* 42–43). Thus, different epochs are said to have different styles. Applying Gadamer's own analysis of the traditional meaning of the term, Gadamer may thus be said to use “style” as a term denoting *unity*, in the sense that style identifies different thinkers or eras, as well as *normativity*, in the sense that style “harmoniz[es]” with or is guided by the norms of “the epoch.”

Considering the ambivalent position that style holds in Gadamer's thinking—style is both essential and secondary in the coming to presence of the work—it is perhaps fitting that his most sustained discussion of style is to be found in several passing references and a four-page Appendix in *Truth and Method*, that is, on the margins of his most renowned work. Here, in a somewhat innovative formulation of the term, Gadamer considers style as a form of mediation between the sense of “taste” and the social norms of “fashion.” While taste, understood through Kantian reflective

judgment, is not “dependent on an empirical universality, the complete unanimity of the judgment of others,” it makes a claim to universality by suggesting that others *should* agree with one’s taste. Fashion, on the other hand, is completely subservient to social generalisation because, being a “matter of mode,” it “has no other norm than that given by what everybody does.” For Gadamer, style is that which relates the “demands of fashion to a whole that one’s own taste keeps in view.” Style “accepts only what harmonizes with this whole” determined by one’s own taste (*TM* 33). Thus, style is here understood as the selection from fashion of that which agrees with one’s sense of taste, thus combining *unity* (with the individual) and *normativity* (a pursuit of decorum or what is “fitting”). One’s style is an individual choice from socially-determined possibilities in terms of whether something is appropriate for the individual.

Gadamer unveils a similar concern with unity and normativity in “the fairly unexplored history of the word” (*TM* 494). In its early form, style replaces the “genera dicendi” of classical rhetoric. Thus, in rhetoric, style refers to a particular mode of speaking and writing appropriate to particular purposes. The requirement of decorum, of using a “correct style,” makes style a normative concept (*TM* 494). Moreover, style also presupposes “unity,” as is also discernible in the “personal use” of the word to refer to “the individual hand that is recognizable everywhere in the works of the same artist” (*TM* 495).

The normative and unifying elements of style are also central to Goethe’s use of the word, which Gadamer claims “reveals the conceptual content that the word ‘style’ *always* has” (*TM* 495, my emphasis). Goethe develops his definition of style through a tripartite classification of *imitation* of nature, *manner*, and *style*. Speaking mainly about pictorial art, Goethe describes style as the highest stage that art can reach, a quality that not every artist possesses. In its simplest form, art may be a faithful and industrious “imitation” of the forms and colours of nature. However, some artists may find this kind of art too restrictive and may thus develop a personal language to express what they can conceive. Such artists have “manner” and, in their work, their “soul [...] obtains direct expression and significance.”⁴ Those who have style, however, combine the expressive aspect of manner with an awareness of “the deepest principles of knowledge [...] the very nature of things [...] in visible and tangible forms.”⁵ Thus, Goethe relegates the traditional definition of style as an expression of individuality to “manner” and adds the

⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Simple Imitation of Nature; Manner; Style (1789),” Lane Cooper ed., *Theories of Style* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968 [1907]) 192–198 (195).

⁵ Goethe 196.

requirement of knowledge of nature for an artist to be described as having “style.” Gadamer latches onto this distinction and argues that, therefore, with Goethe, style “retains a normative sense” as the great artist, to have style, is still obliged to keep with “the nature of things” while developing an individual manner. Thus, Gadamer concludes, style “is by no means a mere peculiarity of expression; it always refers to something fixed and objective that is binding on individual forms of expression” (*TM* 495).

The insistence of normativity and unity is also discernible in the use of style as a historical category, particularly in the history of art discussed as a “history of style” (*TM* 496). Here again, faithfulness to norms determines whether a particular work may be seen as fitting within the particular style of a time and thus contributing to its recognisability. Indeed, Gadamer speculates that the meaning of style as personal recognisability probably derives from “the ancient practice of canonizing classical representatives of particular genera dicendi” (*TM* 495). Style begins as a *normative* term but then becomes also descriptive of a *unity*.

The normative dimension of style, for Gadamer, can be thought in terms of Kant’s notion of reflective judgment as grasping “in the individual object, the universal under which it is to be subsumed” (*TM* 34). Motivated by taste, the evaluation of whether style is “fitting” cannot be an application of readily available rules but must be based on “a ‘sense’ for it.” As Gadamer puts it, “[j]udgment is necessary in order to make a correct evaluation of the concrete instance” (*TM* 34). As such, stylistic judgments are aesthetic judgements. They involve the identification of not just an example of a general rule but an “individual case” that is not “comprehend[ed]” by the existing rules. In this sense, even if Gadamer does not explicitly acknowledge the connection, Gadamer’s conception of style is close to Schleiermacher’s view that style escapes conceptualisation. However, while Schleiermacher highlights the *eventhood* of style in the way it transforms the system that cannot, initially, conceptualise it, Gadamer finds style—as an aspect of Kantian *aesthetics*—to be inadequate in dealing with the more fundamental notion of the “truth” of the work of art. In other words, for Gadamer, stylistic evaluation should be supplemented by ontological consideration of the work of art as truth.

Style, it seems for Gadamer, is “one of [art’s] inevitable conditions” and “it is presupposed wherever art is to be understood”; however, Gadamer believes that “the concept of style is inadequate to describe the experience of art and the scholarly understanding of it” (*TM* 497). Style, Gadamer concludes, “means a unity of

expression” and hence describes something that responds to anterior norms. Studying art in terms of the history of style is thus reductive because this approach fails to “take account of the essential fact that something is taking place in it and we are not just being presented with an intelligible series of events” (*TM* 497).

In Gadamer’s view, hermeneutics has the effect of putting style, as traditionally conceived, in crisis because it “shake[s] up” the “autonomy of viewing art from the vantage point of the history of style” or “individual styles” (*PH* 38). To think of a work as a self-contained unit with a style (as in New Criticism and various forms of formalism), of an epoch as a unified body of work defined by a style (as in Art History), or of genre in terms of a collection of works subsumed under the same stylistic norms (as in Structuralist attempts to compile taxonomies of specific genres) is to miss the “fusion of horizons” at work in the encounter of any work of art through hermeneutic reflection (*PH* 39). The encounter with the work is not an instrumental use of an object stuck in time or an unveiling of a dead past, but a clash or fusion between one’s prejudgements and the work, a meeting that leads to the “transformation” of one’s “preunderstanding” (*PH* 38).

As will be seen below, for Gadamer, genres can no longer be regarded as timeless; on the contrary, genres and historical styles are history-bound and their status changes with time. This does not mean that one should not be aware of genre and related stylistic norms, and, in an interview, Gadamer speaks of “the vital importance of a literary genre” in understanding a text (*DEB* 167). Giving the example of Plato’s *The Republic*, which can only be understood if it is considered in relation to the genre of Utopia within which it operates, Gadamer suggests that in understanding one starts from an awareness of the historical situatedness of a text. Nonetheless, it is equally important to recognise that, as Fred R. Dallmayr puts it, genres and styles are continuously “reappropriated and reinterpreted every time” they are encountered.⁶ What Gadamer means by “understanding” in terms of how we encounter the work of others through a “fusion of horizons” is explained in detail in *Reason in the Age of Science*:

one has to master the grammatical rules, the stylistic devices, the art of composition upon which the text is based, if one wishes to understand what the author wanted to say in his text; but the main issue in all understanding concerns the meaningful relationship that exists between the statements of the text and our understanding of the reality under discussion. (*RAS* 98)

⁶ Fred Reinhard Dallmayr, *In Search of the Good Life: A Pedagogy for Troubled Times* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007) 144.

Thinking of “style” as a descriptive category that posits works as static objects in time would thus lead to missing what Gadamer calls the “ontological valence” or the “truth” of the work that arises, every time singularly and anew, in the hermeneutic encounter with the work. However, this chapter argues, thinking of style beyond unity and normativity allows us to see how style may be deemed central to Gadamer’s conception of the truth of the work, specifically by marking a singularising moment of obfuscation and opening during one’s encounter with the work.

2.3 *Style and the Proper*

Gadamer’s critique of the conceptualisation of art as a form of “expression” poses a challenge to theories that seek to explain style by teleocratically rooting it in the artist or writer as origin. Following and extending Heidegger, Gadamer formulates an ontological conception of the truth of the word not as an aspect of “an activity or self-expression of someone or something” (*OTW* 137) but as having “the temporal character of uniqueness and of an event” (*OTW* 138). A concern with style as the *proper* (style as decorum, as proper signature, as image of man) bypasses the singular truth of the work, which, for Gadamer, is not a property of the writer or of a previously existing reality but something that arises in a singular event in the hermeneutic encounter with the work.

As suggested by the title of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer’s interest in art is never really separable from his concern with what Robert Bernasconi describes as “an irresistible truth that the dogmatic application of method overlooks.”⁷ While Gadamer retains the term, “mimesis,” which is also central to referential theories of art, he makes it a point to distinguish between what he understands by the term and a “crass naturalistic misunderstanding” of it. Echoing Heidegger’s conception of truth as *alētheia*, Gadamer argues that mimesis is not to be understood as producing a faithful copy of the original but as “a kind of showing,” not in the sense of demonstrating something that exists separately, but as elevating what is shown (*RB* 128). Against the conception of style as the proper, Gadamer argues that art is not to be measured according to its degree of faithfulness or appropriateness to a previously verifiable nature. What Gadamer uses is a redefined sense of “mimesis,” one which is understood in a “more universal sense” as the “presentation of order” (*RB* 103). Art, Gadamer suggests, is an attempt at world building, and mimesis occurs in the mirroring of the

⁷ Robert Bernasconi, Introduction, in Gadamer, *RB* xi.

internal attempt of the work to create order. As Georgia Warnke puts it, since art is an attempt to represent the truth of its autonomy as art, “[r]educing its meaning to an expression of its author’s creativity reflects [...] an unjustifiable restriction of the knowledge it contains.”⁸

Another fundamental reason for Gadamer’s critique of teleocratic theories that root art in its author or origin is that such approaches bypass the interpreter’s or reader’s involvement in a dynamic encounter through which the work’s meaning is revealed. As Jean Grondin explains, Gadamer “wishes to take issue with the notion that to understand is to reconstruct, in a *disinterested* fashion, the meaning of the text according to its author.”⁹ Such disinterestedness assumes that the reader can somehow return to the author’s original intention in the text, but the reader himself, Gadamer argues, brings into play a certain pre-understanding of the matter at hand that cannot be ignored. Thus, rather than deciphering an author’s meaning, a Gadamerian reading involves coming to a form of *agreement* about the “subject matter” (“Sache”). In Gadamer’s words, “to understand means to come to an understanding with each other,” that is, primarily “agreement [...] with respect to something” (*TM* 180). The subject matter is not separate from the “process of mutual understanding” but “the path and goal of mutual understanding” (*TM* 180).

Due to the interrelations he sees between author, text, and reader, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is antagonistic to theories that seek to explain literature simply through a return to origins, a retracing of the intentionality of the writer. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer develops this argument through a discussion of Schleiermacher, whom Gadamer feels aestheticises art too much at the expense of “truth” by adopting a subjectivist stance to interpretation. Gadamer’s main point of contention with Schleiermacher is that, in Gadamer’s opinion, Schleiermacher “views the statement a text makes as a free production, and disregards its content as knowledge.” Consequently, “as an interpreter [Schleiermacher] regards the texts, independently of their claim to truth, as purely expressive phenomena” (*TM* 194).

Gadamer’s interpretation of Schleiermacher’s theory of style is founded on the view that Schleiermacher’s work involves a fundamental shift from previous hermeneutic thought in the sense that his aim is not only that of discovering what words

⁸ Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987) 55.

⁹ Jean Grondin, “Gadamer’s Basic Understanding of Understanding,” in Robert J. Dostal ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 36–51 (40, my emphasis).

may mean objectively but also “the individuality of the speaker or author” (*TM* 186). This reading of Schleiermacher has been convincingly demonstrated as inaccurate but it is relevant here in that it is somewhat indicative of Gadamer’s own critique of style as expression and the reasons behind that critique.¹⁰

As seen in Chapter 1, Schleiermacher speaks not only of “grammatical explication,” which relates to the way the “pre-given totality of language” affects writing and interpretation, but also of “psychological explication,” which Gadamer describes as Schleiermacher’s “most characteristic contribution” (*TM* 186). Psychological understanding, in Gadamer’s account of Schleiermacher, is a divinatory process involving an attempt to retrace the creative act of the original production. This focus on the creative source, in Gadamer’s view, leads to understanding becoming primarily “aesthetic” and to subject matter being sidelined (*TM* 187). For Gadamer, Schleiermacher’s concept of “divination” results in an undue emphasis on the subject, with art being understood as “an expression of creative productivity” at the expense of truth (*TM* 187). Gadamer understands “divination” as a form of empathy whereby the interpreter shares an author’s “geniality” through a form of “con-geniality,” a “feeling, [...] an immediate, sympathetic and congenial understanding” (*TM* 190).¹¹ For Gadamer, Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics conceives of the text as a unique manifestation of the author’s life and the interpreter has to try to overcome the “obscurity of the Thou” in order to come to an understanding of the life context of the author from which the work originated (*TM* 190). It is this perceived hankering for the origin and the subsequent sidelining of the encounter with the work that Gadamer sees as reductive of the truth of art in the notion of style.

Gadamer clarifies his problematisation of style as an expression of the proper through an extension of the concept of style to the political arena. The significance of a historical event is not limited to the way it may be “an expression of its time,” and we are misguided if we think we have understood a historical event simply by conceiving it as an “expressive phenomenon.” Similarly, in art, the significance of a work does not simply reside in its being an “expression” of the artistic era in which it was produced, its author or its stylistic genre. What “style” as a *descriptive* category stops us from

¹⁰ See Frank, “The Text and Its Style” 11–28; Bowie, *From Romanticism* 124–125; Thomas Pfau, “Immediacy and the Text: Friedrich Schleiermacher’s Theory of Style and Interpretation,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51.1 (1990): 51–73.

¹¹ Gadamer misinterprets Schleiermacher when he speaks of divination as a way of bridging the historical gap between interpreter and interpreted. Indeed, as Bowie shows, not only does Schleiermacher not endorse the idea of a “congenial” or emphatic capacity form meaning-production on the part of the interpreter, but he actually rejects this idea (Bowie, *From Romanticism* 47).

seeing is that “something is taking place” in the work and it is not simply an expression of something coming before the work (*TM* 497). Therefore, if one is to think of style in relation to Gadamer’s thinking, one will have to do so through his contribution to a phenomenological understanding of the ontological truth of the work.

In *Truth and Method*, this “truth” is discussed in terms of “the ontological valence of the picture” (*TM* 130). In front of a picture, one is not directed to something else outside of the picture that is somehow being represented but is urged to remain with the picture as the bringing into being of that which is represented. Even in representational painting, Gadamer argues, the picture “has an autonomy that also affects the original” in the sense that “it is only through the picture [...] that the original [...] becomes the original.” For instance, “it is only by being pictured that a landscape becomes picturesque” (*TM* 136). In “On the Truth of the Word,” Gadamer thinks of an analogous ontological valence for language. Embracing the thinking of truth not as “self-expression of someone or something” but as “Being” (*OTW* 137) entails moving away from the human as a foundation for truth towards thinking the “authentic word—the word as true word” as being “determined from Being and as the word in which truth occurs.” Thus, “truth” happens in the “word” rather than in some form of correspondence, and to “be a word means to be saying” (*OTW* 138).

For Gadamer, a word stands by “saying,” and he endeavours to discuss the “saying-being” of the word through an analysis of the written word as a form of limit-case that allows him to isolate this essential aspect of the word. He terms this “saying-being” of the word “statement,” resorting to the idea that the validity of a statement, unlike a pledge or notification, depends exclusively on what the statement says rather than any other external factor, such as “the occasionality of the author” (*OTW* 139). This is where poetry becomes essentially important for Gadamer, especially in his late essays. In determining “which word [...] is the most saying,” Gadamer distinguishes between three categories of texts that are “statements”: the religious, the judicial and the literary, which correspond to three respective forms of “saying,” that is, the pledge, the notification and the statement “in the narrower sense” (*OTW* 140). In the case of the pledge, “language steps beyond itself” in relation to some form of agreement and it “finds its completion in the acceptance of belief” (*OTW* 140). Similarly, the legal text requires external factors for it to be complete since a legal text completes itself “in its execution” (*OTW* 141). The *poetic* text—and, for Gadamer, the lyric more than any other kind of poem—or the statement in a *narrower* sense, distinguishes itself from the other forms of statement by being self-sufficient and completing itself. In unravelling

what he means by describing poetry as a statement in the narrower sense, Gadamer decisively refutes the suggestion that poetry can be reduced “to an act of intending to which the author gives expression.” Unlike a written note intended as a reminder or a message, for instance, in which the written words are “secondary in relation to a first, originally meaningful speaking,” a literary text “raises its own voice [...] of itself and speaks for no other, not even a God or a law” (*OTW* 145).

In this sense, following Heidegger, Gadamer thinks of the word in a work of poetry as being “more saying than elsewhere” (*OTW* 144). Staying very close to Heidegger’s words in his discussion of the way the work of art “sets up a world” and allows the earth to “come forth” and “shelter” (*OWA* 45), Gadamer asks: “What does the coming forth of the word in poetry mean?” (*OTW* 144). In his essay, Heidegger speaks of the “coming forth” of the materials in the temple-work, through which “the rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colours to glow, tones to sing, the word to speak” (*OWA* 45). Analogously, Gadamer states that his thesis is that “as the colours in a painting shine more brightly and the stone in a building carries more, so the word in a work of poetry is more saying than elsewhere” (*OTW* 144). Language and word, in poetry, are language and word “in a preeminent sense” (*RB* 134). In this respect, it is being argued that thinking of style through Gadamer has to account for how style contributes to, rather than occludes, the word of poetry being “more saying than elsewhere.”

2.4 *Style and Translatability*

Gadamer’s prioritisation of poetry, and especially the lyric, as a limit-case of the word as “saying” can be understood in the context of what he calls the *eminent text* and the *scale of translatability*, notions that he appeals to repeatedly in his thinking of how the word comes to presence differently in different genres and different modes of language. While the status of philosophy within this scale is difficult to determine, with Gadamer alternating between highlighting its similarities to and differences from poetry in their respective relations to language, Gadamer is consistent in thinking of the lyric as encapsulating to an extreme the status of poetry as an “eminent text” and, consequently, as the most untranslatable of genres. Style, this chapter argues, becomes more ineluctable the more poetry is thought of as being untranslatable, and the lyric, within Gadamer’s thought, functions as a limit case for style as an aspect of *poiesis*.

As Clark points out, Gadamer's use of the term "lyric" is "distinctive" and it does not carry the meaning of "externalisation of subjective emotion" or "drama of consciousness" conventionally associated with the genre.¹² Gadamer tends to "follow [...] a tried phenomenological principle" of approaching philosophical "question[s] from an extreme case," and he thinks of the lyric as a limit case of "the poetic text which stands on its account" (*RB* 134). While literature in general is on the side of the lyric, Gadamer often resorts to the argument that there exists, within literature itself, a "sliding scale of translatability of [...] texts into other languages." If the lyric is at the top of this scale, "the novel takes bottom place" in that it is not essentially defined by the fusion of sound and sense (*ET* 8). As such, translation is "perhaps" possible "with the novel and drama" (*GE* 68) but the lyric is untranslatable and it "implies in the clearest possible way the inseparability of the linguistic work of art and its original manifestation of a language" (*RB* 134). The lyrical word "is language in a paradigmatic sense," especially when in poets like Mallarmé it is raised to the "ideal of *poésie pure*" (*TM* 577).

In what Gadamer describes as its hermetic untranslatability, lyric poetry attains a peculiarly important role in the twentieth century to the point of becoming "the dominant form of poetry in our time" (*GE* 89). Gadamer suggests that if the poetic word "stands" on its own, the hermetic style of poetry becomes crucial in ensuring that the poetic word is still perceived within the context of "the flood of information" that becomes overwhelming in the twentieth century (*RB* 25). As Gadamer argues in detail in his reading of Celan, "in the age of mass communication such lyric poetry necessarily has a hermetic character" (*RB* 135). His claim, therefore, is that lyric poetry in the Modern era has to be written in a certain style in order to allow "language as language [to come] into view" (*TM* 577). This does not mean that Gadamer thinks of the contemporary lyric as being primarily definable through style, as certain reductive accounts of postmodernism would have it in defining postmodern literature. Indeed, despite the fragmentary style of some of the lyric poets he discusses, Gadamer is always careful not to forget "the unity of sense" that exists "wherever speech exists" (*RB* 135). However, and this is why it can be argued that style is ineluctable in the lyric, Gadamer locates this unity in the intersection between "the tonal and the significative forces of language" even if the images evoked may not be clearly conceptualisable. The Heideggerian dynamic of disclosure and concealment is enacted here too as Gadamer argues that "there is not a single word in a poem that does not intend what it means,"

¹² Clark, *Singularity* 71.

but, at the same time, the poetic word “sets itself back upon itself to prevent it slipping into prose,” a literary genre which is placed on the other end of the translatability spectrum from the lyric (*RB* 136). Gadamer is clearly keen to retain both the irreplaceability of the poetic word—the way tone, style and materiality resist erasure—and the way poetry unveils truth as *alētheia* or unconcealment. The poetic is thus implicated in a movement of singularisation, and style is something that relates to the word “standing” as a word.

In “Philosophy and Literature,” Gadamer comments on the way the lyric, “even when it appears to be far from explicit intelligibility,” still “depends upon the inner movement of meaning” (*PL* 251). In a familiar move for Gadamer in his discussion of the poetic word, he refers to Valéry’s metaphor of the difference between the poetic word and the everyday word as the difference between an old gold coin and a paper bill. While the paper bill, like everyday language, is valuable only in terms of what it represents, the coin, like the poetic word, “is its own value” in the sense that it is literally worth its weight in gold (*PL* 250). The exchange value of everyday language, its ability to transmit information, is almost completely abandoned in extreme forms of the lyric in which “the means of grammar and syntax are employed as sparingly as possible” (*PL* 251). However, the “movement of sound” and, arguably, of style in poetry remains attached to the “movement of meaning” in an “insoluble unity,” something which Gadamer believes is wrongly underestimated by structuralist studies of literature inspired by Roman Jakobson and his depiction of the poetic as a linguistic function oriented toward the message for its own sake. Again, one can see Gadamer’s refutation of “mere” formalism.

The untranslatability of the lyric is paradigmatic of what Gadamer calls the “eminent text.” In “The Eminent Text and Its Truth,” Gadamer starts from the Kantian notion of the beautiful as “justified by its own being.”¹³ He then moves on to distinguish literature from other discourses by arguing that literature “postulates its own validity as a last court of appeal,” in the sense that literature (by which he means “*belles-lettres*”) suspends a referential relation to truth (*ET* 3). Literature claims to go “beyond every limited form of address and occasion” and, therefore, it is “*qua* literary work of art, eminent” (*ET* 5). Within the eminent text, language is “elevated” (*ET* 6) through a “full equivalency of sense and sound” (*ET* 8). Significantly, Gadamer insists that this

¹³ As Gadamer notes elsewhere, the autotelic being of poetry is mirrored in the meaning of the word beautiful (in Greek, *kalon*), which describes an attribute that enlightens “for no other reason than because of its own appearance” (*OTW* 143).

elevation of language is not the result of specific “choice of style or [...] stylization” but “the direct expression of the structure of the construct that urgently imposes itself on reader and author alike” (*ET* 6). In saying this, Gadamer does not so much exclude style from having a role in the eminent text but suggests that an eminent text cannot be created by consciously reproducing the style of eminent texts through “craftsmanship” (*ET* 7). However, neither is the content or subject-matter enough to make a text eminent since for Gadamer, “[t]he poetic text exercises a normative function that does not refer back either to an original utterance nor [sic] to the intention of the speaker but is something that seems to originate in itself” (*TI* 42). The language of poetry is not like “everyday language” which “points to something beyond itself and disappears behind it” but rather something that “shows itself even as it points, so that it comes to stand in its own right” (*RB* 67).

What makes a text eminent is neither content nor style, considered in isolation, but something that happens within the encounter between the text and what Gadamer calls the “inner ear,” a mode of perception in which “semantic reference and tonal construct [are] entirely one.”¹⁴ This conception of eminence, while not prioritising style, does not allow for its exclusion, especially if it is thought of as an aspect of singularisation that makes us tarry with the poetic. As will be discussed in more detail below, for Gadamer, a poetic text only exists in being read—“the poetic structure is formed by us in the act of reading” (*ET* 7)—and, hence, its eminence can only arise in an encounter with its readers. What distinguishes the encounter with the eminent text from other encounters with other, more translatable texts, however, is that the attempt to translate this encounter “always involves a loss and in the case of poetry [even more so the lyric] it is an enormous loss” (*ET* 8). Translation fails to grasp the “unique,” that is, “the unity of sense and sound [which] remains untranslatable” (*ET* 8).

The emphasis on the unity of sense and sound as the primary characteristic of the untranslatable, eminent text, validates in poetry, more than anywhere else, the essentiality of style as an element of *poiesis*. As Gadamer writes, an “enigmatic form of the non-distinction between *what* is said and *how* it is said gives to art its specific unity and facility and so, too, its own manner of being true” (*ET* 10, my emphasis). While the *how* of language is, for Gadamer, not to be highlighted for its own sake—one reason why stylisation can never be eminent—the *what* of language does not attain eminence

¹⁴ Gadamer defines the “inner ear” (“*das innere Ohr*”): “The inner ear apprehends the ideal meaning in language, something nobody ever can hear. The ideal form of language, then, demands something unattainable from the human voice, and that is exactly the mode of being of a literary text” (*PL* 248).

without the specific *how*. The “linguistic form [of literature] (unlike other usual linguistic forms) is not simply ‘understood’ and then left behind” (*PL* 249). There is something about the materiality of what Gadamer calls the “fabric of unique texture” of the eminent text that remains (*PL* 255). Style is an essential aspect of *poiesis*, and it remains central even in the experience of the truth of the eminent work.

Style is something with which one tarries, not in the formalist sense of aesthetic pleasure derived from defamiliarisation but in its inextricability with the truth of the work. Indeed, aesthetic perception, for Gadamer, is not to be understood in terms of the “sensible skin of things,” as in Jameson’s evaluation of Conrad’s style of Impressionism—to be discussed in Chapter 5—but in the sense of “tak[ing] something as true” (*RB* 28–29). “Style constitutes a very effective factor in a good text,” but the text does not put “itself forward as a piece of stylistic decoration.” Style, like “the actuality of the words and of discourse as sound,” is always “bound up with the transmission of meaning” (*TI* 43). Thus, Gadamer proposes “aesthetic non-differentiation,” which he contrasts to what he deems to be “aesthetic differentiation” in the Kantian tradition, that is, the sharp distinction between subject matter and the work of art and between the work of art and its presentation or performance (*OTW* 148).

The “how of what is said” contributes to the intensification of the said but then supersedes itself, giving way to the self-presence of the work of art. Appealing to the traditional distinction between style and manner, Gadamer argues that an exclusive emphasis on the “how” of literature would mean speaking “not of art but artistry” (*TI* 42) and “not of style whose incomparability we may rightly admire but of manner, whose presence now is disturbingly noticeable” (*TI* 43).¹⁵ While style, as a laudable aspect of literature, is essential, too much emphasis on “manner” can be disturbing, because it would hinder the appreciation or understanding of something more valuable than it, “the power of Being in the word” (*OTW* 152).

The untranslatable text or, in other words, the untranslatable encounter with a unity of style and content in certain kinds of literature presents a conundrum for anyone

¹⁵ Gadamer reiterates the contrast between style and manner that recurs in German poetics. Like Adorno and Goethe, discussed above, Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling also appeals to the distinction. While mannerism is “objectionable” due to it not being linked with “the absolute,” style “constitutes rather the *indifference* [non-difference] between the universal and absolute art-form on the one hand, and the particular form of the artist on the other” (*The Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas W. Stott [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989] 94). Hegel thinks of the differences between *manner*, *style*, and *originality*. “Style” is the artist’s expression of “an inherently necessary mode of representation” while “manner” is “subjective caprice which gives free play to his own whims.” *Originality* goes beyond “mere” manner and style towards what can be described as a perfect integration of the material with the artist’s subjectivity in expressing the Ideal (*Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts Volume I*, trans. T. M. Knox [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975] 294).

who seeks to respond to it as a critic. For, if the eminent text is untranslatable beyond its coming into being in the “inner ear,” how is one to write about it as Gadamer does, for instance, in *Who am I and Who are You?* without being constantly aware of one’s own inability to convey that which makes the eminent text unique? This issue is clearly not limited to Gadamer and has to be faced every time theory or criticism sets itself the task of responding to the singular, as in this dissertation and its attempt to read style in its singularity. However, it would be a simplification to conceive the singular in the poetic simply in terms of that which resists translatability, and Gadamer does not fall into this trap. Indeed, the poetic in Gadamer—as in Blanchot and Derrida—operates within a dynamic of singularisation, a simultaneous obfuscation that resists transference and an always demanding opening to future readings. Gadamer formulates this dynamic through what might seem a paradoxical statement when he argues that “explication is essentially and inseparably bound to the poetic text itself, precisely because it is never to be exhausted through explication” (*ET* 6). As Baker argues, it is this seemingly paradoxical dynamic that makes the lyric paradigmatic of the poetic “in the way that in setting something forth it also retreats back into itself. In poetry’s moment of showing, its *deloun*, there resides at the same time a moment of occlusion.”¹⁶ In a logic that runs close to Derrida’s notion of the *countersignature*, Gadamer suggests that while the eminent text goes beyond absolute translation, it “wants to be read anew, again and again, even when it has already been understood” (*ET* 6). As such, it differs from other forms of language marked by what Gadamer calls “the one dimensionality of an argumentative context and logical lines of dependency” in that it opens up “what Paul Celan has once called the multifariousness of each word” (*PL* 255). The logic of singularisation lays the way for the reading of style—a uniqueness that recurs—as an aspect of *poiesis* that, while remaining unique, is always open to iterability and readability.

Gadamer does not use the word *iterability*—a Derridian term—but speaks of how a work is only fulfilled when it is read and understood. As such, the great work invites, even demands, multiple responses: “An encounter with a great work of art has always been, [...] like a fruitful conversation, a question and answer or being asked and replying obligingly, a true dialogue whereby something has emerged and ‘remains’” (*PL* 250). If one keeps in mind the way Gadamer sees understanding and translation as almost equivalent terms in that both involve re-creating something essentially alien,¹⁷ it

¹⁶ Baker 151.

¹⁷ See *TM* 386ff.

can be said that translatability is inherently implicated in the coming to being of art that happens in understanding. As Grondin puts it, for Gadamer, “[t]he meaning (event, person, monument) that is to be understood is always one that needs to be translated.”¹⁸

If the scale of translatability has clear end points with respect to literature, the same cannot be said about philosophy, which holds a problematic status in this respect. While in “The Eminent Text and its Truth,” Gadamer does not discuss philosophy as an eminent text, in “Philosophy and Poetry,” Gadamer writes of how the language of both philosophy and poetry, unlike ordinary conversation, “can stand by itself, bearing its own authority in the detached text that articulates it” (*RB* 132). However, philosophy and poetry, despite being similar in this respect, ultimately move in opposite directions. They are two sides of the same coin, close to but also directed away from each other. While neither of them is a form of practical exchange, “their proximity seems in the end to collapse into the extremes of the word that stands [poetry], and the word that fades into the unsayable [philosophy]” (*RB* 133).

The lyric is paradigmatic of the poetic in remaining untranslatable; the dialectical concept is located on the other end: “the language of philosophy is a language that sublates itself, saying nothing and turning towards the whole at one and the same time” (*RB* 138). However, while philosophy of the Hegelian kind might aim at this sublation, it does not, in practice, possess a language which is adequate to it because the language of proposition that it has to adopt suggests that the object of philosophy, which is presumably “nothing”—in the sense that “[t]he whole of being and its categorical conceptualisation is nowhere ‘given’” (*PL* 257)—is known in advance. For this reason, a “verbal expression” remains inextricable from “concept formation” in philosophical discourse. Indeed, in the case of philosophy as in poetry, Gadamer is “sceptical” of the possibility of translation because its language “is so evocative, full of connotations” (*GE* 69). The connotations are not an aspect of style to be neutralised in an attempt to arrive at a degree zero of conceptuality but actually enhance the intelligibility of the whole (*TM* 567). Gadamer argues that hermeneutics acknowledges “the interaction between all elements” of philosophical language and recognises its being “self-giving” rather than a simple transmission of data (*TM* 567). He rejects the tendency to consider rhetorical, formal, or aesthetic aspects of philosophical language as a linguistic dimension that can be separated from “truth,” “logic” or the “cognitive moment.” The result is a consideration of style that echoes Gadamer’s views of style in literature: the “how” of language is not to be ignored in philosophical discourse since it

¹⁸ Grondin 43.

is inextricable from conceptuality; however, at the same time, philosophical language should not get “caught up in purely formal argumentation” if it does not want to fail to live up to its own ideal (*RB* 139).

2.5 *Style and Temporality*

While Gadamer’s interest in “tradition” and in the historical rootedness of understanding is a frequently acknowledged point of discussion, his concern with what he calls “tarrying” in our experience of the work of art is relatively under-represented. This section aims at showing how thinking style through Gadamer involves considering these two, closely related aspects of temporality: firstly, how it is reductive to think of style as a static aspect of a work since understanding always involves the fusion of horizons within tradition but also across temporalities; and, secondly, how in the encounter with the work, style functions as a moment of intensification that urges us to linger and tarry with the work thus somehow shifting the axis of time from linear *horizontal*ity to what can be called a *vertical* axis of experience.

In “The Relevance of the Beautiful” Gadamer writes that “the essence of our temporal experience of art is in learning how to tarry” (*RB* 45). Extending and fine-tuning the implications of this essay, Gadamer later argues that works “are marked by an immediate presentness in time and at the same time by a rising above time.” On the one hand, there is something in a literary work worthy of this designation that transcends temporality and “speaks to us across all temporal distance”; on the other hand, the work of art “affect[s] us immediately” through a process that involves “that one tarry with its form” and that “directs our thinking” to something “that is completely unnameable” (*AWI* 58). The tarrying with form—an intensification of the presentness of the event—gives way to an opening that transcends temporality, the “truth” of the work of art.

The experience of a literary or pictorial work involves what Gadamer calls “*Gleichzeitigkeit*” (“simultaneity” or “contemporaneousness”) in the sense that “one does not have to know at all from what distance in the past, from what foreignness, what one encounters comes” (*AWI* 60). While, as Richard J. Bernstein points out, Gadamer is sometimes “criticized for engaging in a sentimental nostalgia for past traditions and epochs,”¹⁹ far from treating “tradition” conservatively as determining the

¹⁹ Richard J. Bernstein, “The Constellation of Hermeneutics, Critical Theory and Deconstruction,” in Dostal ed. 267–282 (273).

experience of art, Gadamer speaks of how one is drawn into the “path” of the work in the present. Rather than trying to reconstruct the historical reality from which a work might have arisen or, as Gadamer puts it, “see the artistic creations of a past age through the eyes of a past age” (*AWI* 61), Gadamer thinks of “the absolute presentness of art to all times and places” (*AWI* 60). Indeed, Gadamer sees “something repellent in the very idea that art, which possesses such a captivating presentness, could become a mere object of historical research” (*AWI* 61). Seen in the light of the subject of this dissertation, Gadamer’s emphasis on *contemporaneity* redirects attention from a reconstruction of the origins of style (man, ideology, reader, content) to a consideration of the eventhood of style in the presentness of the encounter. More specifically, it is in the experiential moment of tarrying with the work that one can locate the importance of style as an aspect of *poiesis* in Gadamer’s ontology of the work.

The Greek term, “*poiesis*,” is used by Gadamer to talk about that which makes something a work of art in the “absolute presentness” that grips us. The word, as Gadamer explains, has the double meaning of “to make” and “the art of composing poetry” (*AWI* 62) and Gadamer retains this ambivalence to think of *poiesis* in terms of how “poetry is the making of a ‘text’” (*AWI* 63). Building on Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art”—even if Gadamer thinks of temporality differently²⁰—Gadamer speaks of poetry by “echo[ing] the religious concept of the Creation,” as a “making” which allows “whole worlds [...] to rise up out of nothingness, and non-being [to] come [...] to be being” (*AWI* 63). Our experience of art lets the work be and this, in turn, captivates us and immerses us in the work. Art, for Gadamer, is not an object that we admire from a distance but a process and an experience:

When a work of art truly takes hold of us, it is not an object that stands opposite us which we look at in hope of seeing through it to an intended conceptual meaning. Just the reverse. The work is an *ereignis*—an event that “appropriates us” into itself. It jolts us, it knocks us over, and sets up a world of its own, into which we are drawn, as it were. (*AE* 71)

In thinking of poetry as the creation of something out of nothing and as not being directed at anything predetermined, Gadamer is also appealing to the Kantian premise of the beautiful being something “about which it is never appropriate to ask what it is ‘for’.” Referring to the contrast between the Greek concept of *kalon* (fine) and *chrēsimon* (useful), Gadamer thinks of poetry non-teleocratically as “a producing that

²⁰ Gadamer assimilates several aspects of Heidegger’s work on the ontology of the work of art, claiming that art is “its own origin” and “affirms itself” (*TM* 119). However, while for Gadamer art brings its own world into existence, it does not found a new historical “epoch” (*RB* xii).

brings about nothing useful" (*AWI* 64). If art has a *telos* or "goal," this *telos* is immanent to itself. Temporality, therefore, is thought of not in terms of "a one-after-another sequence" but in terms of the "temporal structure of tarrying," an immanent contemporaneity of duration (*AWI* 70). Tarrying refers to the experience of literature. It is like a conversation that absorbs us and through which the truth of the work emerges. At the heart of this experience but not its *telos*, there is an intensive (vertical rather than horizontal, an intensification rather than a progression) awareness of form, of style, of sound, of the presentness of the work. To describe what I have been calling the verticality of the experience, Gadamer uses the term "volume" and he contrasts this amplification of intensity to "duration," a term that "means only further movement in a single direction" (*AE* 76–77). As Sheila Ross puts it, "during this tarrying experience an awareness of 'time passing' is absent."²¹ It is perhaps in this sense that, in "The Relevance of the Beautiful," Gadamer claims that tarrying "is the only way that is granted to us finite beings to relate to what we call eternity" (*RB* 45).

Along with *tarrying*, another fundamental notion relevant to Gadamer's view of the temporality of the work of art is his "profoundly participatory" understanding of tradition.²² For Gadamer, the work cannot be conceived as a static object for our consumption and detached analysis—a text with a content and a style that we can dissect and classify through scientific observation—as that would involve "rais[ing] ourselves above the course of events" (*CON* 237–238). Tradition, for Gadamer, is "not just the careful preservation of monuments, but the constant interaction between our aims in the present and the past to which we still belong," including the works of art we encounter (*RB* 49). Following Heidegger, Gadamer deems our understanding of the world to be always "finite" and one cannot face the "other"—be it a historical event, another person, or a work of art—objectively and in an unconditioned way. Moreover, the linguisticity of our being-in-the-world means that "fore-knowledge [...] is and remains the vehicle of all understanding" (*TM* 564). Tradition does not simply "limit" our understanding of the world but actually "makes it possible" (*TM* 354). The encounter with the work allows us to, every time singularly and differently, "grasp and express the past anew" (*RB* 49). Style, then, is not a fixed aspect of a work to be reconstituted through careful analysis—the signature of a writer, the reflection of

²¹ Sheila Ross, "The Temporality of Tarrying in Gadamer," *Theory Culture Society* 23.1 (2006): 101–123 (106).

²² Ross 113.

content, a particular manifestation of generic norms—but something that arises singularly, every time as if for a first time, in the eventhood of the work being read.

The understanding of historical events, works of art, or texts from the past is a form of dialogue. Understanding a text, therefore, also involves being aware of one's own consciousness or "horizon of understanding" and the way this horizon "re-awaken[s] the text's meaning" (*TM* 390). It is this co-implication in the eventhood of work that, according to Gadamer, the traditional notion of style as a normative and descriptive term fails to capture. If style is understood as teleocratically originating from a source—an author, a genre, an era or a subject matter—then, style is "inconsequential" for Gadamer, as it would be for Heidegger, in speaking about the work of art as an event (*OWA* 39). However, one may think of style as an aspect of *poiesis*, something which makes us linger and tarry with the work as it comes into being. While the "truth" of the work transcends style, it can only arise or become visible through this tarrying with the materiality of the work rather than through a transparent transmission of a pre-existing truth.

2.6 *Style and Freedom*

The emphasis on the contemplative and the dialogical results in highlighting the reader's role in the event of the poetic. As Clark notes, while Heidegger speaks of the poetic as an "obscure, incalculable event for which we can only prepare ourselves," Gadamer, particularly through his non-Heideggerian notion of the fusion of horizons, "stresses the conditions of such an event in ethically informed human practices, the dialogical nature of language, the discipline of conversation, close reading and questioning of texts."²³ As Gadamer puts it, "we cannot speak the truth without an address, without an answer and therewith without the commonality of a hard-won agreement" (*WT* 46). It is in this sense that Gadamer considers reading to be conversation which "creates a common language" between the poem and the reader (*TM* 341).

Gadamer's insistence on understanding (*Verständnis*) as a form of dialogue or agreement (*Einverständnis*) and as involving "*participating in an event of tradition*, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" has been seen as being conducive to structures of thought that inhibit openness to radical alterity

²³ Clark, *Singularity* 87.

and, hence, to a foreclosure of the possibility of surprise and radical shifts in thought (TM 291). Robert Bernasconi, for instance, argues that the concept of tradition in Gadamer “has the function of reducing the strange or foreign to a moment that is to be overcome.”²⁴ In support of this argument, he quotes Gadamer’s claim that “we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us” (TM 282). For Bernasconi, in short, “the conceptions of dialogue that [Gadamer] does select tend to have the common feature of diminishing alterity.”²⁵

However, as Bernasconi concedes in his essay, if the possibility of openness to the other is at least implied in several pronouncements by Gadamer as early as in *Truth and Method*, there is an even more obvious shift towards alterity in Gadamer’s late essays. In this respect, Bernasconi brands Gadamer’s formulation of a hermeneutic relation to the other marked by openness as a “corrective.”²⁶ In other words, claims such as that “openness to the other [...] involves recognising that I myself must accept some things that are against me” (TM 361) are interpreted by Bernasconi as inconsistencies within Gadamer’s theory. His argument is that Gadamer is unsuccessful in *integrating* the openness to alterity within the structure of his theory of dialogue so that Gadamer’s late shift is an *interruption* more than a development of his original thesis.

It is also possible, however, to echo Clark in seeing the “tension” between, on the one hand, “stressing the nature of understanding as always a dialogue,” and, on the other hand, thinking of understanding in terms of a shift or difference, as precisely that which creates the gap or “uncertain space” within which Gadamer’s thought resides. Rather than an inconsistency in Gadamer’s thought, then, such a space outlines what Clark sees as Gadamer’s commitment to critical “freedom” with its openness to change within the subject. The tension between the same and the other in Gadamer’s model of understanding, rather than betraying inconsistency, marks “the freedom of the interpreter [or the interlocutor in dialogue] to be able to think beyond the immediate constraints of his and her intellectual context and its inheritances.”²⁷

How to think of or respond to style if we heed Gadamer’s insistence to “always take into account the mystery of human freedom, which through the actualisation of its potential always and again presents surprises” (GE 193–194)? As Clark writes, Gadamer’s notion of freedom is enacted in reading, where it translates as “the capacity

²⁴ Robert Bernasconi, “‘You don’t Know What I’m Talking About’: Alterity and the Hermeneutical Ideal,” in Lawrence K. Schmidt ed. *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue, and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995) 178–194 (186).

²⁵ Bernasconi 180.

²⁶ Bernasconi 182.

²⁷ Clark, *Singularity* 63.

for critical distance, including above all from how one currently understands oneself.” In this respect, it can be said that Gadamer’s thinking of freedom, like Blanchot’s and Derrida’s, raises the issue of what we are calling an *ethics* of reading. The encounter with the other in dialogue, be it conversation or reading, allows us to, as it were, “particularise” ourselves by making us aware of our “limits” as interpreters and interlocutors.²⁸ Gadamer’s description of hermeneutic understanding as guiding our response to both a “person” and a “text” exposes the inherently dialogical structure of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. For Gadamer, understanding something or someone does not involve a cognitive mastering of an object but a form of dialogue between the reader or listener and a linguistic expression or person. This, Gadamer believes, is also true of one’s experience of art: “An encounter with a great work of art has always been, I would say, like a fruitful conversation, a question and answer or being asked and replying obligingly, a true dialogue whereby something has emerged and remains” (*PL* 250). As David P. Haney points out, “the process by which the truth of a poem is revealed is instructively similar to the unconcealing that goes on in the ethical hermeneutics of being open to (instead of imposing, asserting, or conceptualising) the truth of another person.”²⁹ There is something in poetry and the work of art that resists conceptualisation while demanding that we think “along with it” as partners in conversation.

This resistance to conceptualisation, an aspect of the singularity of poetry, is what certain theories of style like cognitive stylistics fail to acknowledge. In seeking to explain style as a variety of ways of expressing a number of universally shared mental schemata, conceptual metaphor theory reduces poems to the status of examples. Other theoretical approaches, which think of style as the teleocratic expression or manifestation of an anterior essence, are also problematised as they do not see the way truth arises in an *encounter with* rather than a *transmission of* meaning to the reader. If style is thought in terms of the poetic *event*, then it becomes something whose force of world-making or *poiesis* is not simply an aspect of the text as an object of analysis but something that arises in the coming to being of the work in reading.

The demand for a certain kind of listening, a patient engagement with poetry that does not involve conceptual mastery of a poetic object, reveals the intrinsically ethical dimension of Gadamer’s thought. Gadamer thinks of poetry as opening itself to

²⁸ Clark, *Singularity* 64.

²⁹ David P. Haney, “Aesthetics and Ethics in Gadamer, Levinas and Romanticism: Problems of *Phronesis* and *Techne*,” *PMLA* 114.1 (1999) 32–45 (38).

the reader through a demand for understanding which, at the same time, urges restraint: “a poem is not a fact which can be explained as an instance of something more general, the way that an experimentally valid fact is an instance of the law of nature.” As Gadamer insists, hermeneutical understanding involves understanding “*this* person, *this* text” and one cannot blindly exploit the text in order to apply a method or to explain poems away as instances of more general observations. Indeed, while there is a hermeneutic “attitude,” “there is no hermeneutic method” (*WHO* 161).

Considering the focus on developing methods of analysis in contemporary stylistics, it is difficult to agree with Carter and Stockwell’s claim that this discipline, in its various branches, is essentially a continuation of Gadamerian hermeneutics. While stylistics, as Carter and Stockwell conceive it, echoes hermeneutics in focusing on the actualisation of the work in the reader and on how the reader brings his own background to bear in any analysis with the consequence that “the literary work is already conditioned by interpretation, even before reading begins,” the attempt to develop analytical tools that can be assessed in terms of verifiability and applicability runs counter to the Gadamerian insight that one’s response to a work can never be the application of a previously determined method of analysis.³⁰

Gadamer’s thoughts about reading being a form of freedom are put into practice in his book on Celan. However, rather than an attempt to develop a verifiable tool of analysis that could then be applied elsewhere—as is customary in contemporary stylistics—Gadamer, faced by the hermeticism that he describes as “the poetic style of our age” (*WHO* 177), tries to retain the “potentiality for being other” by acknowledging that sometimes it is impossible to come to an agreement or to reach the confidence of a full interpretation (*TI* 26). We are always unprepared in our encounter with art, in the sense that each work of art faces us in its particularity rather than as an example of a general law. A person involved in “understanding,” for Gadamer, does not “know and judge as one who stands apart unaffected, but, rather, he thinks along with the other from the perspective of a specific bond of belonging, as if he too were affected” (*TM* 320). The reader and the poem, like two persons in dialogue, are bound to each other by the truth that arises from a “fusion of horizons,” a truth that transcends what each of the two partners in the conversation knows. Understanding involves a dialogue with the other—person, a text or an event—which leads to an exchange and enrichment of one’s position but never a complete and absolute grasping of “truth.” It can be argued that the Gadamerian term “fusion of horizon” marks both the limitations that our historical and

³⁰ Carter and Stockwell 296.

linguistic conditioning puts on us as well as the opening to understanding and conversation. As Warnke puts it, in conversation: “all participants are led beyond their initial positions towards a consensus that is more differentiated and articulate than the separate views which the conversation-partners began.”³¹ One’s position in relation to the other changes during the encounter with the other but dialogue can never lead to objective knowledge because “what we consider to be knowledge [...] always has some contingency built into it.”³² Thus, understanding is never fixed and final but always steeped in language, dynamic and fluctuating. It allows for change of the very prejudices with which we always approach understanding. In short, using Jens Kertscher’s words, one can say that “the understanding of what is said has to be considered as the result of the dialogical process between speech partners” rather than “the grasping of an ideal meaning [or] of the speaker’s intention.”³³

The modern lyric as a limit case, but also the other of conversation, can challenge our own view of the world and introduce what Gadamer describes elsewhere as “a potentiality for being other that lies beyond every coming to agreement about what is common” (*TI* 26). Celan’s poetry is a moment of singularisation that, simultaneously, unveils and conceals itself; it overflows with possible meanings but it also resists absolute conceptualisation. As Gadamer writes, poetry has a dual effect on us in that it is both something that we recognise but also something that shakes our horizon:

The intimacy with which the work of art touches us is at the same time, in enigmatic fashion, a shattering and a demolition of the familiar. It is not only the ‘This art thou!’ disclosed in a joyous and frightening shock; it also says to us; ‘Thou must alter thy life!’ (*PH* 104)

His readings of Celan are thus hesitant responses that are aware of the impossibility of fully grasping Celan’s poetry. As Clark puts it, Gadamer’s readings of Celan engage the poetic as something which is unforeseen, “free” in the sense of being “incalculable, unrepeatable and singular.”³⁴ For Gadamer, in encountering a work of art, one is overwhelmed and unable to reduce it to pre-established concepts: “Great art shakes us because we are always unprepared and defenceless when exposed to the over-powering

³¹ Warnke, *Gadamer* 169.

³² Ulrich Arnschuld, “On the Certainty of Uncertainty: Language Games and Forms of Life in Gadamer and Wittgenstein,” in Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnschuld and Jens Kertscher ed., *Gadamer’s Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002) 25–44 (36).

³³ Jens Kertscher, “‘We Understand Differently, If We Understand at All’: Gadamer’s Ontology of Language Reconsidered,” in Jeff Malpas et. Al ed., *Gadamer’s Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002) 135–156 (144).

³⁴ Clark, *Singularity* 89.

impact of a compelling work” (RB 37). In other words, Gadamer thinks of the poetic as an “event,” even though he is not as radical in his thinking as Blanchot, for instance, may be. While Blanchot, as will be seen in the next chapter, thinks of the event as an anarchic and revolutionary moment which suspends the relevance of any past realities or future projects, Gadamer acknowledges the ways in which Celan’s poetic events convey meaning and do relate in some ways—but never completely—to traditional structures. Indeed, it is the space between the ineluctability of tradition and the openness to the surprise of the first time that Gadamer’s late essays inhabit.

2.7 *Style, Justice and the Law*

The focus on Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics should not lead to sidelining the ethical and political dimensions of Gadamer’s thinking; and this section argues that Gadamer’s hermeneutics discloses inherent political and ethical concerns. Gadamer expresses a deep distrust of the prioritisation of calculability and programmability that arose with the Enlightenment and with the prioritisation of *techne* that Gadamer sees as dominating modern western societies. He provides a somewhat scathing critique of twentieth century technological culture and, more specifically, its overreliance on the “cult of the expert” (GE 170). For Gadamer, understanding is always a form of *application*, that is, practical knowledge (*phronesis*) as opposed to simply being a theoretical development of a *method*. *Phronesis*, a notion that Gadamer inherits from Aristotle, promises what Gadamer calls “a different kind of knowledge” from *techne* (GE 171). While *techne* “is teachable and learnable,” a form of expertise that is transferable, *phronesis* “recognizes the feasible in concrete situations in life” (GE 171). As Bernstein argues, Gadamer takes *phronesis* to be a “corrective” to the excessive scientism and theoretical mindset of modern society by rooting understanding in the concrete, factual and singular realities we are faced with.³⁵

Phronesis has ethical and political repercussions in that it suggests that the *good* is not something that can be determined a priori but that is determined in its application, always in the here and now of the singular. As Grondin puts it, “[b]ecause practice is all about action, it is of no use to have an abstract notion of the good [...]. What counts is to be able to do the good in human affairs.”³⁶ In order to do good, then, one must reflect or tarry with a thought or situation rather than simply apply ready made algorithms or

³⁵ Bernstein 279.

³⁶ Grondin 39.

norms. It is in this sense that Gadamer claims that “it is already a sufficient political act to be a thinker and to school others in thought, to practice the free exercise of judgment and to awaken that exercise in others” (*GE* 153).

Judgment, for Gadamer, as for Derrida, is an inherently political mode of thinking and Gadamer explores this dimension in his numerous essays and interviews about a variety of social subjects, including, economics, statehood, university, administration, justice and others.³⁷ Gadamer’s work on understanding as *phronesis* as well as the related insights on law, justice, and the critique of the subsumption of particulars to universal concepts are also particularly relevant to literary interpretation and can thus be implicated in the formulation of an ethics of reading style. Indeed, as will be shown both at the end of this chapter and in Chapter 5, Gadamer’s insistence that understanding is always singular—a practical encounter in a dialogic relation with the text as in his readings of Celan’s lyrics—is profoundly antagonistic to structuralist theories of style as well as recent developments in theories of style, such as conceptual metaphor theory, which seek to discover universally shared conceptual schemata that are deemed to underlie different styles.

The notion of judgment as necessarily singular broaches discourses of normativity and legality. In *Truth and Method*, for instance, Gadamer highlights the proximity between literary hermeneutics and legal hermeneutics by claiming that, together with theological hermeneutics, they share the same origins. More significantly, legal hermeneutics may actually be considered to have “exemplary significance” (*TM* 321). In both theological and legal hermeneutics, there is an “essential tension between the fixed text—the law or the gospel—on the one hand and, on the other, the sense arrived at by applying it at the concrete moment of interpretation, either in judgment or in preaching.” For Gadamer, the same tension between the text and interpretation is present in literary interpretation and, therefore, the insights gleaned from a discussion of legal hermeneutics may be transferable to some extent. One of Gadamer’s major arguments in this sense is that “a law does not exist to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted [...]. This implies that the text [...] must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application” (*TM* 307–308).

The jurist can never have direct access to a particular law as a historical object and, therefore, will have to “reflect” about the law in its application in order to arrive to understanding, which remains singular (*TM* 323). Knowledge of the law—legal

³⁷ See *GE* for a representative range of issues discussed by Gadamer.

expertise—by itself is not enough for judgment. The same may be said about any historical investigation that can only aim, like any work of interpretation, at a *concretisation* of historical events in the present rather than an objective *recuperation* of the past. In this respect, Gadamer speaks of the mistake that the literary critics may make when they look at a text historically, by, for instance, placing it within the context of “the history of language, literary forms, style” (*TM* 333). Gadamer’s suggestion is that to look at a text in terms of its normative adherence to a particular style (an era’s, a genre’s, a writer’s, or any other “unity”) is to fail to realise that understanding is always marked by the interpreter’s horizon. It is the way “historically effected consciousness is at work in all hermeneutical activity” that, for Gadamer, makes legal hermeneutics paradigmatic even for literary interpretation (*TM* 336). Our encounter with literature is always inscribed within tradition but, at the same time, this encounter can only happen from the specific context in which one is reading.

Since, as Warnke argues, “[t]he conditions of understanding are the same whether we are concerned to understand what we should do, how we should judge, or what the meaning of a text is,” how one relates to the text one reads is also an ethical issue.³⁸ While Gadamer insists that it would be wrong to understand a text as being an expression of another person, a Thou, he suggests that, if we think of hermeneutics in dialogical terms, “the relationship to the Thou and the meaning of experience implicit in that relation must be capable of teaching us something about hermeneutical experience” (*TM* 352). In this respect, Gadamer identifies three kinds of relationship to the Thou. The first way is that of the Thou as part of a more general “human nature,” that is, as a “predictable” specimen. Gadamer critiques this approach as treating the other as a means to an end and equates it to the “naïve faith in method and in the objectivity that can be attained through it” in analysing texts (*TM* 352). Such a relationship to the Thou characterises theories of style that aim for scientific objectivity and verifiability, such as cognitive stylistics. The second approach to the Thou involves acknowledging the other as a person but thinking of oneself as having a better understanding of the other than the other can have of himself. This relationship is also problematic in that it leads to robbing the other of one’s “legitimacy” by keeping the other at bay (*TM* 354). This is seen in certain kinds of hermeneutics when they adopt a “historical consciousness,” judging the past as being conditioned by historicity but failing to see one’s own

³⁸ Georgia Warnke, “Literature, Law, Morality,” in Bruce Krajewski ed., *Gadamer’s Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics* (California: University of California Press, 2004) 82–102 (91).

immersion in tradition. On the other hand, it is the third kind of relationship to the Thou that Gadamer sees as being analogous to “the highest type of hermeneutical experience.” This involves recognising “the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. In other words, one does not simply note the “openness” of the other to interpretation but also one’s own openness to being moved and changed by the other. The other, the past, tradition, literature, is not only “other” but “has something to say to me.” One thus remains “open to the truth claim encountered” in the other and dispenses with “methodological sureness of itself” (*TM* 355). Within this dialogical understanding of hermeneutics, it is reductive to think of style simply as a property of the other—the author, the text, the genre—which the critic can analyse and dissect from a distance. If style is to be thought in Gadamerian terms, it has to be thought otherwise and read otherwise.

In many ways, therefore, Gadamer’s hermeneutics questions the ethical limits and responsibilities of criticism and literary theory. In “The Limitations of the Expert,” Gadamer reminds us that “practical knowledge” involves individual choice aimed at the good. This entails a sense of individual responsibility that, according to Gadamer, is sidelined by the cult of the expert that is dominant in modern society. For Gadamer, “in the end we ourselves are examined and must answer” (*GE* 187). What defines responsibility is precisely “something which I can never discharge to the knowledge of another.” While the notion of understanding as practical knowledge retains this sense of individual concern for the other—whether it is a human other, a historical event, or a text—the modern state with its proliferation of experts keeps shifting responsibility through “infinite regress” (*GE* 187). The cult of the expert is also related to what he sees as the contemporary orientation in western societies towards developing administrative structures for their own sake. The expert is often given administrative powers in modern states, which Gadamer interprets as the prioritisation of a form of superior *techne*, not only functioning as “an art, skill, craftsmanship” that creates but also as something that determines the *use* of the object (*GE* 170). This, for Gadamer, is unsatisfactory for various reasons, among which is the fact that the idea of the “pure expert” and the concomitant belief in “the notion of a scientifically certified rationality” are “fictitious” in that they forget the inescapability of “prejudice” (*GE* 172). What this distrust of expertise means is not that we should simply adhere to tradition but that we should be more aware of how “every concrete determination by the individual contributes to socially meaningful norms” (*GE* 173). Doing politics, but also reading

literature, is thus, for Gadamer, not just the application of universal concepts but a practical, singular involvement, every time differently.

As demonstrated by his reading of Celan, to be discussed below, Gadamer encounters literature not in a way aimed at establishing a taxonomy or method that would be applicable elsewhere but always in terms of a singular encounter with singular works. His readings leave a space for individual judgment, not in the sense of inviting unbridled relativism, but in the sense of performing singular encounters with the work through which the truth of the work arises. Understanding, therefore, does not mean understanding a universal and then applying it to a concrete case but understanding the text as a universal in itself.

2.8 *Style and Invention*

In view of Gadamer's critique of art as individual expression as well as his insistence that the work is rooted in tradition, one may ask whether there is space for *invention*, including stylistic innovation, in his philosophical hermeneutics. How, in other words, is one to account for change, surprise, and the arrival of the new in Gadamerian terms? Today, "to invent," in English, means to "create or design" but earlier uses of the term suggest "finding out" or "discovering," senses derived from Latin "invenire" (from *in-* "into" and *venire* "come"). As such, the word's etymology suggests a paradoxical situation in the sense that an invention, which is often thought in terms of novelty, also involves the discovery, presumably, of something that already exists. To "discover" is to "find," to "divulge," to *uncover*. This can be contrasted to the verb "to create," which, unlike "to invent," suggests the possibility of creating something "out of nothing."³⁹ To think of the possibility of the new in Gadamer is, arguably, to think of *invention*, simultaneously, in the sense of a discovery of something as well as in the sense of *creation*, that is, the eventhood of the work as something that could not have been anticipated or calculated a priori.

Comparisons with Heidegger are almost inevitable. As Clark writes in relation to Heidegger's ontology of the work, "insisting that it be read as ontological event and not as an object of aesthetic contemplation—the work claims the status of an act that must produce, or perform, the terms even of its own legitimation." In other words, for Heidegger, the work does not depend on the author or a previously existing reality but,

³⁹ "invent," "discover," and "create," <<http://oxforddictionaries.com>>.

as it were, “springs *from nothing*.”⁴⁰ While Gadamer shares with Heidegger the openness to “surprise,” he arguably gives more importance than Heidegger to the reader, audience or anyone who encounters the work. While, for Heidegger, the reader has to, more than anything else, *preserve* the singular truth of the work in the realm that is opened by the work itself, for Gadamer, that truth arises in the *dialogic relationship* with the reader. This does not mean that the reader is unimportant for Heidegger. Indeed, for him, the eventhood of the work only arises in its being perceived, and reading, for Heidegger (as also for Derrida and Blanchot), is structurally part of the work itself. However, Gadamer puts more emphasis on the work’s truth and eventhood as arising in the hermeneutic experience in the form of a question and answer relationship with the work, whereby the reader is shaken and changed by the work.

It is in the encounter with the work, therefore, that inventive or creative “surprise” might occur for Gadamer. Echoing Heidegger’s interest in Friedrich Hölderlin, Gadamer defines the “poetic statement” as something that “does not reflect an existent reality [...] but represents the new appearance of a new world in the imaginary medium of poetic invention.” Rather than language reflecting an event, the event occurs in “something’s coming into language.” This, for Gadamer, lays out “a place for the hermeneutical experience” whereby tradition is “understood and expressed ever anew in language.” The “ever anew” of the event is dialectical in structure, more specifically, a form of “question and answer” (*TM* 466).

The aleatory and the inventive in style, then, cannot simply be the result of individual expression, a project of renewal. In this respect, it is essential to look at Gadamer’s re-evaluation of the Kantian notion of “genius.” Gadamer rejects a psychological understanding of genius but retains the sense of genius as that which “exhibits a free sweep of invention and thus the originality that creates new models” (*TM* 46). This originality is not deemed to be simply a function of the “unconscious productivity” of the artist (*TM* 80). Neither, however, is it simply a faculty of the reader, as is suggested by the idea that the meaning of a work depends on whatever the reader sees; this, says Gadamer, would give way to “an untenable hermeneutic nihilism” and would simply transfer “the authority of absolute creation” from the artist to the perceiver or from the writer to the reader (*TM* 82). Instead, originality has to be thought within the context of the encounter. As Gadamer puts it, “*all encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event*” (*TM* 85). It is the eventhood of the work in that encounter—what Gadamer calls a

⁴⁰ Clark, *Singularity* 53.

“genuine experience (Erfahrung) induced by the work, which does not leave him who has it unchanged” (*TM* 86)—that should be at the basis of a consideration of invention. The possibility of “continually becoming a new event,” for Gadamer, is thus a consequence of “the productive ambiguity that constitutes the essence of a work of art,” something that happens ever anew in singular encounters with the work (*TM* 499).

Inventive style, then, within the context of the Gadamerian thinking of the event of the work of art, is not simply a formal innovation. For Gadamer, to describe it this way would be to reduce the work to an aesthetic object in a way that ignores the truth of the work. Neither is stylistic invention simply something that shows the originality of the artist or, on the other hand, the creativity of the reader. Style, if it is to be thought as inventive within Gadamer’s ontology of the work, would be an aspect of what Gadamer calls “the unique form of the work” that contributes to one’s “linger[ing] before the beautiful” thus allowing the truth of the work to arise, as if from nothing, always anew (*TM* 46). On the one hand, then, what is new arises from a return to or a discovery of (invention as discovery) as that which has already been written; on the other hand, each encounter, through tarrying, creates a singular, unsubstitutable event, as if from nothing.

2.9 *Reading Style: Gadamer’s Encounter with Celan*

Echoing Gadamer’s claim that “a poem is not a fact which can be explained as an instance of something more general, the way that an experimentally valid fact is an instance of the law of nature” (*WHO* 161), this dissertation does not treat Celan’s poetry as a “test case” that “sets a precedent for other cases involving the same question of law.”⁴¹ Of course, as Derrida’s thinking of exemplarity reminds us, nothing can really escape the logic of the example and remain an absolutely singular “case”; ultimately, a singular reading is an exemplary case of a singular reading and hence always already iterable. However, these readings will resist the temptation to be simply instrumentally oriented beyond Celan’s poetry towards the development of a procedure. Instead, the aim will be to read Gadamer/Blanchot/Derrida reading Celan. As such, an attempt will be made to accompany the three thinkers in their listening attentively to the singular demands of Celan’s poems, in their tarrying and lingering with the poems, and, in so doing, it will give particular importance to how style may be read in ways which differ from the *teleocratic* readings of traditional theories of style and contemporary stylistics.

⁴¹ “test case” <<http://oxfordictionaries.com>>.

This leaves unanswered the question of why Celan and not any other poet or writer was chosen. On the one hand, the choice is a consequence of the strong presence of this poet in the work of the three thinkers being discussed. Both Gadamer and Derrida wrote a number of essays on Celan which were then collected in monographs, that is, respectively, *Gadamer on Celan: "Who Am I and Who Are You?" and Other Essays*⁴² and *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Blanchot did not write extensively about him but "The Last to Speak" is an important exception and, as Gerald L. Bruns, among others, has shown, there are powerful affinities between the poetics of Blanchot and Celan, even if not always openly declared.⁴³ Therefore, the choice of Celan allows us to follow different thinkers responding to the same poet, thus bringing to light both the points of convergence among them as well as their divergences. Indeed, it is not insignificant that if Derrida and Gadamer found it difficult—necessarily, if one thinks with Derrida, or regrettably, if one thinks with Gadamer—to engage in any real "dialogue"—and here, already, a Gadamerian term is being used to describe the incident—in their notorious 1981 (non)encounter in Paris, Derrida responds more comprehensively than elsewhere to Gadamer in "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue—Between Two Infinities, the Poem," an essay on Celan and Gadamer's readings of Celan. As Derrida writes in this essay published after Gadamer's death, his "admiration for this other friend, Paul Celan" is something that, amongst the differences, he shares with Gadamer: "Like Gadamer," he confesses, he has "often attempted, in the night, to read Paul Celan and to think with him" (SQ 141).

However, there is also a second, perhaps more decisive motivation for the decision to "think with" Celan. It is not so much that Celan's poetry can serve as an example of how to read style non-teleocratically but that it *demand*s such a response. As will be shown in Chapter 5—and in statements like this, the tension between the stylistic, strategic, and structural requirements of a dissertation and a non-teleocratic reading becomes tangible—style in Celan enacts a dynamics of *singularisation*, at one and the same time being inscribed within a shared language and resisting such inscription. Celan's poetry enacts style not as a teleocratic image of man, ideology or of subject matter. Rather, it invites the reader into an encounter in which style arises as a moment of obscurity that, paradoxically and singularly, opens up possible future

⁴² Title cited in text will be abbreviated to *Who Am I and Who Are You?*

⁴³ See Gerald L. Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) 87–101 and 158–172.

readings while refusing to be conceptualised absolutely, that is, fully understood, analysed or dissected into rigid taxonomies or universal schemata.

A discussion of how style in Celan may be read *with* Gadamer—in a Gadamerian style—would logically be expected to start by seeing how Gadamer, in practice, reads “style” in Celan. However, it should be clear by now that this cannot be a straightforward endeavour since, true to Gadamer’s critique of “style” as a *normative* concept based on “unity” that is symptomatic of an over-emphasis on the “aesthetic” at the expense of “truth,” *Who Am I and Who Are You?* might initially seem to marginalise the relevance of “style.” In this collection of essays, in which Gadamer writes, primarily but not exclusively, about a sequence of lyrics from Celan’s *Breathturn* (*Atemwende* [1967]) called “Breath-crystal” (“Atemkristall”), Gadamer *does* occasionally talk about Celan’s “style.” Indeed, Gadamer describes it as “unmistakable and unique,” “a style recognisable even when imitated, though obviously only awkwardly” (*WHO* 145–146). For Gadamer, in fact, there is something in Celan’s writing and in “the variety of his forms, colours and motifs” that is specific to Celan and that identifies him as Celan (*WHO* 146). Celan’s style is thus primarily discussed as something individuating, a *signature* attribute of the poet that may be imitated if only to highlight its untranslatability.

However, it is not surprising that as soon as Gadamer refers to Celan’s unique style, he immediately retreats, warning us against “overestim[ing] the value of this unity.” As seen above, for Gadamer, the concept of “style” suggests “unity” and “coherence,” and, therefore, thinking too much of style in the sense of a way of writing that can be identified across “the poet’s collected work” might somehow make us forget that any unity which may exist in a poem is there “on the basis of the self-standing individual configurations of the poems” (*WHO* 145). In other words, giving too much importance to style as a unifying thread in a writer, a movement, a genre or an era might lead to a loss of the singularity of the poems and their uniqueness as poetic events.

This is in line with Gadamer’s general problematisation of *expressive* theories of literature. For Gadamer, “it is the poem which speaks and not an individual in the privacy of his experiences or sensations” (*WHO* 68), and he warns us of how a common reason for the failure of interpretation is “that one obstructs one’s way to the poem by attempting to understand it on the basis of something external, something brought in from the outside” (*WHO* 144). This “something external” refers to both biographical information and the reader’s expectations about what the poems may be about. For instance, Gadamer problematises Celan’s characterisation as “poet of the Holocaust” by

arguing that even when a poem, like “Death Fugue” (“Todesfuge”), is expressly about this experience, “poetry always remains more—much more—than what even the most committed reader knows beforehand” (*WHO* 162). Consequently, the notion of style—at least if understood traditionally in terms of signature—is too close to an expressive conception of literature for Gadamer. While style “*is there*,” Gadamer reminds us, this awareness should only be used to enhance the reading of individual poems (*WHO* 145, emphasis added). In this respect, one may refer to an anecdote about Celan recounted by Gadamer:

If, as it is told, Celan once admonished some interpreters of one of his poems for speaking of the “lyrical I” by saying: “But isn’t it the lyrical I *of this poem!*”—then I too would like to acknowledge that while research into motifs can sharpen the eye for certain details better, such as what “stone” means in Celan, isn’t it the stone of *this poem*? With respect to the legitimate task of studying Celan’s poetic vocabulary as such, this must not be forgotten. (*WHO* 146)

The implication is that reading should focus on the specificity of “*this*” as opposed to aspects that are inherently based on recognisability through repetition, such as “Celan’s poetic style” or recurrent metaphors or images in Celan’s poetry.

However, if, as proposed in this chapter, style is rethought, with Gadamer, as a moment of singularisation, that is, as a moment of obfuscation or resistance that, paradoxically, leads to a multitude of future readings, then it becomes possible to see how style is by no means inessential in Gadamer’s reading of Celan. Gadamer approaches Celan’s lyrics in a way that exhibits what can be called a certain *attunement* towards reading poetry that inevitably follows from his thoughts about the previously discussed “poetic word,” something that calls us, demands our attention and comes into being through the resulting encounter. “Every poem,” for Gadamer, “is its own topos; indeed, its own world, never repeated—as unique as the world itself,” and he treats Celan’s lyrics as singular utterances which demand singular readings from anyone having the patience to listen and tarry (*WHO* 152). As Clark puts it, reading, for Gadamer, is a form of dialogue that “speaks to” a poem on the basis of the poem itself as the sole “irrefutable witness” to what it says,⁴⁴ and, in so doing, allows “a text [to] speak again” (*WHO* 181).

Gadamer’s reading of Celan, oscillating between an emphasis on the singular autonomy of the poems and an awareness of the text’s dialogue with its “language world,” may be said to reflect what Clark calls “the open singularity of the literary.” As

⁴⁴ Clark, *Singularity* 77.

Clark writes, “successful interpretation lives in the tension of these opposed demands,” the demand to understand and the demand to remember that every poem is “its own topos.”⁴⁵ On the one hand, every poem is unique, and to make this point Gadamer paraphrases a passage from Celan’s “The Meridian” speech by reminding us that “it can never be a question of the topos ‘stone,’ but rather always only a particular stone in a particular poem.” On the other hand, however, Gadamer also believes that poetry should be viewed “as something intended for the members of a shared language community” (*WHO* 129). To say this differently, “the poetic word is ‘itself’ in the sense that nothing other, nothing prior, exists against which it can be measured,” but, at the same time, “there is no word which does not exist beyond itself.” While a poem stands on its own, appearing as an intensified mode of “saying,” it is also “said” (*WHO* 130).

A poem’s style, or what Gadamer calls “the singularity of *how* it is said,” is something the reader carries with in the eventhood of the poem. The awareness of that something which makes every poem “a unique utterance, an incomparable and untranslatable balance of sound and meaning” leads Gadamer to claim that any interpretation is “modest” because “conclusive interpretation simply does not exist” (*WHO* 145–146). An interpreter never knows enough and this holds back any attempts to analyse poems to the point of erasing them, for instance, by explaining away their singular images as manifestations of universally shareable concepts. The poem, in its irreplaceable style, speaks for itself. However, this materiality or intensification also has the character of a “rejoinder” which latches onto our “expectation of meaning,” making the poem, to a greater or lesser extent, something we “understand” (*WHO* 131). Interpretation then necessarily becomes a way of letting the poems speak for themselves in the encounter with the reader.

In view of Gadamer’s understanding of hermeneutics as a form of ethical conversation with the other that shakes our prejudices and refuses to be bound to previously verifiable concepts, Celan’s poetry is highly amenable to a Gadamerian reading. Gadamer frequently describes Celan’s poetry as a “dialogue” (*GE* 120), and the title of his most important essay on Celan, “Who Am I and Who Are You?,” highlights the dialogic structure that Gadamer sees as defining Celan’s poems. Indeed, one may say with Joanna Klink that “the I/You relation is the irreducible structure in Celan’s poetry, the condition of possibility of anything happening at all within the poem.”⁴⁶ In

⁴⁵ Clark, *Singularity* 76.

⁴⁶ Joanna Klink, “An Introduction to Paul Celan,” *The Iowa Review* 30.1 (2000): 1–18 (8).

this respect, Gadamer reads the following untitled Celan poem from *Atemwende* (*Breathturn*) as being about that which it enacts, that is, the dialogic:

In rivers north of the future
I cast the net you
haltingly weight
with stonewritten
shadows. (Celan 227)

(In den Flüssen nördlich der Zukunft
werf ich das Netz aus, das du
zögernd beschwerst
mit von Steinen geschriebenen
Schatten.) (Celan 226)

The speaker/fisherman casts “the net” with an address and the “you” of the poem, in a “future” that is both gestured towards and ungraspable (it is *north* of the future), responds by loading it with “stonewritten shadows.” The shadows, insubstantial and intangible, are “stonewritten,” tangible and inscribed. To use a distinction that the poem problematises, the connection of the “I” and the “you”—at one and the same time enacted through the address and promise—is both the subject and the ontological structure of the poem. One here thinks of Derrida’s commentary on Francis Ponge’s “Fable,” a poem that “puts *into action* [*en acte*]” the very possibility of its existence (*PS* 9). Celan’s poem, as it were, cites the dialogic structure that it brings into being or, more precisely, promises or gestures towards bringing into being. Indeed, what Celan’s poem enacts is not so much a dialogic encounter of one with the other but a promise of such an encounter. The response of the “you,” the other but also the reader, cannot be a simple acknowledgment of reciprocity but something done hesitatingly. The word “zögernd” is translated as “haltingly” by John Felstiner, thus suggesting a form of interruption that marks the dialogical structure, but it could also be translated as “hesitatingly,” reminding us of the uncertainty and limitations from which the “You” must always start. As Gadamer observes, “casting the net is an act of pure expectation”: it is not clear when the net is or will be loaded by “you,” thus suggesting that this dialogic encounter “occurs again and again” (*WHO* 83). It is in this potential encounter with the other, even with the other as reader, that the eventhood of the poem arises. Celan’s poem is always in motion, always open to future reading, and not a fixed aesthetic object to be dissected in terms of, for instance, the integration of style and content.

Arguably, Celan's singular style is recognisable in this poem. The dialogic and undecidable structure of the poem is a signature mark of Celan, but, rather than reducing the poem to an expression of Celan's individuality, this singular style also opens itself to reading, instituting, as it were, the conditions of its own readability. As Klink puts it, then, "for Celan, all *Rede* (speech) is *Anrede*—'speaking towards,' speech directed at someone or something else."⁴⁷ Celan himself makes this point in "The Meridian," a speech he delivered on the occasion of being awarded the Georg Büchner Prize in which he reflects about poetry as inherently speaking towards "an Other":

The poem wants to reach an Other, it needs this Other, it needs an Over-against.
It seeks it out, speaks toward it.
For the poem making toward an Other, each thing, each human being is a form
of this Other. [...]
A poem becomes conversation – often despairing conversation [...].
(*Celan* 409–410)

Celan's words reverberate when Gadamer speaks of reading poetry and trying to come to some form of understanding: "every reader can respond to what the language gesture conjures up, as if it were an offer" (*WHO* 134). There is a sense in which Celan's poems demand to be read as Gadamer believes poems should be read.

This demand is at least dual in nature. It is an offer, a gesture addressed towards the other meant to establish a rapport, some form of understanding. It thus asks to be read. But, in doing so, it also asks *not* be read, not to be exposed too much to the light of analysis. It asks to remain obscure, in the shadows, impenetrable and to have the reader respond to this impenetrability. A Gadamerian reading of Celan should not simply bypass style in order to get at the meaning or truth behind it. Ultimately, for Gadamer, "in a way which cannot be easily described, the actual utterance is always the same as what the speech intended," as seen, for instance in "In Rivers" (*WHO* 131). As Gadamer reiterates, "the poetic word is 'itself' in the sense that nothing other, nothing prior, exists against which it can be measured," and, therefore, style is not simply an expression of a pre-existing concept or of a personality (*WHO* 130). The self-standing of language is intensified in poetry, where words cannot simply be "substituted" by others. Gadamer is aware of "the singularity of how it is said" and, thus, style cannot be paraphrased into inexistence. Nonetheless, with Gadamer, one does not stop at the "how" of poetry because the "poetic word," while self-standing and irreplaceable, always "implies something else" (*WHO* 131).

⁴⁷ Klink 9.

As Clark points out, Gadamer's response to this dual demand of singularity results in a curious characteristic of Gadamer's book on Celan; Gadamer's attempt to countersign the singularity of the poems leads to what may seem as a "prosification" of the poems or "a set of truisms and statements of the vaguely obvious."⁴⁸ To give a few examples, Gadamer describes Celan's "The Numbers" as being "about the experience of time" (*WHO* 93), and he claims that "Temple-Forceps" "is clearly about the poet's response to the call of old age" (*WHO* 100). "In the Hailstone" "is also explicitly about death" (*WHO* 102), while "Your Dream Butted" "wants to say that a poem is not a sudden inspiration, but that it demands long preparatory work" (*WHO* 107). However, these seemingly simplistic readings are somewhat complicated by Gadamer's resistance to monolithic interpretations. Gadamer frequently proposes various simultaneous readings of a poem, stopping short of resolving ambiguity, and he often insists that "a few questions remain open" (*WHO* 110). For instance, "Paths in the shadow rock" is about the necessity for blessing, but who is the "You" from which this blessing is demanded? The title of the book itself is clearly indicative of this perpetual openness. Gadamer asks "Who am I and who are You?" at the end of his discussion of "Allied with the Persecuted" but the whole book reiterates, without answering conclusively, the same question.

Celan's reader, in Gadamer's view, "must clearly not be hurried" and "must simply try to keep listening," thus having the ideal hermeneutic attunement that Gadamer exemplifies in this book. One faces the demand made by the poems by moving towards a greater understanding (never absolute or complete) through slow, detailed and, as it were, self-limiting moves, "without [the aid of] any special kind of information" (*WHO* 134). Gadamer explores possibilities and refuses to categorise and delimit the poems' meaning. His readings frequently turn on themselves, moving forward through successive cycles along the hermeneutic circle but never arriving to a resolution. They give the impression of someone thinking aloud, rather than applying a previously established framework or practical procedure; as Clark puts it, Gadamer's "readings move tentatively between 'transpositions' into familiar generalities and movements of turning back and withdrawal."⁴⁹

It is precisely in those moments of "withdrawal" in which Gadamer tarries with the language of the poems and with the numerous possibilities opened up by single words or even caesuras that Gadamer may be deemed to be dwelling on style as a

⁴⁸ Celan, *Singularity* 77–78.

⁴⁹ Clark, *Singularity* 78.

moment of singularisation. As will be seen in the rest of this study, such moments of singularisation in Celan's poetry appear frequently. For instance, in reading "In Rivers," Gadamer focuses on the "bold metaphor of the 'written shadows'." Gadamer here starts from a stylistic comment—he highlights the audacity of the unusual and unconventional metaphor—and then shows how the metaphor, while resisting absolute translatability, "attests to something like sense." The metaphor, Gadamer insists, "means something, and isn't simply the dull resistance of the burdensome." Thus, he proceeds to respond to the phrase by listing several possible meanings: "Perhaps one can translate it like this [...]" (*WHO* 85). The different meanings proposed do not lead to a resolution, a closure of the dialogue, and, in a final paragraph that, like many others in this book, ends with a question, Gadamer concludes his reading by dwelling on the meaning of the metaphor, "north of the future." Possibly, Gadamer suggests hesitatingly, the phrase could refer to "a landscape of death." However, this is uncertain and we are told that it "is worth pondering further" (*WHO* 86). As Gadamer writes elsewhere, the obscurity of Celan's language is close to silence but this paradoxically leads to a simultaneous "explosion into word fragments of different meaning" (*GE* 115). Celan's style then demands one tarries with the words, not for their own sake—as if ornament was all—but as if the poetic event was precisely this moment of intensification that precedes and accompanies understanding.

Gadamer's reading of "Word-deposit" ("Wortaufschüttung") also focuses on this aspect of language as the bringing into being of an event rather than as representational expression. Gadamer interprets Celan's poem as metaphorically depicting language as lava erupting from the centre of the earth and depositing itself into the shape of roaring seas. The poem speaks of "the word-moon" that is hurled away from the earth and that, in its "crater / nakedly bears witness to the beginnings." For Gadamer, this is the way the poetic word makes its true origin visible. The crater shows once again the "force" of the eruption, the volcanic deposit that grounds the poet's words. In short, "the metaphor wonderfully describes the true poetic word as a cosmic event—not only as something that destroys nothing of what is true and uncovers the truth, but even more so, as a word that no one, not even the poet, can claim as his own" (*WHO* 121).

How to approach the poetic word, then, as *poiesis* or wor(l)d-making? The poetic word is not simply expression of a previously verifiable truth or of the poet's intentions. It is something that, in the sense of *alētheia*, "uncovers the truth." Style would then be part of the singular "how" that, in the poem's encounter with reading,

allows this uncovering of the said. From Gadamer's perspective, an ethical reading of style would then not seek to dissect poetic language in terms of virtuosity, individual signature or genre but would look at the way style, as an important aspect of "the art of language," helps in the intensification of the "saying" in literature that elevates the "concrete content" of the work to absolute presence (*OTW* 148). The compound noun "word-moon" in "Word-deposit" is a path to such moments of singularisation. It is a metaphor that exposes the singular style of the poet—Celan's signature tendency to create compound words will be discussed in Chapter 4—while also opening up the possibility of meaning being created: "it is indeed the case that we experience not only the new creation of language achieved by the poet, but that under its influence we discover anew all the royal forms of our language." The poem, in other words, both recognises the language it comes from and "establishes new authority under its own dynasty" (*WHO* 121).

Style, in *Who am I and Who are You?*, is thus an aspect of that with which we tarry in the event of the poetic. While Celan's particular style seems to invite such tarrying and lingering, Gadamer understands this as a signature mark not only of Celan but of the style that characterises contemporary poetry. For Gadamer, within a context where "poetry is no longer 'welcome'" because it is inundated and suffocated by the mass media, what he sees as Celan's hermeticism becomes "the poetic style of our age," the adequate response by poetry to the overwhelming mass rhetoric (*WHO* 177). Celan's style is thus understood in terms of situatedness. For Gadamer—and in this he is following Heidegger—"all modes of speaking are not poetically conceivable at all times" (*WHO* 177). Celan's style is interpreted as a necessary reaction of the poetic to its age, a position that is taken up also in "Are the Poets Falling Silent?" in which Gadamer appeals once again to the gold coin metaphor he inherits from Valéry to remind us that "in poetry, when one is directed away from the word, one is also at the same time directed back to it; it is the word itself which guarantees about which it speaks" (*GE* 73).

In view of this characterisation of the poetic and of what Gadamer sees as the contemporary prevalence of science and "the idolatry of scientific progress," Gadamer argues that for the poetic to survive today, "the word of the poet in such a time must be different" (*GE* 74). There is heavy pressure on poetic style to change. As Gadamer writes in *Who am I and Who are You?*:

[T]he conventions of language of our time demand other stimuli [than the poetic]. This is important to bear in mind in evaluating the poetic style of our age. [...] Thus the new mass rhetoric, which has made inroads in our society through the mass media, has contributed to the affinity of poetic and especially lyric language for the hermeticism that characterizes our epoch. (*WHO* 177–178)

And as an indication of how the poetic word has to change, Gadamer chooses Celan, whose style is marked by what Gadamer calls, using a phrase from Rilke, “indescribable discretion” (*GE* 74). One aspect of this style is what Gadamer calls a “signatory conciseness,” which refers, among other things, to Celan’s paratactic syntax, his distillation of language into very few words and his tendency to use short lines and to load his line breaks with significance (*WHO* 83). In particular, Gadamer notes the suggestiveness of the positioning of words in the poems, such as the last word, which is often set apart from the rest on separate lines. This has the effect of meaning being transmitted not so much “in an affected form of language” but through the relative positioning of words thus making Celan’s poetry and the modern lyric very subtle and quiet (*GE* 78). It is as if Celan’s style, which takes his poetry close to silence, is the only way to resist the “dispersion into the faint oscillation of the tuned-in loudspeaker. It is a matter of summoning up something to show the poetic configuration in action and to withdraw from the prosification that is levelling everything.” If poetry is not to vanish “in the floods of informational chatter,” it has to, almost counter-intuitively, murmur not shout, almost remaining silent (*WHO* 178).

Gadamer’s argument that Celan’s style is in some way a reaction to contemporary realities might seem to make his conception of Celan’s style teleocratic, in the sense that Celan’s style is presented as somehow deriving from or being addressed towards something external to it. However, it must be said, in Gadamer’s practice of reading, the awareness of the social context in which the poem is created does not lead to reductive readings of the poems as examples of the contemporary lyric. On the contrary, it often serves as a starting point for what then progresses into a singular interest in the reading of individual poems. Such an awareness of the contemporary style of poetry does not annul reading by encouraging the categorisation of Celan’s poems but something that informs the always singular and always different encounters with the poems in moments of reading. Gadamer’s readings move towards generalisability but also resist such movements by lingering on the silences, the caesuras and all that which resists semantic transference.

Celan's "style of poetry" is thus described by Gadamer as suggesting a "precise meaning" while withholding it. It is a mode of writing through which "fragments of meaning seem to be wedged together" and, therefore, the poetry does not indicate its meaning openly or easily (*WHO* 131). The reader becomes central in providing some form of unity of meaning to the "blocklike speech" that conjoins individual words "without constraining them by means of logic and syntax." The paratactic style of Celan's poems—as if their words "operate fully without [being] constrain[ed] by means of logic and syntax"—makes the reader decisive, essential (*WHO* 167). It requires that "our ear is acute enough to hear" something bordering on silence, an effect of peculiar stylistic aspects of Celan's poems:

One feels the attraction of a precise meaning while also being aware that this meaning is withheld, perhaps even deliberately concealed. What is behind this style of poetry, one typical not only of Celan, but indeed of an entire generation, and how do we deal with it? (*WHO* 160)

It is, paradoxically, that which borders on silence which can now speak most powerfully, particularly in the context of "an epoch of the electronically amplified voice" (*GE* 81) and this, according to Gadamer, may explain the way, in his later poems, "Paul Celan increasingly moved toward the breathless stillness of muted silence in words which have become cryptic" (*WHO* 67). Within this context, silences—like the soundless moments of a symphony—become formative. Thus, as Gadamer writes in relation to "In Rivers," "One must not only read the poem precisely with regard to its line breaks, one must also hear it that way" (*WHO* 83). Caesuras become meaningful in the poem's encounter with the reader, something which conceptual metaphor theory—whose concomitant concept of style will be discussed in Chapter 5—cannot but be oblivious to.

Celan's poetic style demands the reader's response and full attention. It resists translatability but demands it at the same time. In other words, it may be argued, Celan's poetry is poetry of singularisation. Celan himself did not like his poems being called "hermetic"⁵⁰ but his poems demand a certain kind of reader who is ready to be patient, to listen and to tarry: "The reader who is interested in understanding and decoding hermetic lyrics must clearly not be hurried. Such a reader need not be scholarly, or especially learned. He or she must simply try to keep listening" (*WHO* 67).

⁵⁰ According to Klink, "he inscribed Michael Hamburger's copy of *Die Niemandrose* with the phrase *ganz und gar nicht hermetisch*—'not in the least hermetic'" (2).

With Gadamer, the reader must be ready to repeat, over and over again (“Let us follow once more” [*WHO* 77]) and to engage in “sincere, probing mediation on the text itself” (*WHO* 135). This, for Gadamer, does not require any form of expertise or the development of complex theoretical models. True to his earlier thinking (*Truth and Method* has been described as an argument against method), Gadamer’s close-reading of Celan’s poetry represents a renunciation of the university critics’ stance and their programme of verifiable scholarly research. As Gadamer puts it: “The present book does not claim to have achieved conclusive results through scholarly investigation, rather it puts into words the experience of a reader whom such a message has reached” (*WHO* 63). The claims by the readings are “modest,” not meant to be transferable or taken as exemplary models of reading (*WHO* 146).

CHAPTER 3: BLANCHOT AND STYLE

3.1 Introduction

In “Literature One More Time,” Blanchot provides an “inventory” of ideas that “have ceased to belong” to literature (*IC* 397). Echoing Heidegger but also, as Clark puts it, “announcing aspects of arguments that have since become familiar in deconstructive criticism,”¹ Blanchot scripts a dialogue in which, among other things, the notion of the “masterpiece” is pronounced to be obsolete (*IC* 400). While Blanchot rarely dwells at length *specifically* on the implications that this may have on theories of style, thinking with him leads to a radical re-evaluation of literature and, consequently, of the notion of style. Gone is the absolute faith in the “artist as a creative personality, the literary figure as an exceptional existence, [and] the poet as genius” (*IC* 397). The promise of immortality to which writers and artists were attracted is now “devalued,” and the idea of art as an extension of the artist in time, even after the end of his time, becomes less appealing and justifiable (*IC* 398). Art, for Blanchot, is no longer understood as a product traceable to its creator, and this shift urges us to rethink the notion of style as expression of the individual, human self which may be used by the reader to retrace the profile of the writer as a powerful, “privileged individual” who takes over from God and “create[s] something out of nothing” (*IC* 401).

Also problematised is the notion of “culture,” which, Blanchot claims, insists on the unity of the form and content dyad that is prevalent in literary criticism (*IC* 398). “Culture works for the whole” and “for culture, a work’s signification is its content” (*IC* 400). On the contrary, for Blanchot, literature posits form and content in an “infinite,” non-unificatory relationship, with the consequence that “all efforts to relate them to the other [...] necessarily fail” (*IC* 399). Literature, then, is not simply an intensification of form, as Valéry argued, and neither is it an expression of meaning through style, as thematic criticism would have it. What literature does is “to signify infinitely and signify itself as infinite” so that “the innermost meaning of every literary work is always ‘literature’ signifying itself” (*IC* 400). As Blanchot writes elsewhere, “the poem is profundity opened onto the experience that makes it possible, the strange impulse that goes from the work toward the origin of the work, the work itself having become the anxious and boundless search for its own source” (*BC* 198). Style, therefore, within

¹ Timothy Clark, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a crisis of subjectivity in Romantic and post-Romantic writing* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997) 245.

Blanchotian thought, cannot simply be considered as a teleocratic expression of content or of the writer's individuality, and it is also not to be reduced to the formalist assertion that style (an aspect of form) is that which determines literariness. Style in Blanchot, instead, may be thought in terms of response to what Blanchot calls the "impossible," something that cannot be reduced to clarity or to the same. Style as an encounter with the impossible is not a capitulation of thought but that which allows thought "to announce itself according to a measure other than that of power [...] the measure of the *other*, of the other as other" (*IC* 43).

Still, how to reconcile this with the signature effects of style marking his writing as peculiarly Blanchotian? This chapter argues that while Blanchot is one of the great stylists of the twentieth century, style in his work is more than the flourish of a paraph. Forming part of a tradition of writers, which includes Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida, on the borders between literature and philosophy, Blanchot writes with and towards a style that, rather than serving as a dress of thought, has a productive, formative, and conceptual force. The claim is that style in Blanchot is not the form that follows content but actually that which produces the conceptuality while simultaneously being its necessary expression or reflection. The conception of style that arises is not simply formalist. More than a series of linguistic features, style in Blanchot comes to the fore in terms of a quasi-phenomenological event of reading characterised by an infinite relation with the otherness of the other, interruption and what is being called a logic of paradoxical anachrony.

This performative or conceptual force of style that always arises in an encounter with the reader gives Blanchot's language something of what Mallarmé attributes to poetry, that is, the ability not simply to express meaning but to create it (*WF* 27–42). The notion of style that arises is non-teleocratic, a mode of writing that relinquishes power and identity and that is marked by what Blanchot calls "the impatient waiting for the unknown" (*IC* 48). While Blanchot would contest the claim that style is simply something that happens in the mind of the reader, as some reader-response theorists do, Blanchot's *an(-)archic* conception of style as paradoxical anachrony posits the reader as a necessary element in the event of style. Style is always oriented towards the reader, who, in reading, encounters the work in its singularity; however, style, as it were, creates its singular readers performatively. Thus, the reader is, simultaneously, presupposed by and consequential to style.

3.2 *Style and Subject Matter*

Literature's refusal to work within the traditional dichotomy of style and content endows it with what Blanchot calls *radical exteriority*. In speaking about the "essential solitude" of literature, Blanchot does not refer to the solitude of the writer but to the work itself, whose exclusive statement is "that it is—and nothing more." The work, for Blanchot, does not function as a mediator of meaning and "[w]hoever wants to make it express more finds nothing, finds that it expresses nothing" (SL 22). "Solitude" names the radical exteriority of the work from the world of definition or thematisation through which it would be described in terms of what it is and what it means. Style, then, is not a reflection of or complement to subject matter, as argued in New Critical approaches, but must be understood within the context of the work as an event.

As argued in Chapter 1, in talking of the work as something alien and uncommunicative, Blanchot follows Heidegger. For both of them, in Clark's words, "literary texts are not, in the end *about* something. They are that 'something' themselves."² However, Blanchot's understanding of art is even more resistant to discourses of "truth" or "meaning" than Heidegger's since, to use Heideggerian terminology, for Blanchot, the earthly element of the work can only be related to the world's space through violent recuperation. For Blanchot, art is a "limit-experience," in the sense of being always on the outside (IC 261). Indeed, if there is a (non)essence to art as an absolute, it lies in its "refusal" to enter in a relation with truth. As Hill reminds us, however, Blanchot does not then seek the specificity of literature in the "concept of the self-legislating autonomy of literary language."³ What is singular about literature is "the infinite paradoxicality of its essential non-essentiality," or its "essential solitude" and this problematises formalist conceptions of style as the source of literariness or literary essence.⁴

Blanchot's position also contests teleocratic, political theories of literature as an instrument of political intervention or as a necessary reflection of ideology. If literature is an absolute that arises from a refusal of the world of meaning, then style is not something that the author can manipulate in devising politically effective writing to influence the outside world. Neither is style, as Jameson and Adorno would have it, primarily a reaction to social and political realities. In developing this point, one may

² Timothy Clark, *Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot: Sources of Derrida's Notion and Practice of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 76.

³ Hill, *Extreme Contemporary* 92–93.

⁴ Hill, *Extreme Contemporary* 93.

read Blanchot against Sartre, whose *What is Literature?* is a springboard for Blanchot's "Literature and the Right to Death." Sartre speaks of *committed* literature and of how prose may be a form of acting in the world, producing effects for which the writer has to assume responsibility. The "bourgeois" notion of art for art's sake comes under attack and prose is presented as a working ground for social responsibility. In contradistinction to poetry, which "serves" words rather than utilising them as an "instrument," prose writing is action in the world.⁵ Sartre does not claim that one can prescribe the style of committed literature but that style is an individual choice that always follows "the content" and that "among good writers the second choice [of style] never precedes the first [of content]."⁶ For Sartre, style is something secondary; writing is primarily "a matter of knowing what one wants to write about" and *then* "how one will write about it." If "the writer is imbued, as [Sartre is], with the urgency of these [political] problems [...] one can be sure that he will offer solutions to them in the creative unity of his work."⁷ For Sartre, therefore, style emerges as a complement to the ideas that the politically committed writer engages in literature of praxis.

In response to the Sartrean instrumentalisation of style in prose, Blanchot weaves the intricate contention that rather than producing meaning as intervention in the world by acting as an extension of the writer, literature abolishes both the world and the writer. "[W]hen I speak," writes Blanchot, "death speaks in me." Language annihilates the real-life object and replaces it with "being" or "an idea"; there is an inevitable erasure of the singular reality of the object for the sake of communication. Thus, "when I speak, I deny the existence of what I am saying." It follows from negation in language that when someone speaks he also denies "the existence of the person" who is speaking as the "I" of language can only be uttered at the expense of the speaker. Thus, what remains is not the object itself but rather the absence of the object. Language still refers to the object but only to highlight its nonexistence, "which has become its essence," and the life of the object passes onto meaning and the idea (*WF* 325). Literature goes a step further than common language by aiming at the pre-conceptual singularity of things as they were before their entry into language. Using Blanchotian imagery, one can say that literature calls forth the corpse that remains in the tomb when the resuscitated Lazarus is brought out into daylight. Common language destroys the object (Lazarus's corpse) in being its revelation (Lazarus in the daylight). Literature, on the other hand, seeks to

⁵ Sartre, *What is Literature?* 12.

⁶ Sartre, *What is Literature?* 26.

⁷ Sartre, *What is Literature?* 296.

reach that “moment which precedes literature,” the “Lazarus in the tomb” (*WF* 327). However, how can literature be “the revelation of what revelation destroys”? The answer lies in the materiality of language itself, the physicality of words as things in their “rhythm, weight, mass, shape.” In literature, “the word acts not as an ideal force but as an obscure power”; it inhabits a space that is neither beyond the world nor the world itself (*WF* 328). Words cease to be transparent conveyors of absence or meaning and become “solid mass.” Literature, as personified by Blanchot, makes a case for its immanence: “I no longer represent, I am; I do not signify, I present.” In short, for Blanchot, when literature “names something,” that something is abolished in being brought into the light by language, but “whatever is abolished is also sustained, and the thing” finds a refuge in the word itself. The process of signification, “the very possibility of signifying,” appears in the place of the precise meaning of words (*WF* 327–329).

Reworking Sartre, Blanchot distinguishes between poetry and prose, which he sees as being perched on opposite sides of the “two slopes” of literature. Prose lies on the slope “turned toward the movement of negation by which things are separated from themselves and destroyed in order to be known, subjugated, communicated.” On the other hand, on the poetry slope, “literature is a concern for the reality of things [...] it is the being which protests against revelation [...] a force that is capricious and impersonal and says nothing, reveals nothing” (*WF* 330). As the “slopes” metaphor indicates, the two slopes are each other’s inescapable other side. Thus, literature is not simply divisible into two opposite movements, as Sartre’s distinction between poetry and prose suggests, but, as Blanchot himself points out, “*unit[es]* two contradictory movements,” that is, negation and the “advent of meaning, the activity of comprehension” (*WF* 338).

This “ambiguity” or doubling at the heart of literature, its wavering between expression and representation, between being a thing and meaning that thing, between transparency and opaqueness, runs counter to the teleocratic idea that style can be instrumentalised in the name of *littérature engagée*. Rather than, for instance, impinging on political realities through a style of social realism, “literature denies the substance of what it represents” and, indeed, if it attaches itself to a “truth outside itself, it ceases to be literature” (*WF* 310). Literature of “action” is, therefore, deceitful in presenting itself as a language of command because literature “presents” rather than “commands” (*WF* 317). Both the committed writer and the political message portrayed in *littérature engagée* are undone by literature in its negation of the world of action.

3.3 *Style and the Proper*

Blanchot's most sustained discussion of style is "The Search for Point Zero," a review of Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) in which Barthes claims that style has "its roots only in the depths of the author's personal and secret mythology" and that "style is properly speaking a generative phenomenon, the transmutation of a humour" (*WZ* 10–11). Barthes does not consider style to be an aspect of what "we must call literature" because, as Blanchot paraphrases the issue, for Barthes, style is an inevitable extension that gives the writer "as singular an accent as that which makes his face recognizable" (*BC* 205). If style is not a matter of choice but a form of biological inevitability, a "visceral, instinctive language" that identifies the writer, then it does not have literary value in itself (*BC* 208).

Blanchot problematises this view of style as literary physiognomy through a discussion of Marcel Proust's style. Proust, Blanchot tells us, worked hard on his style, and this allowed him to develop "a form that we admire today as wonderfully Proustian" (*BC* 208). "But," asks Blanchot, "who is speaking" in his writing? Which of the numerous aspects of Proust's personality or personalities is writing? While his style is recognizable, his personality is protean and it is impossible to establish a definite correspondence between style and self. Hermann Broch presents the other side of the same problem. While Proust has a protean personality and a seemingly identifiable style, Broch is a "scattered, fragmented man" (*BC* 111) whose writing—like Joyce's—includes an "extreme diversity of languages, styles, and even syntaxes." Broch's diverse styles would make one think of "two writers unknown to each other or enemies of each other" (*BC* 114). Again, there is no correspondence between style and self and this unsettles our "old romantic convictions" about style and tone being "unique, the expression of [an author's] secret truth or his immutable soul" (*BC* 114).

Rather than an identifiable biological entity who leaves indelible marks on his writing, for Blanchot, "it is the entirely other who writes, not only someone else but the very demand of writing, a demand that uses the name Proust but does not express Proust, that expresses him only by *disappropriating* him, by making him Other" (*BC* 208–209, my emphasis). Style, for Blanchot, is not the proper expression of the writer, someone's property by choice or necessity: "writing marks but leaves no trace; it does not authorise us to work our way back from some vestige or sign to anything other than itself as (pure) exteriority" (*IC* 426). Clearly, such a view of style undermines, for instance, the assumptions at the heart of stylometrics and corpus stylistics, which seek

to build a case for the authenticity or recognisability of a style through the identification of recurrent linguistic features. Buffon's maxim that "style is the man himself" may be rewritten, through Blanchot, as "style is the dispossession of man."

Blanchot's critique of Barthes is indicative of the position he tends to assume in relation to the question of style. The paradoxical anachrony that, this chapter argues, is at the heart of the relation between style and thought in Blanchot is central to the relationship between the writer and writing, which Blanchot sees as defying the linear and teleocratic concept of production: for him, writing is not simply the product of the writer as an individual but, at one and the same time, *dependent* on the writer for its existence and the *source* of the writer's being as a writer. Style is not simply an expression of the writer's personality but, to a certain extent, performs or creates the writer.

Blanchot's essay, "René Char" (in *La part du feu* [*The Work of Fire*] [1949]) anticipates several such motifs about authorship and the relation between the writer and the work which would later dominate *The Space of Literature* (*L'Espace littéraire* [1955]). Through the economy of the work envisaged by Blanchot, the poet no longer precedes the text in a relationship of chronological anteriority. Instead, a structure of paradoxical anachrony appears whereby the emergence of the work is contemporaneous to the erasure of the writer. Rather than in terms of the notion of poetry as expression or representation, Blanchot conceives the writer as "second to what he makes" and "subsequent to the world he has brought to life," while poetry is both "the writer's work, the truest impulse of his existence," and also that which "causes him to be, what must exist without him and before him" (*WF* 99). The poet is the master of the poem, its origin; however, the poem anticipates the poet, "for it is in the poem that the complete and completely free presence of beings and things is realized," and it is here that "the poet manages to become what he is" (*WF* 105). In Blanchot's thinking of poetry, before the work is written, there is no one to write it. While Blanchot often speaks about the erasure of the writer as characterising contemporary thought about literature, Blanchot's claim is more far-reaching since he sees the disappearance of the writer as an *inherent* rather than *occasional* aspect of the economy of the work.

This does not mean that Blanchot completely excludes the writer and his subjectivity from the process of literary production. The writer is both essential to the coming to being of the work and dismissed by the work. As Clark points out, Blanchot's understanding of the structure of the emergence of the work still holds an

affective dimension absent from Heidegger.⁸ While, for Heidegger, in great art “the artist [is] like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge” (*PLT* 39), Blanchot speaks of the (impossible) desire of the writer to possess the movement from where the work emerges. The writer desires, as it were, that which has already erased him; and it is in this movement towards the “space of literature” that the writer becomes a writer, if only to be dispossessed. In a Heideggerian sense, the writer is marginally necessary in order to *let-be* the projection of the work. Blanchot, on the other hand, thinks of literature in terms of a paradoxical anachrony that alternates between stressing the space of literature as a *consequence* of the achieved work and as the *source* and starting-point of the work. Style, in this context, is also conceived paradoxically: it is both a recognisable, signature effect of the writer but also something that contributes to the creation of the writer. In this sense, it becomes simplistic to hold onto a teleocratic conception of style as a chronologically linear consequence of the writer as origin.

That to “write is to break the bond that unites the word with myself” is an early motif in Blanchot’s writing that he later develops in relation to the *neuter* or *neutral* (*SL* 26). Discussing Kafka’s narratives specifically, but extending the implications to literature, Blanchot presents the erasure of the self in writing in terms of a movement from the personal “je” (“I”) to the impersonal “il” (“he” or “it”) (*IC* 379). Rather than personal expression or autobiography, in the traditional sense of the term, we hear in the narrative form something indeterminate speaking. By this impersonality, Blanchot does not mean the third-person “he” who grasps things objectively or the self-sufficiency of the work of art, but “irreducible strangeness” within the work itself, or the arrival of “the neutral into play” that marks the intrusion of the other (*IC* 384–5). The neutral voice is not an objective, detached style or an aspect of the work appearing as an autonomous aesthetic object that integrates style and content, but a suspension of the power to say “I”: “The act of writing is interminable, incessant.” The writer “can believe he is asserting himself in this language, but what he is asserting is completely without a self. To the extent that, as a writer, he accedes to what is written, he can never again express himself” (*SL* 26–27). If what the writer affirms is not personal or individual but something completely other to him, a response to the impossible and therefore deprived of self, it becomes untenable to think of style as an *expression* of one’s individuality.

⁸ Clark, *Inspiration* 249.

“The Beast of Lascaux” unveils the romantic, transcendental dimension to Blanchot’s thinking about the writer’s relation to the work that allows us to think of style in terms of an event that originates in a relation to the impossible. There is a quasi-theological structure to Blanchot’s argument that “what is written comes from no recognisable language” and, in this, it is “like sacred language [...] without author or origin, and thereby always refer[ring] back to something more original than itself.” The language of writing “gives voice to this absence,” and, in this, it echoes the sacred speech of the oracle in which divinity speaks through its absence. This, argues Blanchot, is a present absence that two writers of what he calls the “fragmentary,” Heraclitus and Char, recognise in sacred speech and writing, respectively. Heraclitus speaks of how the divinity in Delphi does not speak “but points,” in a gesture which opens a space for those who open themselves to “this coming” (*BE* 11). Similarly, for Char, poetry is a form of pointing, a song of promise, “impersonal and still to come.” In the case of both writers, therefore, writing—and, more specifically, the fragmentary—“does not base itself on something which already is, either on a currently held truth, or solely on language which has already been spoken or verified” (*BE* 12). This temporality distinguishes a Blanchotian understanding of style from theories of style as intertextuality associated, for instance, with Bakhtin’s notion of *dialogism*. For while Bakhtin, teleocratically, conceives style as an embodiment of already-existing voices—literary, social, and historical—Blanchot thinks of literature as a dynamic pointing to the future, voices *from elsewhere* that are still *to come*. Literature is “language without justification” and, therefore, style is an impersonal mark that is not simply the signature of its performer or an expression of anterior sources. The writer is “simply the irresponsible vehicle of a language infinitely beyond his control” (*BE* 10). Style is not simply one’s own *property* or a *proper* representation of truth, but may be thought—as it is discussed below—in terms of openness to a “demanding” voice that “comes from a distance,” openness to an encounter or event still to come (*WD* 14).

3.4 *Style in Practice: Blanchot, Char and the Fragmentary*

While Blanchot’s style, it is being argued, cannot simply be explained as a unique way of writing that expresses his personality, and any account of his style must consider how in his work there is the performative eventhood of a gesture towards the impossible, undeniably, Blanchot’s essays and books are marked by styles that are, in many ways,

singularly identifiable as Blanchotian.⁹ Indeed, there are various stylistic markers that are tangible across his essays, such as, the uncannily rhythmic structures, the heavy reliance on paradox, and the repeated modulation of statements. A particular structure or movement also recurs. Blanchot's critical essays tend to be notoriously difficult to paraphrase, enacting a constitutive fragmentation which frustrates readers who expect the conventional statement-exposition-conclusion development. They proceed slowly, examining ideas, extending thoughts as far as they can go, turning back on themselves repeatedly rather than moving forward towards a resolution, a compromise or the triumph of a conclusion. Some may argue that what is called "style" stops short of such overarching structural issues and that style is more identifiable with the specific language and words of a text rather than the construction and development of an argument. However, the fragmentation of the structure, together with the elusive nature of its development, reflects the vertiginous language of his text at a more basic linguistic level. Indeed, what Kenneth Douglas describes as the fundamental experience of reading Blanchot, that is, a feeling of "vertigo" caused by "fundamental anguish before [an] absence of foundation, [a] nothingness," is created by both the structure of the text and the style of paradoxical anachrony that, this section argues, characterises Blanchot's writing.¹⁰

Despite these recurrences, no monolithic description of the style of Blanchot's entire oeuvre would do him justice. Blanchot's styles range from the assertive political voice in "Declaration on the Right to Insubordination in the Algerian War" (1960), to the style of paradoxical anachrony of his early essay on "René Char" (1949), and the fragmentary style of later texts like *The Writing of the Disaster* (*L'écriture du désastre* [1980]). His *récits* and full-length novels enact other styles yet again. Blanchot's earlier styles, while already recognisable as Blanchotian, are closer to the traditional language of criticism than that of his later fragmentary texts. On the other hand, in texts written from the 1960s onwards, there is a significant alteration in Blanchot's writing or, more accurately, there is an *intensification* of specific stylistic features that, while present in his earlier work, now become dominant. Despite the generic hybridity that is already present in the early Blanchot—one can roughly distinguish between Blanchot's *récit* and what can be called his discursive work (including reviews, literary criticism and work engaging more directly with philosophical issues)—texts like *Awaiting Oblivion*

⁹ This section is based, in parts, on Mario Aquilina, "'This song to come, this reader to become': The Style of Paradoxical Anachrony in Blanchot's 'René Char,'" in Callus et. al ed. 249–267.

¹⁰ Kenneth Douglas, "Blanchot and Sartre," *Yale French Studies* 3 (1949): 85–95 (85).

(*L'Attente l'oubli* [1962]), *The Infinite Conversation* (*L'Entretien Infini* [1969]), *The Step Not Beyond* (*Le pas au-delà* [1973]), and *The Writing of the Disaster* exhibit a radical generic hybridity that is gestured at but not performed fully earlier. One reason for this heterogeneity of style is that Blanchot's writing, in a similar way to Derrida's, is marked by what Hill calls an "acute sensitivity to the singularity of the event."¹¹ Blanchot's work is non-teleocratic in that it does not express already-existing thought but is a performative event of encounter with writers like Char, Nietzsche, and Celan, but also with the aleatory, the future reader, and voices from elsewhere.

Michael Holland describes the style of Blanchot's later texts as "language of the fragment, both in theory and in practice" (*BR* 258). For Holland, this new phase in Blanchot's oeuvre is characterised by "the disappearance of the conventional divide between literature and criticism" (*BR* 253) and the way the two "'worlds' to which language gives form [common language and literature] become indistinguishable" in the search for "a new fragmentary mode [in] language as a whole" (*BR* 259). However, the fragmentary style in Blanchot is perhaps more accurately describable as *anti-theoretical* than as something which Blanchot searches for, as Holland puts it, "in theory" and then applies "in practice." Indeed, his fragmentary style suspends the distinction between theorisation and practice. As Kevin Hart puts it, the fragmentary "resists incorporation into a totality, a unity, or even a program that would itself thematize fragmentation."¹² With Blanchot, speaking *of* or theorising *about* the fragmentary style equates to writing *in* the fragmentary style or, more precisely, responding to the demand or "exigency" of the fragmentary.

As suggested in Chapter 1, Blanchot's fragmentary style is in the tradition of the Romantic fragment. However, Blanchot sees a fundamental difference between the fragmentary and the Romantic fragment in that while the fragmentary involves "arrangement at the level of disarray," the Romantic fragment, in his view, does not escape totalisation or subsumption in the whole (*IC* 308). For Blanchot—and this argument is not always accepted¹³—Schlegel's fragments gesture towards the "closure of a perfect sentence" and are, therefore, similar to the aphorism, which is theoretically perfect, self-contained and "works as a force that limits [and] encloses" (*IC* 152). Blanchot sees the Romantic fragment as a promising way of opening up new

¹¹ Leslie Hill, "Three Texts," *The Oxford Literary Review* 22 (2000) 3–8 (7).

¹² Kevin Hart, *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 155.

¹³ See, for example, Simon Critchley, *Very Little, Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* 2nd Ed. (New York and London, Routledge, 2004) 125ff.

possibilities of thought, but he tries to pursue all the radical implications of the fragment in moving away from the aphorism. He thinks of the fragmentary as something that remains open to “the field that *other* fragments constitute along with it,” that is, as always marked by its relation to otherness rather than by orientation to any “centre in itself.” The fragmentary is not a series of self-contained wholes with a perfect integration of style and content but constituted by the “interval (wait or pause) that separates the fragments” (*IC* 359). Refusing teleocratic reappropriation in structures of unity and visions of totality, the fragmentary is not something that has broken from a previous whole or that functions as a moment “of a whole still to come” but a mode of writing beyond the dialectic of unity and fragmentation (*IC* 307). The fragmentary style, then, is marked by an infinite relation between style and thought, a perpetual non-coincidence rather than a promise of or nostalgia for integration. In this, the fragmentary contests traditional teleocratic theories of style that seek to root style in a fixed source or origin such as the writer or the subject matter.

Heraclitus, for Blanchot, is an early writer who shows the inventive dimension of fragmentary style, the way it creates new possibilities of thought. Giving a stylistic evaluation of Heraclitus’s language, Blanchot writes that Heraclitus invented a new kind of speech, “a prodigious event [...] that invents simplicity.” Heraclitus’s style is built on paradox, holding within it both the speech of the gods but also obscurity and enigma, simultaneously gesturing towards unity and fragmentation, never allowing us to interpret it monolithically and always demanding to be “read doubly” (*IC* 88). His style brings about a “decisive deepening of human language” and, as a result, a “new man is born here” (*IC* 86). This “new man,” for Blanchot, is “read[able in] just a few characteristics” of Heraclitus’s linguistic choices, among which is the “reciprocal contrariety” that, as shown below, is also crucial to Char’s and Blanchot’s style (*IC* 87).

Blanchot’s use of the metaphor of the birth of a “new man” captures the inventive force of the fragmentary style. Rather than a signature that expresses its anterior source, Heraclitus’s style is born *simultaneously with* the new man and allows the possibility of inventive thought. The relation of Heraclitus’s style to thought and man unfolds itself within the dynamics of paradoxical anachrony in being simultaneous and concurrent rather than subsequent and reflective. Through his discussion of Heraclitus, Blanchot problematises the model of language and style as mimetic and proposes language as creative or formative. However, this is not a simple reversal, a shift to the opposite side of the dialectic. It is not the case that style gives rise to the thing or else that the thing gives rise to style but that the movement involved cannot be

frozen. Heraclitus has the ability to speak “both with the one and with the other and, even more, holding himself between the two” and not immobilizing this movement “between-two.” He is interested in a more essential difference than that between words and things. He has the “vigilance of a man to whom a knowledge of what is double has been imparted” (*IC* 90).

For Blanchot, Char is someone who has a “fraternal bond” (*IC* 309) with Heraclitus, but also the poet who responds in the most vigilant way to the demand of the fragmentary. Blanchot contests the common description of Char as a poet of aphorisms, arguing that the fragments in Char’s work are neither self-contained units of thought unrelated to each other nor parts of a whole entailing harmony and reconciliation (*IC* 307). Rather, in true fragmentary style, they are fragments that are linked through “a new kind of arrangement [...] that accepts disjunction or divergence as the infinite centre from out of which, through speech, relation is to be created.” What brings Char’s fragments together is not dialectical opposition or complementation but a form of “juxtaposition” and “interruption” positing the terms in a relation of exteriority to each other (*IC* 307). In this respect, Blanchot reads Char’s poetry as a (non-)space of the fragmentary, a pulverised location of a rigorous response to the neutral. Rather than expressing the poet’s self, Char’s poetry is written in a fragmentary style of interruption that enacts a transition from the personal to the impersonal:

René Char’s “phrases,” rather than being coordinated, are posed one next to the other: islands of meaning with a powerful stability. [...] We could analyze this: a verbal privilege given to substantives; a condensation of images so rapid (a ravishment and uprooting) that the most contrasted signs—more than contrasted, without relation—are in the least space made contiguous. And finally, in the syntax of phrases, a tendency to a paratactic order; when words having no articles defining them, verbs without a determinable subject (“*Alone dwell*”), and phrases without verbs speak to us without any preestablished relations that organize or connect them. (*IC* 308–309)

The “paratactic order,” as well as the “interruption” and “juxtaposition” marking the contiguity of fragments in Char’s poetry, make Char’s style a response to irreducible difference. Perhaps, it would be difficult to find a better description of certain important movements in Blanchot’s style than his own evaluation of Char’s language.

Indeed, Blanchot’s style, when writing about Char, is attuned to Char’s style of contiguity that goes beyond contrast. Blanchot’s practice of style, as will also be seen in relation to Blanchot’s essay on Celan, “The Last to Speak,” often involves inhabiting—but not mastering—the style of the writers or works discussed. It is a style that is

marked by foreignness, the infiltration of the other into the same without turning that other into sameness. In “René Char,” this foreignness of the style of the other is introduced into the essay through Char’s poetic voice permeating Blanchot’s critical register in the form of paraphrase, citations and quotes:

The poem is the truth of the poet, the poet is the possibility of the poem; and yet the poem stays unjustified; even realised, it remains impossible: it is “the mystery that enthrones” (*Alone They Remain*), “the meaning that does not question itself” (*Leaves of Hypnos*). In it are united, in an inexpressible and incomprehensible connection, the obscure depths of being and the transparency of awareness that grounds, the “exquisite, horrible, moving earth” and the “heterogeneous human condition” [...]. (WF 100)

Blanchot does not simply *assimilate* Char’s style through a simple form of amalgamation that irons out differences, but introduces *contiguity* and *interruption*. Quotes from Char are used but their irreducible difference remains—also marked here by the quotation marks and brackets. The conception of style that arises is that of a response to (a reading, which is also writing) or an encounter with the “impossible,” in Blanchot’s sense of the term. Char does not simply function as an “other” to be brought back to the “same” through style, but “the other as other” (IC 43) or “impossibility become relation” (IC 47), to which Blanchot’s style responds without grasping it completely. The response of Blanchot’s fragmentary style to Char’s fragmentary style involves a “relation of the third kind” that is not simply dialectical opposition or fusion but a mode of contiguity and interruption. This juxtaposition of contraries or style of interruption is tangible in the imagery, such as, “islands of meaning” that are “capable of infinite drift” (IC 308). The image is paradoxical, entailing stony islands and drifting water or singularity and difference at the same time. Char’s fragments, like Blanchot’s, are not fixed wholes or aphorisms and yet they are tangibly singular.

The style of unresolved oppositions is also seen in Blanchot’s heavy reliance on paradox or what he calls “reciprocal contrariety” (IC 87). Indeed, a dominant and recurrent stylistic mark in Blanchot’s essays, particularly in his early criticism, is *paradoxical anachrony*, which has a powerful conceptual and formative force. Blanchot’s conception of literature as a non-dialectical contrariety of opposites that, in fragmentary style, are somehow not subjected to linear chronology resurfaces repeatedly in “René Char,” which explores the paradoxical and anachronic relations of the poem with both poet and reader. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

The poet is born by the poem he creates; he is second to what he makes; he is subsequent to the world he has brought to life and concerning which his ties of dependency reproduce all the contradictions expressed in this paradox: the poem is his work, the truest impulse of his existence, but the poem is what causes him to be, what must exist without him and before him, in a superior consciousness wherein are united both the obscurity of the depths of the earth and the clarity of a universal power to establish and justify. (*WF* 99)¹⁴

This is arguably a signature passage of the early Blanchot, a long sentence that keeps oscillating between the two sides of an opposition without, however, ever achieving a dialectical synthesis or resolution. Paradoxes abound and chronological linearity is shattered as the poet is presented as subsequent to that which he precedes, being “second to what he makes.” Paradox presents itself in various ways in this sentence and it moves the writing forward in a series of modulations that repeat by rephrasing the previous statement. The passage starts with three paradoxes contained within singular and distinct clauses. The first two clauses, “The poet is born by the poem he creates” and “he is second to what he makes,” are short, almost aphoristic in form. The third clause, “he is subsequent to the world he has brought to life and concerning which his ties of dependency reproduce all the contradictions expressed in this paradox,” is longer, syntactically complex, and it also introduces the second part of the sentence where Blanchot formulates the paradox involved in the economy of the work once again. In this second part, starting with “the poem is his work,” the opposition is expressed through the use of the coordinating conjunction, “but,” rather than being contained within an individual clause as is the case in the three clauses forming the first part of the sentence. Once again, each of the two sides of the irresolvable paradox is laid out through repetition. The first side of the opposition is stated twice with “the poem is his work” and, then, “the truest impulse of his existence.” The second side of the opposition is also stated twice: “the poem is what causes him to be” and also “what must exist without him and before him.” Moreover, in the final clause, where Blanchot speaks of the superior consciousness within which the poem exists, Blanchot introduces yet another opposition, a paradox within a paradox, as it were, as this consciousness is presented as uniting darkness and light, that is, “both the obscurity of the depths of the earth and the clarity of a universal power to establish and justify.”

¹⁴ (Le poète naît par la poème qu’il crée; il est second au regard de ce qu’il fait; il est postérieur au monde qu’il a suscité et par rapport auquel ses relations de dépendance reproduisent toutes les contradictions exprimées dans ce paradoxe: le poème est son œuvre, le mouvement le plus vrai de son existence, mais le poème est ce qui le fait être, ce qui doit exister sans lui et avant lui, dans une conscience supérieure où s’unissent l’obscur du fond de la terre et la clarté d’un pouvoir universel de fonder et de justifier. [*RC* 104])

This passage, with its vertiginous fragmentary style of paradoxical anachrony, is an account of an irresolvable relation between the poet and the poem. Blanchot's conception of the relation between the writer and his work does not end in a Hegelian sublation into a higher ring of the dialectic but is an infinitely recurring paradox, a suspended irresolvability of oppositions. Blanchot grapples with paradoxes and one gets the impression that he is trying to make the impossible leap from the inevitability of sequentiality and linearity in writing to the simultaneous presentation of oppositions. Blanchot's paradoxical style is fundamental, albeit necessarily imperfect, for the formation of his conception of literature as a non-dialectical contrariety and it is hard to see how he could have written about literature in a different way.

The relations of 'contrariety' are also tangible in the concentrated interplay of connotations and associations which contribute to the evocation of an impossible chronology in the relation between poet and poem as well as reader and poem. Using *birthing* imagery, Blanchot writes of how the poet is "born by the poem he creates," thus echoing the Christian mystery of the Conception whereby, as John Donne puts it, Mary becomes her "Maker's maker."¹⁵ Poet and reader are mutually implicated in a relation of "becoming" with poetry. Blanchot conceives the poem as a "song to come" (*WF* 99) ("chant à venir" [*RC* 104]) that is concurrent with the "reader to become" (*WF* 99) ("ce lecteur à devenir" [*RC* 104]). Thus, "to come"—understood as future promise but also, possibly, as sexual fulfilment—and "become"—understood as creation—are inextricable. Blanchot formulates the relation between poet and poem as an impossible future becoming, "one of the mysterious demands of poetry's power" (*WF* 99). The sexual and birthing connotations continue as the poet is "subsequent [in time] to the world he has brought to life [created] and concerning which [par rapport auquel] his ties of dependency reproduce [reproduisent] all the contradictions expressed" in a series of paradoxes. The ties of the poet's dependency on the poem "reproduce" a series of irresolvable contradictions, where the verb "reproduce" (suggesting both "to create an offspring" and "to produce again") embodies the simultaneity of time and birth paradoxes that mark Blanchot's conception of the poet's relation to the poem. The contradictions are "reproduced" through—are an offspring or repeated instances of—the poet's "rapport" (relationship) with the poem (*WF* 99; *RC* 104). The poem's relations with the poet and the reader are both productive of paradox and determined by a paradoxical economy.

¹⁵ John Donne, "Annunciation," in *The Works of John Donne* (Ware: Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994) 244.

Blanchot's style in "René Char" is also elusive and constitutive through its reliance on paratactic *modulation*, that is, repetitive reformulation of a statement through various subsequent phrases often not connected with conjugations. Significantly, a tendency for "paratactic order" is yet another feature that Blanchot identifies as defining Char's style and that of other writers of the fragmentary, such as Heraclitus (*IC* 309). In many ways, Blanchot's reading of Char is a performance of his conception of style as a response to the impossible, a response to a demand in the language of the fragment.

In its performative eventhood, the fragmentary problematises, while not completely excluding, any would-be stylistic identification of the writer of the fragmentary. Rather than of a poet who expresses himself through style, Blanchot thinks of style, paradoxically, as creating its poet performatively. As Philip Beitchman writes, "there is no authorial 'I' (moi-l'auteur) to take credit for [the fragmentary word], to begin it, or to bring it to any conclusion. The fragment neither begins nor ends."¹⁶ The fragmentary is not something that a writer decides to write, the execution of a pre-conceived plan, but a response to a demand that comes from the outside. The fragmentary does not lead to unity but neither does it originate in a unified self. Its writer, therefore, "writes not out of a will or a desire to write, or for gain, fame, glory, distinction, or out of deep sorrow or overwhelming joy." As such, he "can be a writer paradoxically only in the sense that he is not a writer," that is, by losing control over himself.¹⁷ The fragmentary is a renunciation of style as signature and a shift to style as the event of responding to the outside.

3.5 *Style as Genre*

Blanchot's work undermines teleocratic conceptions of style in terms of generic norms in ways which echo Gadamer's critique of style as unity and normativity. To think of style as genre, that is, in terms of the teleocratic idea that style is primarily definable against already-existing norms or formal rules, becomes untenable through Blanchot, whose own style dissolves generic distinctions, and who leads to thinking of style in relation to the eventhood of the work.

¹⁶ Philip Beitchman, "The Fragmentary Word," *SubStance* 39 (1983): 58–74 (71).

¹⁷ Beitchman 71.

The radical hybridity of Blanchot's styles is more pronounced in his later, fragmentary work, which Roger Laporte calls "a new style, a new genre."¹⁸ Significantly, however, what we have been calling a *style*, the *fragmentary*, with its speaking of the *neuter*, is characterised by the way it "dispense[s] with attributions of mode or genre," thus suspending the normativity of pre-established styles.¹⁹ In Hill's words, Blanchot's late writing is "essentially unclassifiable [and] fictional representation finally seems to have become indistinguishable from meditative, philosophical prose, and vice versa."²⁰

The result of this generic hybridity, of style that refuses to be teleocratically pigeonholed within existing norms, is, as Blanchot puts it, "a threat and a scandal of thought." The voice of the *neuter* in the fragmentary, writes Blanchot, "is that which cannot be assigned to any genre whatsoever: the non-general, the non-generic as well as the non-particular" (*IC* 299). This resistance to categorisation and prescription inscribing a relation to the "unknown" makes the fragmentary style profoundly subversive of conventional conceptions of thought. It opens new possibilities of thinking through an "interruption in language" that responds to "the unknown in its infinite distance" (*IC* 77). Style, in Blanchot, does not replace thought, but makes new modes of thinking—thought oriented to the yet-to-be-known of the future—possible.

While the dissolution of generic distinctions of style is clear in Blanchot's later work, the *récit/roman* dichotomy that appears frequently in Blanchot's early writing already gestures at this problematisation. Indeed, more than being stylistic or generic, the *récit/roman* dyad, for Blanchot, names inextricably intertwined possibilities in the ontology of the work. Blanchot writes about one particular episode in Homer's *The Odyssey*—the encounter with the Sirens—and how the novel (*roman*) and the *récit* have different relations towards the Sirens and their "imperfect songs that were only a song still to come [but that] did lead the sailor toward that space where singing might truly begin" (*BC* 3).²¹ The *roman* is characterised by its focus on entertainment, its being based on a series of episodes in time, as well as its credibility and familiarity which it presents as fictional. As Clark argues, this "definition of the novel would remain reductive, even silly, were it not set up entirely by way of contrast to the *récit*, a mode

¹⁸ Roger Laporte, "Maurice Blanchot Today," trans. Ian Maclachlan, in Carolyn Bailey Gill ed. *Maurice Blanchot: The demand of writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 25–33 (26).

¹⁹ Leslie Hill, "Introduction," in Carolyn Bailey Gill ed. 1–20 (11).

²⁰ Hill, *Extreme Contemporary* 13.

²¹ Since the word "narrative," in English, may also refer to novel writing and there is no English equivalent to "récit," "récit" is being retained for clarity.

of language to which the novel is understood as embodying a resistance.”²² The *récit*, unlike the novel, is a “narrative of one single episode” and it “escapes the forms of daily time and the world of ordinary truth” (BC 6).

However, the novel and the *récit* are not simply different genres but inherently interrelated (im)possibilities in the work. As Lars Iyer argues, while the novelist “believes [...] that he is in command of that which he would narrate,” he can only write by cutting himself off from the dangers of the sirens’ song. Or, in Iyer’s words, the novel leaves behind “the memory of the experience” in order to become a novel.²³ This memory, on the contrary, is what the *récit* as an event bears witness to, and it involves a “struggle” from which “what we call the novel was born.” The novel foregrounds the voyage towards the sirens but, unlike the *récit*, forgets “any allusion to a goal or a destination,” the inhuman song of the sirens itself. This makes the novel an essentially human enterprise, also because—in line with Blanchot’s thinking of *desouvrement* or *unworking*—human beings are powerless to reach the “Isle of Capraea,” where the Sirens dwell. “No one can head for this island,” writes Blanchot, “and whoever decided to would still go there only by chance” (BC 5). The novel cannot not forget its own point of origin, but that point in the space of literature, the event which the *récit* enacts, remains.

Blanchot’s account of the *récit* enacts a paradoxical anachrony in the relation between the *récit* and the event that pushes towards a thinking of style in terms of singular performativity or eventhood rather than generic normativity or stylistic deviation. While the novel remains rooted in human experience and human time, the *récit* exists, as Hill puts it, “only as an enactment of the singular event that constitutes the *récit* itself.”²⁴ In a recognisable style characterised by paradox, Blanchot speaks of how the *récit*

is the movement toward a point—one that is not only unknown, ignored, and foreign, but such that it seems, even before and outside of this movement, to have no kind of reality; yet one that is so imperious that it is from that point alone that the narrative [*récit*] draws its attraction, in such a way that it cannot even ‘begin’ before having reached it; but it is only the narrative [*récit*] and the unforeseeable movement of the narrative [*récit*] that provide the space where the point becomes real, powerful, and alluring. (BC 7)

²² Clark, *Sources* 84.

²³ Lars Iyer, “Blanchot, Narration, and the Event,” *Postmodern Culture* 12.3 (2002) n. pag (paragraph 38). Web, 10 Sep 2011.

²⁴ Hill, *Extreme Contemporary* 143.

The *récit* then, rather than a narrative in a particular style defined by its adherence to specific stylistic requirements, is a movement towards its own origin, an orientation towards a future that can never be present.

As Blanchot writes, “the narrative [*récit*] begins where the novel does not go [the dwelling of the Sirens] but still leads us by its refusals and its rich negligence” (*BC* 6). The novel may steer away from the event of the *récit* by favouring unity, continuity and sequentiality, but it leads us there anyway in being what Iyer terms “a narration of that which it has already lost.”²⁵ Thus, the differences between the *roman* and the *récit*, rather than generic or stylistic, are determined by different moments in the relation of the work with its own origin. This is why, as Hill puts it, “there is no such a thing as the *récit* in general, but also why there are so many *récits*.”²⁶ The event of the *récit*, or the *récit* as an event, is always singular, and one may say that a *récit* is only similar to other *récits* in being an imitable example of singularity. This thinking of the *récit* clearly problematises the understanding of genre as a category definable by stylistic, structural, thematic, or linguistic features. If the *récit* is always a singular event, then style, in relation to it, has to be thought within this incalculable eventhood rather than in terms of the fulfilment of generic criteria that would categorise the text in which it appears as a *récit*.

For Blanchot, modernist literature radicalises the problematisation of literature as definable in terms of “unity of genres.” Indeed, in modernism, adherence to stylistic norms no longer regulates “literature”:

genres scatter and forms are lost, [...] each book seems foreign to all the other books and indifferent to the reality of genres [...]. [W]hat seems to express itself in art works is not eternal truths, types and characters, but a demand that is opposed to the order of essences. (*BC* 200)

The effect of this break with traditional style and the continuity of genres in modernism has the paradoxical effect, for Blanchot, of taking literature towards its “disappearance.” What this means is not that literature is no longer written but, on the contrary, literature goes “toward itself, toward its essence” (*BC* 195). Modernist literature performs its non-teleocratic non-essentiality by calling itself into question, not in terms of a collection of styles, forms, or genres that are already recognised and classified, but as something that cannot be “discovered [...] verified [or] justified.” What speaks in modern literature is not eternal truth or specific literary styles but the anti-teleocratic voice of the *neuter* (*BC*

²⁵ Iyer, “Blanchot, Narration, and the Event” paragraph 38.

²⁶ Hill, *Extreme Contemporary* 143.

200). At least momentarily, certain works of modernism take art towards its end in the sense that “rare, fugitive” (BC 110) works by writers like Woolf, Joyce, Broch, Musil, and Mann do not simply “exhaust” a genre but seem “to have broken something” (BC 108).

However, Blanchot does not think of modernist literature—in its intense questioning of its own origins—as a different literary style or genre determined by the era in which it is produced. This sets his thinking apart from teleocratic conceptions of modernist style, such as that of Jameson who, as will be seen in Chapter 5, defines style in modernism as a period-specific phenomenon that reflects a particular stage in capitalist ideology. Rather, for Blanchot, in modernist literature, literature becomes what it has always been: an escape from genre and from anything which may act as an “essential determination” (BC 201). Blanchot suggests that the way art seems to be founded on its impossibility is not just an aspect of modernism but “the secret demand of art, which is always, in every artist, the surprise of what *is*, without being possible, the surprise of what must begin at every extreme, the work of the end of the world” (BC 107). It is in this sense that Blanchot speaks about the future of literature being a movement towards its non-essentiality. Style, if taken as referring to an aspect of genre, that is, in terms of formal rules that determine the essence of a work, a genre or a literary era, is what literature exceeds in its quest for its own non-essence. Indeed, the non-teleocratic “essence of literature is precisely to escape [...] any assertion that stabilizes it or even realizes it: it is never already there, it always has to be rediscovered or reinvented” (BC 201). From a Blanchotian position, to retain the term “style,” one has to think of it in terms of the event of literature, that is, in terms of an an-archic moment in which anything which already exists stops, falls apart, and is interrupted in the creation of something, that, at least momentarily, escapes essential determination and definition: the event as the non-teleocratic and an-archic suspension of the law.

As Blanchot argues, despite the traditional characterisation of modernism in terms of stylistic innovation, these works are not characterised by an attempt to achieve “newness at any price” and neither are they necessarily products of genius (BC 109). They are, rather, moments of revolution in which previous generic, stylistic norms are suspended. Even more than modernism, however, surrealism is for Blanchot the literature of the revolution, or as Iyer puts it, literature of “the day after the revolution.”²⁷ For Blanchot, “surrealism” is not a style, a system or a school, nor a

²⁷ Lars Iyer, *Blanchot's Vigilance: Literature, Phenomenology and the Ethical* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 72.

movement of art and literature” (*IC* 407) but a radical rejection “of what counts as art” (*WF* 301). Through “chance,” which “is offered by way of encounter,” thought is introduced to “what is encountered only through encounter” (*IC* 412). Surrealism allows us to see how writing is not simply a reflection of thought—as if the style of surrealism would be an attempt to convey a previously existing experience—but “thought writing (not thought written)” (*IC* 412). “Knowledge,” writes Blanchot, “does not exist before writing” and “the written comes to thought in the movement of writing” (*IC* 421). The surrealist experience is an opening to chance, surprise, the unknown, derangement, all of which may be met, in a volatile instant, and never fully grasped in an “encounter” through writing. This is not an encounter characterised by unity, which would allow style to coincide with thought, but a moment of “discordance” between terms that relate to each other through their exteriority (*IC* 416). As Blanchot writes, “through the aleatory[,] a relation is therefore produced that is no longer founded on continuity.” Style, in surrealism (in literature and thought), is not a teleocratic expression of the writer, of a concept or subject matter, but something that, in being written, touches, at least momentarily, that which is unknown, on the outside, and that always surprises us.

While Blanchot’s thinking, like Gadamer’s, problematises the understanding of style in terms of unity and normativity, there are essential differences in their respective thinking of the issue. Gadamer argues that focusing on style as an aspect of genre would lead to missing the “ontological valence” or the “truth” of the work that arises, always anew and singularly, in the hermeneutic encounter with the work (*TM* 130). For Gadamer, style is implicated in a moment of tarrying with the work that allows for the truth of the work to come into being. However, the temporality of style in Blanchot is radically different in that the singular event is “always still to come, always already past” and hence never conceivable in terms of the presence of “truth” (*BC* 10). Style, for Blanchot, can never fully coincide with truth in a way that Gadamer’s ontology of the work allows.

3.6 *Style and the Rational: From Philosophy to Poetry through Plural Speech*

Blanchot writes on the borders of philosophy and literature. Through his interest in writers of the fragment on the threshold of philosophy (Heraclitus), or its margins (Nietzsche), as well as through his own fragmentary style, Blanchot shows “the birth of philosophy within the poem” and its potential return to it—not in a way that reaffirms the stylistic differences between two modes of discourse but a way that suspends

generic distinctions (*BE* 16). Blanchot, like Nietzsche, Heraclitus, as well as Heidegger and Derrida, writes in a constant relation to philosophy, not from within what he calls its “official language,” that is, “the language of continuity” introduced by Aristotle (*IC* 7), but from within a tradition that—using a term to match Blanchot’s conception of art as *post-cultural*—may be described as the *post-history* of philosophy. The fragmentary style (as opposed to the traditional language of philosophy) is not “proto-philosophical” or “primitive” but actually “*postphilosophical*” in surpassing any conventional forms and expectations which regulate philosophical writing. The fragmentary in Heraclitus is not an initial step in the development of a more adequate or more rational language, but a space in which language *refuses* philosophy by preceding it and surpassing it at the same time. Blanchot writes the fragmentary, a style of interruption that inscribes thought, precisely, as a refusal to develop, a form of resistance to what he terms the “violence that is inherent in the art of demonstrating and arguing” (*IC* 340). The fragmentary, with its *doubleness*, its tendency towards *interruption*, its *disarray*, and its *plurality* of voices, precedes but also surpasses the dialectical language of rationality, characterised by *unity*, *continuity*, the logic of *non-contradiction*, and a teleocratic insistence on *progression* of thought. The fragmentary style, however, is not simply a refusal of thinking. It is anarchic, in the sense that it resists the authority of a master philosophical discourse, and, in so doing, it creates new possibilities of thought. This style, then, to use Blanchot’s words, is “one part, and not the least, of the ‘art of thinking’”—not an ornamental aspect of thought but constitutive of thought (*IC* 339).

The fragmentary style, a language of self-contradiction without a fixed centre, moves towards poetry. This is also the “essential movement” in Nietzsche’s writing and a major reason why his work becomes problematic for conventional philosophical styles (*IC* 140). Mme. Förster-Nietzsche tried to neutralise this doubleness—this non-coincidence between style and thought—by bringing Nietzsche’s fragments together and publishing them in *The Will to Power*, thus making her brother “a true philosopher, in the common sense of this word” (*IC* 137). However, Nietzsche, like Heraclitus, Char, and Blanchot, moves “from internal relations, characteristic of idealism, to ‘the third relation’ in which neither dialectic nor fusion has a role to play.”²⁸ Blanchot thinks of a third relation in terms of “another form of speech [...] wherein the Other, the presence of the other, would return us neither to ourselves nor to the One” (*IC* 67). It is a doubly dissymmetrical relation informed by strangeness and interruption that goes beyond determination through duality or oneness.

²⁸ Kevin Hart, “From the Star to the Disaster,” *Paragraph* 30.3 (2007) 84–103 (94).

The fragmentary style responds to this third relation through doubleness of language that does not simply seek to *erase* and *replace* unity. Blanchot upholds the possibility of sustaining what Hart describes as “two slightly phased registers, one dialectical and the other neutral, the one a mode of activity, the other a passivity beyond all dialectical passivity.”²⁹ This doubling is bound to disturb any movement toward unity but it does not form a new totalizing discourse determined by opposition to unity. As Beitchman puts it, “negation, for Blanchot, is only another form of affirmation” and Blanchot’s fragmentary is not mere negation.³⁰ The fragmentary has “two different traits”: it is “a speech of affirmation” and “already effacing itself, slipping outside itself by a sliding that leads it back toward itself in the neutral murmur of contestation” (*IC* 153).

The fragmentary style, therefore, does not originate from unity, and neither is it teleocratically directed towards it. It embodies multiplicity, contrariety, and refuses identification with an author as source. It also appears in the form of “plural speech,” a kind of conversational form that deviates from the style of Socratic or dialectical dialogue by “exceed[ing] all unity.” The voices in the plural speech of the fragmentary do not simply *converge*. What they say cannot be easily distinguished and it is certainly not opposed. Still, the phenomenon of repetition, the “redoubling of affirmation,” has the aim not of cementing that which is reiterated—as in the angry crescendo of “Hitler’s terrible monologues” (*IC* 75)—but of actually splitting it open to its own difference, otherness and strangeness: “Plural speech would be this unique speech where what is said one time by “me” is repeated another time by ‘*Autrui*’ and thus given back to its essential Difference” (*IC* 215–6). The “conversational form” in Blanchot is thus not simply the dialectical clash of opposites but an opening to difference.

Rather than embodying the voice of the philosopher or transcending that voice in a quest for objectivity, the relation established between the interlocutors in plural speech is, paradoxically, a “non-relation” or an opening to “an alterity that holds in the name of the neutral” (*IC* 77). Plural speech keeps them “suspended,” pulled apart by their foreignness to each other. This foreignness is rather what is really “in play, and demands relation,” an “infinite separation, fissure, or interval that leaves [the other] infinitely outside me, but also requires that I found my relation with him upon this very interruption that is an *interruption of being*.” In plural speech, written in the style of

²⁹ Hart, *Dark Gaze* 157.

³⁰ Beitchman 62.

interruption, the other is “not another self for me [...] but rather the unknown in its infinite distance” (*IC* 77).

Plural speech is a style that allows thinking-otherwise, not through the dialectical development of an argument, but through interruption, repetition, a form of stuttering. Conversation is, in its structure, inherently fragmentary; there can be no conversation without pauses and interruptions that allow for changes in turn-taking. However, plural speech is a more radical interruption. As Blanchot puts it, in the style of dialectics, “interrupting [is] for the sake of understanding” (*IC* 76). On the contrary, “the unlimited in thought [...] excludes all discussion and disregards all controversy” (*IC* 214). The interruption in language responds to the “infinity” and “strangeness” separating speakers.

This style of interruption is thus not simply a way of introducing gaps or pauses within the development of an argument. Far from being *just* a style, it is a radical change in thinking, “a change in the form or the structure of language” that revolutionises thought. The shift is analogous to the revolutionary shift in thinking witnessed in the move from Euclid’s geometry to Riemannian geometry. Thinking in terms of Euclid’s geometry, especially, his fifth postulate or parallel postulate, which proposes the inevitable meeting of two straight lines intersecting a common line segment at an angle smaller than right angles, involves thinking in terms of unity and convergence. On the other hand, plural speech, like Riemann geometry, which theorises non-homogeneous geometries, suggests “ceas[ing] thinking solely with a view to unity, and [making] the relations of words an essentially dissymmetrical field governed by discontinuity.” It is a “non-pontificating speech capable of clearing the two shores separated by the abyss, but without filling in the abyss or reuniting its shores: a speech without reference to unity” (*IC* 78). Plural speech is thus non-teleocratic, not deriving from a lost unity or moving towards a future convergence.

Unlike the dialogue style embraced by traditional philosophy, in plural speech, as Hill puts it, “there is no real distinction between the two—perhaps at times even more than two—voices involved. The speakers do not seek unity or homogeneity, but, in their intermingled voices, embody difference, separation and withdrawal.”³¹ Thinking is done through a style of repetition, a form of echoing that does not aim at dialectical progression of thought:

³¹ Hill, *Extreme Contemporary* 168.

— A great and fine exigency. Let us develop our thoughts.

— We will most certainly never say anything against reason, except to provoke it, for it easily falls asleep—but still, we must develop completely, and we know how very far we are from this total development. [...] [T]o learn not to develop is to learn to unmask the cultural and social constraint that is expressed in an indirect yet authoritarian manner through the rules of discursive “development.”

— Or it’s to risk giving the forces of unreason free reign. A cry is not developed.

Madness, however, is. (*IC* 339)

It is clear that plural speech is not an exchange in the style of dialectics in which debate leads to logical progression and greater coherence. The thinking of the interlocutors is fluid, constantly modifying itself and almost interchangeable. Soon enough, it becomes almost impossible, even beside the point, to determine who exactly is speaking. As one of the interlocutors puts it, “[t]rue thoughts question, and to question is to think by interrupting oneself”, thinking, therefore, through a style of interruption (*IC* 339–340).

While, as shown in Chapter 1, style has often been seen as potentially hindering or obscuring rational thought, Blanchot suggests that, with what we call “developed thoughts,” what might really be happening is that “‘truth’ lies not in the least in the ideas that are expressed, but wholly in their oratorical development” (*IC* 340). The “mode of exposition” or style thus makes certain speeches seem like “developed thoughts” but, for Blanchot, “true thoughts shun the violence that is inherent in the art of demonstrating and arguing” (*IC* 340). In urging us “to stop, to interrupt and make a void, to put an end to the tyranny of a well developed speech,” Blanchot suggests that the way language develops (or not) determines whether we can arrive at true thought or not. Language is thus presented as a pulverised non-space through which we flounder—not necessarily *stylishly* but always necessarily *in style*—towards thought rather than a channel through which thoughts are conveyed (*IC* 340).

As Hill suggests, *The Infinite Conversation*, with its mixture of a variety of fragmentary styles and more traditional, discursive styles, embodies, structurally and stylistically, the dissymmetry that Blanchot sees as posing a demand on us. In its structural and stylistic hybridity, *The Infinite Conversation* can thus be seen as being “not a random collection of essays” but an attempt to respond to the question set out at the beginning:³² “how can one write in such a way that the continuity of the movement of writing might let interruption as meaning, and rupture as form, intervene fundamentally?” (*IC* 8) As this early question in Blanchot’s book suggests, style or styles—“how” to write—is decisive in fragmentary and plural speech.

³² Hill, *Extreme Contemporary* 168.

This stylistic hybridity, a form of internal difference or what Blanchot calls “arrangement at the level of disarray,” is not only present in the juxtaposition of the different texts within *The Infinite Conversation* but also within specific sections in the text (IC 308). For instance, in “René Char and the Thought of the Neutral,” apart from a second section called “*Parentheses*” which is written in fragmentary conversation, difference and dissymmetry are inscribed by a sudden shift from the traditional essay form to the conversational fragmentary also in the first part of the essay. Writing *of* the fragmentary thus becomes writing *the* fragmentary, an inevitable response to a demand by the Outside, the Neutral.

In responding to the exigency of plural speech that in its plurality “is not predicated of the one and does not say the one,” the fragmentary, as a style, is thus not simply a signature, or an adequate reflection of subject matter but a response to a demand from elsewhere that is creative of thought (IC 156). The identity of the writer becomes irrelevant and the same may be said about the interlocutors in the plural speech, who engage in a dialogue as that “between two gamblers” and share a “non-personal intimacy.” While the gamblers may have “particularities,” their singular characteristics are forgotten during the game (IC 217). For Blanchot, the fragmentary is an even more radical questioning of style as signature than, for instance, the protean style of Broch or Joyce because its unrecognisability and escape from categorisation do not arise from a multiplicity of styles associated with plural voices but from a redoubling or repetition of an anonymous voice through different interlocutors who are non-identifiable, anonymous, and not individualised.

“A rose is a rose” is one of those texts in which style has a formative function through, paradoxically, an interruption of thought. Blanchot echoes Alain French’s claim that “true thoughts are not developed” and that, therefore, to “learn not to develop would thus be one part, and not the least, of the ‘art of thinking’.” One of the interlocutors responds to Alain by proposing “thinking by separate affirmations” in which one “says something and goes no further,” steering away from “proof, reasoning, or logical sequence.” Blanchot searches for a style that would respond to fragmentary thought as interruption rather than writing that seeks to preserve linearity, methodological progression and the coherence that characterises “the exigency of reason” (IC 339). Plural speech is a response to the fragmentary and it is not merely theorised but thought through plural speech itself, thus making itself possible in responding to the fragmentary.

Plural speech, by being structured in a way that allows for continuous interruption, implies that “someone else has the right to speak and that a place for him is to be left in discourse.” Thus, it “has from the outset renounced having the last word” instead enacting “redoubling” or repetition (*IC* 341). Just as Gertrude Stein’s recursive definition of a rose, while struggling to stabilise the object and its identity, has the effect of “withdraw[ing] from the rose even the dignity of its name, which, unique, claimed to maintain it in its beauty as essential rose” (*IC* 343), the redoubling in plural speech, that is, the doubling of the already doubled, “makes what is said enter into its essential difference” (*IC* 341). Redoubling, which fragments the conversational form in Blanchot, is a refutation of the origin.³³ It is repetition that always returns, always anew, not only recommencing every time but also imposing the idea that nothing has ever truly begun, having from the beginning begun by beginning again. This problematises the notion of the origin or the initial which theories of style as the proper assume. Instead of identity, through repetition, one becomes aware of the infinite difference within the same:

This redoubling of the same affirmation constituted the strongest of dialogues. Nothing was developed, opposed, or modified; and it was manifest that the first interlocutor learned a great deal, and even infinitely, from his own words repeated [...]. For it is as though what he said in the first person as an “I” had been expressed anew by him as “other” [autrui] and as though he had thus been carried into the very unknown of his thought: where his thought, without being altered, became absolutely other. (*IC* 341)

This thought about redoubling is soon echoed by the other interlocutor through a response which is not just *about* redoubling but *is* in itself a redoubling of the previous interlocutor’s speech:

Saying two times the same thing, not through a concern with what is identical but by a refusal of identity, and as though the same phrase, in being reproduced but displaced, in some sense developed of itself and in accordance with the very traits of the space engendered by displacement rather than according to the exterior organization of rhetorical development.

This is not merely a theoretical account of the style of conversational fragmentary but its performance or enactment. The theory and practice of the style of plural speech become indistinguishable, if at all separable, in a text which shows how “‘true thoughts’ are not developed, but repeat themselves” (*IC* 342).

³³ Cf. Derrida: “what is reflected is split *in itself* and not only as an addition to itself of its image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles” (*OG* 36).

Blanchot's fragmentary, through style, seeks the impossible disruption of continuity within a language that is traditionally linear and unidirectional, a language that unfolds itself, even in its struggle against development, through a forward thrust. However, within this linear progression that written language seems to impose, Blanchot identifies a disruptive stylistic and conceptual possibility, that of "writ[ing] without developing." This is a possibility that Blanchot, echoing Alain French, sees as having been "first recognized by poetry." Alain sought "in poetic formulation the model of these thoughts that should be said without being developed." As one of the interlocutors puts it, "[p]oetry and literature do not bear up under the insistence of something signified, or of an ensemble of significations already constituted and organising themselves through the coherence of a solely logical discourse" (IC 342).

The fragmentary style, in resisting development, thus returns to the poetic, to the literary as a quest for the non-essential essence of literature, steering away from the logical and clear style expected of philosophical discourse. It is this aspiration towards the poetic that makes Blanchot's style an enactment of that to which it responds—philosophy on the way to literature or, in other words, fragmentary writing, is what we read at the end of "A rose is a rose":

*To identify by separating, speech of understanding,
To go beyond by negating, speech of reason,
There remains literary speech that goes beyond by redoubling, creates by
repeating, and by saying over infinitely, says a first and unique time even this
word too many where language falters. (IC 344)*

Aware of the paradox that while true thoughts are not developed, he has just developed "this refusal to develop," Blanchot makes thought collapse into itself at the end of "A rose is a rose." The paratactic syntax of these final (but definitely not conclusive) formulations, their use of the infinitive as opposed to the conclusiveness of specific tense, as well as their unconventional use of commas followed by capital letters, take Blanchot's style towards the literary and the fragmentary. Thus, "the final word," rather than the triumph of a conclusion, is an acknowledgment of hesitation and uncertainty deriving from repetition.

3.7 *Style, Politics, and Freedom*

While the notion of style as a political instrument—a teleocratically oriented use of language meant to affect the outside world—is problematised by Blanchot’s thinking of how style dispossesses rather than represents, Blanchot’s conception of literature is radically political. For Blanchot, “literature is perhaps essentially [...] a power of contestation, contestation of the established power, contestation of what is (and the fact of being), contestation of language and of the forms of literary language, finally contestation of itself as power” (*F* 67). Style, within this context, may be thought as an aspect of a fundamentally *anarchic* revolutionary event that suspends the law. The social dimension of the fragmentary, in line with Blanchot’s understanding of the political as a radical refusal, involves thinking “the responsibility which comes solely from the truth of being a writer” in the language of the neutral rather than in what Blanchot calls the language of “Sartrean commitment” employed as an extension of the writer’s body (*DSR* 11). Style does not have political force due to its employability as a tool that could fulfil the writer’s intention but as a response to a demand that writing, in its impersonality and its coming always from elsewhere, puts on the writer.

Blanchot’s conception of literature as a form of contestation and the implications of a political understanding of style are central to “How is Literature Possible?” Through his characteristic strategy of first paraphrasing and then, as it were, taking a text to its limits and opening it from inside, Blanchot discusses Jean Paulhan’s distinction between terror and rhetoric, that is, between the attitudes held by those who distrust conventional language, style, and literary devices as impediments to genuine thought and those who uphold linguistic models and commonplaces as fundamental to all forms of communication, including literature. As Michael Syrotinski puts it, in Paulhan’s account of it, the “opposition between terror and rhetoric appears [...] to polarize two conflicting ideologies of expression; this aspiration towards originality on the one hand, and on the other, the attraction to the stability of the commonplace.”³⁴ Paulhan’s dichotomy includes two opposite ways of thinking of style, that is, style as difference or innovation and style as conformity to existing norms. However, the issues raised are not exclusively literary or linguistic. Paulhan reflects about his use of the term, “Terror,” rooting it in historical events: “We call periods of *Terror* those moments in the history of nations [...] when it suddenly seems that the State requires [...] an

³⁴ Michael Syrotinski, *Defying Gravity: Jean Paulhan’s Interventions in Twentieth-Century French Intellectual History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 82.

extreme purity of the soul, and the freshness of a communal innocence.”³⁵ In periods of revolutionary “*Terror*,” Paulhan points out, “skilfulness, knowledge and technique become suspect.” It is in this spirit that the delegate to the Convention, Joseph Lebon, decrees in 1793 that “the revolutionary tribunal of Arras will begin by judging those prisoners ‘who are distinguished by their talent.’” Terror seeks to return to innocence, presented by Lebon as freedom from the pernicious dangers of rhetoric or empty style wielded by men of “talent.” “Words,” for Lebon, “create fear” and, terror hunts down styles that may be ambiguous or indirect. In using the term, “terror,” Paulhan alludes to the links between distrust of language and revolution so that terror becomes that which is antagonistic to “flowers of rhetoric” or ornate paraphs of stylishness. Terror takes French literature from pre-revolutionary classicism towards revolutionary romanticism which enacts terror in its attempt to find new and original means of expression rather than emulating models. Thus, the classical preference for rhetoric is overturned in favour of thought, which is now seen as being antecedent to words.

Paulhan shows that the problem with the position of “terrorist” writers who would seek to, as Syrotinski puts it, “reject [...] literary places and conventions in an attempt to accede to pure, authentic expression is that, in their attempt to annihilate it or purify it, terrorists are obsessed with language.”³⁶ Paulhan sees this as a form of blindness to the rhetorical element in their thinking and he argues that once terror is pushed to its limits one discovers rhetoric. In other words, the terrorists’ invocation of freedom *from* style can only ever be expressed *in* style.

After following Paulhan’s argument around the paradoxical opposition between rhetoric and terror, or style and styleless innocence, Blanchot reaffirms the terror that Paulhan’s book discredits. Terror “is not just any aesthetic or critical conception; it covers almost the entire realm of letters; it is literature, or at least its soul, so that when we put terror into question, refuting it or showing the frightening consequences of its logic, it is literature itself we are questioning and gradually annihilating” (*BR* 56). While there seems to be an inherent paradoxical illogicity in literature, it exists. Terrorist writers reject commonplaces and stylistic conventions in an attempt to express their thoughts but, “this tendency, according to which one only writes out of hatred of words [thus rejecting established styles and rhetorical conventions], is the soul of literature.” In a moment of an-archic revolution or contestation, writers try to annihilate

³⁵ Jean Paulhan, *The Flower of Tarbes: or, Terror in Literature*, trans. Michael Syrotinski (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006) 24.

³⁶ Syrotinski 84.

all existing literary styles and, in so doing, put into question their own activity. Thus, literature, for Blanchot, seems to exist despite a seeming impossibility of existing. “How is literature possible,” asks Blanchot, when the creation of a work seems to follow from an attempt to prevent literature from existing? (*BR* 56) Blanchot gives two answers to this. The first one follows Paulhan’s argument literally and arrives at the conclusion that literature is only possible “by virtue of a double illusion,” that is,

the illusion of some writers who fight against commonplace expressions and language by the very same means which engender language and commonplace expressions; and the illusion of other writers who, in renouncing literary conventions or, as they say, literature itself, cause it to be reborn in a form—as metaphysics, religion, etc.—which is not its own (*BR* 58).

Paulhan’s suggestion is that the awareness of being controlled by rules and language and accepting their constraints can allow the writer to “master them” and to have a way of progressing to new territories. To rephrase this in terms of style, one may say that Paulhan speaks of innovation in terms of building on and gradually departing from established stylistic and generic norms. However, this conclusion is only one of the two that Paulhan reaches, according to Blanchot, as there is also a second answer to be read “in the secret book that we assume [Paulhan] has written” and which appears to us once we dispel Paulhan’s “arbitrary [...] opposition between content and form.” This is that “thought, in order to return to its source, that is, in order to throw off the loose outer form it is clothed in and which is a travesty of thought, has to yield to clichés, conventions and the rules of language” (*BR* 59). Thus, literature arises, from the perspective of both terror and rhetoric, through its absence. As Syrotinski puts it, “we are left with a terror that can only ever be re-invented, and a rhetoric that never allows itself to be codified into any kind of literary convention. It is neither terror nor rhetoric, and both of them at the same time.”³⁷

The claim is not that art has some kind of foundational purity but rather what Hill describes as “the aporia that turns that act of foundation into no more than the impossibility of a possibility.”³⁸ This, as Hill suggests, has major implications not only for the possibility of literature but also for the “political question of the future of the (national) community in its time of distress.” Both writing and the community in 1941 (when Blanchot wrote this essay) appeal to something in the future and to “resistance to all established, current and prior forms of” writing or community. Literature, like the

³⁷ Syrotinski 92.

³⁸ Hill, *Extreme Contemporary* 75.

unavowable community Blanchot dwells on at length in his late work, is an “impossible interval” which belongs to the language to which it is addressed while projecting itself to “voice what is nothing less than a promise of radical futurity.”³⁹ Literature contests all that is external to it. In giving it this role, Blanchot presents literature as founded on “a politics of opposition to the status quo” and as possibly helping in refounding the national community. Literature’s power of contestation lies in its contestation of the possibility of foundation.

The real contestatory force of literature, for Blanchot, lies in its being non-teleocratic, in its absolute refusal to be employable for any purposes the writer might have. The radical implications that this thinking has for style can be shown through a contrast to what may initially seem a similar conception of the political force of autotelic art in Adorno. Like Jameson, Adorno maintains the Hegelian dichotomy of style and content, and argues that “real denunciation is probably only a capacity of form,” which is “the locus of social content” (*AT* 230). Echoing Blanchot’s denunciation of *littérature engagée*, Adorno’s argument is that literature is inherently contestatory and “in no case does it become social through forced collectivisation or the choice of subject matter” (*AT* 231). Adorno roots the powerlessness of the political writer in the “ends-means rationality of utility,” the same false consciousness that directs even that kind of literature that seeks to expose that rationality. For Adorno, therefore, art is social in not being explicitly social, and “insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness” (*AT* 227). Adorno’s critical theory seeks to contest the primacy of instrumental reason, and it sees art as contesting such reason through its autonomy rather than being an instrumental intervention itself. As Simon Jarvis explains, for Adorno, “once works of art are pressed into the service of some higher end, they immediately lose their autonomous character. As sheer instruments they could no longer offer a critique of instrumental reason.”⁴⁰

This, however, should not be understood as a call for an asocial or apolitical essence of art. On the contrary, for Adorno, art is always political, and art is social not in engaging social concerns directly but in opposing society paradoxically by positing itself as “autonomous art” (*AT* 225). In late capitalism, everything is defined heteronomously and everything is given an exchange value, including all forms of practice, but “by its aversion to praxis [art] denounces the narrow untruth of the practical world” (*AT* 241). It contests action by negating practical life. Nonetheless, and

³⁹ Hill, *Extreme Contemporary* 76.

⁴⁰ Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 121.

it is here that a crucial diversion from Blanchot must be highlighted, simultaneously and paradoxically, for Adorno, art is itself praxis in its very antithesis to praxis. This involves a dialectical dynamic as art appears as “the counterimage of enchained forces” but also, at the same time, as “the paradigm of fateful, self-interested doings” (*AT* 226). The social dimension of art as an absolute commodity arises from its dialectical contestation and mirroring of commodification.

In declaring itself to be valuable in itself and not merely oriented towards anything outside itself, autotelic art, with its insistence on stylistic innovation at the expense of interest in social issues, resists the late capitalist notion that everything can be quantified and measured in exchange value. While, unlike Blanchot, Adorno thinks of the claim of incommensurability as *illusory*—art is not free from ideology and artworks are unable to escape the dynamic of the forces of production—he sees art’s persistence as critical of late capitalist commodification. However, the paradoxes go even further because art is only able to claim autonomy as a result of the social development of the commodification of culture which allows works of art to be alienable and not serve any immediate function. Autotelic art is not only “for-itself” rather than “for-other” but has actually shed the illusion that it is “for-other” and insists on being “for-itself.” Art is thus an *absolute* commodity that, unlike other social commodities, has done away altogether with the illusion that it satisfies a need. Art does not hide the fact that it is surplus labour, production for no need at all, style for its own sake, but actually embraces it in its defence against commodification. While Adorno’s insights into the contestatory force of art—as inherent in its autotelic claims rather than in any overt political statements it might make—reverberate in Blanchot, Adorno’s account of style is, in the final analysis, inextricably bound to social determination, and this makes it essentially *teleocratic*.

In *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot thinks of the political element of style through a consideration of *Ars nova*, a musical style of the late Middle Ages that, in its departure from strict rhythmic modes, was a radically groundbreaking form. Interpreting Gyorgy Lukács’s rejection of modernism and its preoccupation with stylistic virtuosity at the expense of the fullness of history and its social processes as an example of the recurrent failure to welcome that which is foreign to culture, Blanchot argues that the artistic experience is to be found precisely in that which renders art foreign to all culture.⁴¹ It is this foreignness and groundbreaking unconventionality

⁴¹ See Gyorgy Lukács, “The Ideology of Modernism,” *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 1963) 17–46.

which makes *Ars nova* an “artistic experience” (*IC* 346). Reviewing Adorno’s comments on the “barbarity” of atonal music, Blanchot claims that what makes it seem barbaric is in actual fact everything that ought to keep it from being taken as such: “its critical force, its refusal to accept as eternally valid the worn-out forms of culture, and above all its violent intention to empty natural sonorous material of any prior meaning, and even to keep it empty and open to a meaning yet to come.” For Blanchot, music written in the style of *Ars nova* is fragmentary, not in the sense of something primitive that “appears as a renouncing of the act of composing,” but “on the contrary, as the seeking of a new form of writing that would render the finished work problematic” (*IC* 347). Culture seeks “finished works,” “eternal things” that can be “admired as perfect and contemplated in the preserves of civilization: museums, academies.” It deadens the work of art by institutionalizing it and making it accountable in conceptual and historical terms. The fragmentary, on the other hand, “compromises the notion of the work” by disturbing coherence, predictability and unity (*IC* 349). This does not make “art” (as opposed to “culture”) “proto-cultural” or “primitive” but actually “*postcultural*” in that it surpasses any conventional cultural forms and expectations which regulate culture (*IC* 348). Style is thus a decisive element in “*postcultural*” art. In its radical innovativeness, it stretches the limits of that which culture considers art, thus resisting attempts to institutionalise art.

When Blanchot speaks of *Ars nova* as an art form that “desensitizes” language by ridding it of that which makes it perceived as “natural,” he seems to echo Shklovsky’s formalist notion of “defamiliarisation” or “*ostranenie*” (*IC* 349).⁴² However, Blanchot does not try to define literariness through purely formal aspects that gather onto themselves the essence of literariness but locates the essence of literature, precisely, in its fundamental non-essentiality, its contestatory resistance to formalist, political, thematic, or expressive pre-determination. The fragmentary style is not simply a way of defamiliarising reality through style. While traditional staples of interpretation include the suppression of that which is not recuperable into the whole, the fragmentary “painfully seeks to escape the power of such unity” and thus functions as contestatory, “radical interrogation” (*IC* 349–350).

In this respect, the importance that Blanchot gives to the thinking of a moment that unfolds a space of absolute freedom that is not bound by either previous laws or the requirement of future ends can hardly be overestimated. Blanchot’s distinctive line of

⁴² See Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1965) 3–24.

thought can be glimpsed in an interview in which he explains why he signed the “Manifesto of the 121” or the “Declaration on the Right of Insubordination in the Algerian War” (1960). Crucially, Blanchot argues that insubordination is not a “duty” but a “right” in the sense that the “utmost refusal” he signed for is not “an obligation [that] depends upon a prior morality” but “only on itself, on the exercise of the freedom of which it is the expression” (*PW* 33–34). Significantly, Blanchot speaks in similar terms about the absolute freedom of literature. The “enslaved” author, Blanchot writes, does not attain freedom by giving himself the liberty to make himself everything he is not but through a “global” negation that not only negates his own situation but is also “the negation of time, [...] the negation of limits.” Ultimately, the work is not a “negative, destructive act of transformation, but rather the realization of the inability to negate anything, the refusal to take part in the world” (*WF* 315). Blanchot talks of “refusal” as “absolute, categorical,” “something that does not enter into discussions” and does not “argue its case” (*F* 111). In being enacted, refusal exceeds law and functions as its neutral interruption. It does not appear as power but as what Hill terms “the weakness of the impossible as the ground without ground of the law,” an “affirmative caesura, hiatus, and interval [, a] neutral suspension of power, irreducible to any form of negativity.”⁴³ Blanchot thus thinks of literature and politics in terms of anarchic revolution which opens up a non-space of freedom from law, a moment out of time when that which determines and follows is suspended through a non-teleocratic conception of literature and community. Style as an event would then be an aspect of such anarchic moments that defy temporality and that institute, through a paradoxical anachrony, the possibility of the unannounced and unclassifiable.⁴⁴

3.8 *Style, Invention, and the Time of Anachrony*

Anarchic revolution does not simply suspend what came before. On the contrary, literature, Blanchot argues, “gives us a premonition it perhaps lives only on its transformations” (*BC* 109). While literature is a “powerful negative moment” and “coincides with nothing for just an instant,” it is also “immediately everything, and this everything begins to exist: what a miracle!” (*WF* 301–302). The birth of a work is

⁴³ Leslie Hill, “‘Not in Our Name’: Blanchot, Politics, the Neuter,” *Paragraph* 30.3 (2007): 141–159 (155).

⁴⁴ Blanchot sees Marquis de Sade as “the writer par excellence.” Sade’s words “I am the revolution, only freedom allows me to write” become for Blanchot “a state of affairs that any writer has to recognise” (*WF* 321).

marked by chance, unpredictability, the surprise of something outside expectation and control. Style, in this context, is not simply formal innovation but something that can allow for the possibility of an incalculable and unforeseeable event. Neither is style as an event the result of a *project* of change, for instance, the product of a manifesto. The temporality of style open to the impossible is “that of surprise.” The encounter, the irruption of the outside can happen “at all times but in a time impossible to determine” (IC 412).

Style as an event has a fundamental relation to the law, not in the sense that it is produced to annihilate the law or to renew it but in the way it provokes “exceptions to itself, which form a law and at the same time suppress it.” Blanchot does not present a groundbreaking work of “inimitable originality”—what we might call a work written in an absolutely singular style—as the exception to the law, but that which, on the contrary, reveals the law: “in these exceptional works in which a limit is reached, it is the exception alone that reveals to us this “law” from which it also constitutes the unusual and necessary deviation. [...] [W]e could never recognize the rule except by the exception that abolishes it” (BC 109). Style as an event, then, reveals the law of style retrospectively rather than through a conscious attempt to supersede existing genres and literary styles.

Clearly, as Blanchot argues, style as an event is “difficult to attain, [and] more difficult to sustain” as it becomes prey to institutionalisation, the work of the critics, but also of “the disciples, the imitators.” Those who imitate or comment about the style of a groundbreaking work “rationalize it” (BC 108). However, while non-teleocratic freedom is an ideal, literature derives its force precisely from its continuous confrontation with the question of its ground and determination, and this eventhood remains in the future singular encounters with singular readers. As Iyer argues, the “absorption is never complete” and the singularity of the revolutionary work and of its style keeps refusing complete appropriation as it is encountered always singularly, by different respondents.⁴⁵ A singular reading of style—what we have also been calling an *ethical* response to the singularity of style as an event—would sustain this singularity.

Derrida, as shown in Chapter 4, also allows us to think of the event of style non-teleocratically, but he also reminds us that if at the heart of the law there is always already transgression and innovation, there is also no transgression or innovation without the law from which it departs. In Blanchot, the resistance to teleocratic

⁴⁵ Lars Iyer, *Blanchot's Communism: Art, Philosophy and the Political* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 6.

conceptions of literature is even more radical, almost absolute, and it takes two main forms. Firstly, as seen above, Blanchot often thinks of the relationship between the author, the work, and the reader in terms of what we have been calling *paradoxical anachrony*, whereby the author or the reader is conceived as both the origin and product of the work thus disturbing the linear and chronological structures at the heart of most theories of style. Secondly, the need to “radically affirm [...] the rupture,” the break, is arguably the dominant (non)structure in Blanchot’s writing, whether that oriented towards politics, towards literature or, as is often the case, to a consideration of both simultaneously (*PW* 88).

The temporality of the event of literature, for Blanchot, is also the temporality of certain significant historical revolutions in which the established order is suspended and, at least momentarily, there is an opening to a future of possibilities not determined by past realities. May 1968 is one such “event” that keeps reappearing in Blanchot’s political writing. Blanchot interprets the happenings, protests, slogans and posters that appeared in the events as not merely oppositional to established power but as demanding an affirmation of a radical and “decisive” break from the notion of power, including the notion of opposition to power (*PW* 93).

In this context, the radical freedom after the revolution cannot simply be understood as a reaction against oppression. The revolutionary freedom that the writer embodies and enacts is not freedom to be used instrumentally in, for instance, attacking a political reality but “the power of non-employment” (*F* 64). If, in engaging with established power, one becomes an accomplice in power, what Blanchot sees in the May 1968 events is the structure of a non-dialectic conception of revolution which goes beyond simple negation in that it is the negation even of what has not yet been advanced and affirmed. May 1968 actualises such a revolution because it is an “anti-authoritarian movement” and not messianic since nothing came of it. As such, it is “sufficient unto itself, and [...] the failure that eventually rewards it is none of its concern” (*BR* 224).

In Bruns’s words, presented in this way, “[i]t is as if a revolution were like a work of writing.”⁴⁶ The anarchic revolution is “a rupture in time,” a refusal but also an affirmation that does not bring any arrangements but rather undoes arrangements, including its own. It is “a present without presence” that suspends time, and, at that moment, “there is a state of arrest and suspension. In this suspension, society undoes itself entirely. The law collapses. Transgression occurs: for a moment, there is innocence; interrupted history” (*PW* 100). As Blanchot conceives it, revolution emerges

⁴⁶ Bruns, *The Refusal of Philosophy* 261.

not as a *disruption* but as a *destruction* of the world order. It does not simply fine-tune society or overturn structures of power to replace them with others but detaches itself absolutely from power, affirming, for a moment, a break with order and the creation of an event. Literature inhabits and affirms such “a revolutionary regime,” that is: “the time of between-times when between the old laws and the new reigns the silence of the absence of laws, that interval which precisely corresponds to the gap in speaking when everything ceases and stops, including the eternal drive to speak, because, then, there is no longer any prohibition” (*IC* 226).

With Blanchot, style appears as a surprising and creative aspect of the event of art, its coming into being as “a new possibility” of thought (*DSR* 185). Echoing Schleiermacher, one may say that in Blanchot, at least momentarily, style as an event is non-conceptualisable and free from any kind of determination. Style as that which escapes conceptualisation, therefore, but also style as Heideggerian self-creation, that is, unmotivated opening to future possibilities without any pre-established designs and beyond determination by genre or human creativity.

3.9 *Reading and Translating Style: Blanchot Reads Celan*

Blanchot’s thinking about poetry in terms of a (non)relation to the impossible leads to questions about how to perform what may be provisionally called *ethical* readings of style. This section will address this issue through a discussion of Blanchot’s running dialogue with Levinas as well as of a short essay, “The Last to Speak,” in which Blanchot reads Celan as a poet of the outside. This will inevitably involve a discussion of style not only in theoretical terms but also “in practice” since, in Blanchot, style is always a response to or encounter with the outside, the impossible.

For Blanchot, Levinas, whom he calls his “oldest friend” and for whom he feels a “well known” debt (*PW* 124), brings “a new departure in philosophy” through thinking “the idea of the Other in all its radiance and in the infinite exigency that are proper to it, that is to say, the relation with *autrui*” (*IC* 51–52). Levinas challenges the subject-centred ontology that has dominated “philosophies of the Same,” through which the other is conceptualised as “another ‘myself’, being at best equal to me and seeking to be recognized by me as a Self.” Instead, Levinas thinks of “*Autrui*” as “entirely Other” or that which like God “exceeds me absolutely” (*IC* 52). There is a “transcendent relation” that marks “an impassable distance between myself and the other,” meaning that the other is “absolutely outside myself” (*IC* 53).

As Critchley argues, Levinas's view of subjectivity (like Blanchot's) is essentially *anarchic*. "The Levinasian ethical subject," Critchley writes, "is a subject defined by the experience of an internalized demand that it can never meet, a demand that exceeds it, what he [Levinas] calls infinite responsibility," and this "demand places the autonomy of the subject in question."⁴⁷ In this way, Levinas runs counter to "the 'archic' character of subjectivity in modern philosophy." While the "archè or principle governing selfhood is autarchy, understood as self-origination and self-legislation,"⁴⁸ for Levinas, "the subject is affected without the source of the affection becoming a theme of representation" (*OTB* 101). The relationship with exteriority is characterised by what Levinas calls "obsession," "an-archical" movement which "undoes thematization, and escapes any *principle*, origin, will, or *archè*" (*OTB* 101).

The face, or *le visage*, comes to stand, in Levinas, for that which I cannot dominate and which puts a demand on me, specifically, the demand not to kill. As Hill argues, "the face in Levinas is not a phenomenological entity as such, but [...] what, prior to manifestation, opens the possibility of relation to the other."⁴⁹ In terms of Levinas's distinction between the *saying* (an ethical event of addressing) and the *said* (propositional content), "my responsibility for the other is the *for* of the relationship, the very signifyingness of signification, which signifies in saying before showing itself in the said" (*OTB* 100).

The face of the other, towards which one is always moving and which imposes an obligation, offers resistance, "a refusal to allow [it]self to be tamed or domesticated by a theme" (*OTB* 100). This resistance of the other, who escapes determination and conceptualisation, Blanchot tells us in a phrase that hints at doubt, "*at least as Levinas characterizes it, is ethical*" (*IC* 54, my emphasis). Indeed, one may notice a discrepancy between the two thinkers in relation to Levinas's thinking of the relation to the other as ethical. There is "ambiguity" at the heart of Levinas's thinking: on the one hand, Levinas sees the relation to the other as a relation to God—more in structural than in thematic terms—but he also prioritises "speech" (over writing) as that in which the other "presents himself face-on, beyond the reach of my powers" and, through which, "teaches me and teaches me what exceeds me absolutely" (*IC* 55–56). How can the other exceed me absolutely through its "radical exteriority" while "at the same time ask of interiority that it furnish a common denominator between the Self and *Autrui*"? (*IC*

⁴⁷ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of commitment, politics of resistance* (London and New York: Verso, 2007) 11, 56.

⁴⁸ Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding* 93.

⁴⁹ Leslie Hill, "'Distrust of Poetry': Levinas, Blanchot, Celan," *MLN* 120.5 (2005) 986–1008 (990).

57). *Autrui*, for Blanchot, is not on the same plane as myself, and, hence, the encounter is characterised by infinite exteriority. It is in this sense that Blanchot claims that “what comes into relation [in the encounter] remains without relation, and the unity that thus comes to the fore is but the surprising manifestation [...] of the un-unifiable, the simultaneity of what cannot be together.” At the point of juncture in the encounter, “disjunction [...] reigns over unitary structure” (*IC* 415). This is also the kind of encounter that we witness in Blanchot’s reading of Celan’s poetry and prose, where, “what is speaking to us,” Blanchot writes—hinting at Celan’s line that would then inspire Derrida’s response to Gadamer’s reading of Celan: “The world is gone, I must carry you”⁵⁰—reaches us through the necessity “to carry one toward the other, in a union that does not create unity” (*LS* 57).

In emphasising the *radical* and *absolute* exteriority of the other, Blanchot, as Iyer argues, extends and modifies Levinas’s “non-indifference to the other person” to the “concern with the neuter, which is always, contra Levinas, ‘the Indeterminate They, the immense faceless Someone’[(*SL* 33)], which can be associated neither with good nor the ethical.”⁵¹ Significantly, at the beginning of “The Last to Speak,” Blanchot writes about “*What* is speaking to us” (“Ce qui nous parle ici”) rather than “who” is speaking to us in Celan’s poetry (*LS* 57 my emphasis). The shift from the other as person to the other as neuter, as Iyer points out, allows Blanchot to “link the relation to the other person to the relation to the artwork,” that is to the poetic in its relation with the outside and the unknown.⁵² After all, writes Blanchot while simultaneously citing and incorporating a verse from Celan’s “Stretto,” “isn’t the outside also read as writing, writing without link, always already outside itself: *grass, written outside one another?*” (*LS* 59).

Levinas generally speaks of the human relation in terms of the relation with *Autrui* as a human other; with Blanchot it is possible to think of poetry and of reading as relations with the outside, the neutral. This is what Blanchot also finds in Celan, for whom “poetic assertion [...] still leaves something, if not to hope for, then to think about” (*LS* 77). Poetry is an opening to the outside, the future, which, however, is never grasped. It is the promise of a handshake, the song to come of the sirens. It is the call to a call, as in Celan’s “Singbarer Rest” (“Rest [Remainder] Singable”):

⁵⁰ See Derrida (*SQ* 135–163).

⁵¹ Iyer, *Blanchot’s Communism* 11.

⁵² Iyer, *Blanchot’s Communism* 11.

*Forbidden lip,
announce
that something is still arriving,
not far from you. (LS 79)*

For Blanchot, poetry is the announcement of an arrival, not the arrival itself. It is that which promises an encounter, drawing towards it both poet and reader. As Celan writes in “The Meridian,” “a hope of poems has always been to speak in just this way [...] *in the cause of an Other*—who knows, perhaps in the cause of a *wholly Other*.” The “who knows” is crucial, as Celan insists. Blanchot, perhaps, would see it as the resistance of the wholly other to being known absolutely. Celan, conversely, sees it as encouraging because a “not all that distant, a quite near ‘other’ becomes thinkable” (Celan 408). This wholly other, a promise of a song to come, in Celan, is both poem and human other so that the net of “In Rivers” is cast with the expectation of a “you” and of itself being written:

*In rivers north of the future
I cast the net you
haltingly weight
with stonewritten
shadows. (Celan 227)*

Blanchot’s thinking of poetry as that which is not conceptualisable, as anarchically escaping predetermination, and as a form of singularity characterised by refusal and resistance, has several repercussions on what can be called a phenomenology of reading that arises from Blanchot’s work, which, in turn, is often a reading of others, including Char and Celan. Indeed, a discussion of Blanchot’s reading of Celan can only be, once again, a discussion of *style in practice*. In Blanchot, style arises as a response to the outside, a response to the impossible other that fascinates us but escapes complete determination; this relation to the outside marks the style of Blanchot’s response to Celan, a poet of the outside. As Clark writes, “in so far as the poetic is singular[,] its fitting reader does not pre-exist the encounter with it, but should become, through that encounter, the reader suitable to it.”⁵³ Style in Blanchot’s reading of Celan, as in his readings of Char discussed above, is the performance of such an encounter with the otherness of the other. As Blanchot writes in “René Char,” the relation between a poem and its reader echoes, in its impossible chronology, the relation between the poem and the poet:

⁵³ Clark, *Singularity* 107.

It is not true that poetry can do without being read [...]; yet previous to any reader, it is exactly the role of the poem to prepare, to put into the world (*mettre au monde*) the one who has to read it, to force him to exist starting from this still half-blind, half-composite that is the stammering reader involved in habitual relationships or formed by the reading of other poetic works. (WF 98–99)

Mandell translates Blanchot's "mettre au monde" as "put into the world," but the expression can also be translated as "give birth to." And what the poem, as a mother, creates is a "half-blind, half-composite that is the stammering reader," a dependent infant. Yet, impossibly, the infant reader is already "formed by the reading of other poetic works" and thus, to an extent, he predates the poem which gives him existence. On the one hand, reading is an inherent part of the economy of the work and to read is "to allow the book to be" (SL 193), to respond to its singularity through a "weightless yes" (SL 197). On the other hand, through reading, we are called into existence as readers. This has the effect of marking the work with what Clark calls a "permanent structural incompleteness" that leaves the work always open to singular, future readings.⁵⁴

It may be said that while Blanchot moves in a somewhat different direction to Gadamer in the way they develop their thoughts about the singularity of the reading experience, they share a distrust of expertise or scholarship which would seem to foreclose the possibility of surprise and the eventhood of future readings. For instance, far from flaunting the applicability and verifiability of his reading, Blanchot concedes that the "words that return with insistence" in Celan and that he highlights are "chosen perhaps by the attraction of our reading" (LS 69). What the reader responds to is not simply the author's act of communication but, as Hart argues, the "call that increasingly reveals itself to come from the obscure origin of the work [...] the eternal murmur of the Outside,"⁵⁵ or, in Celan's words from "Die Halde" cited by Blanchot: "*this drunken eye / that all around like us / wanders here and sometimes / surprised looks singly at us*" (LS 65). In Blanchot, then, style is not simply a linguistic feature of the text or a teleocratic expression of a previously existing reality but part of what is always a singular event that arises in an almost phenomenological encounter with the text.

The paradoxical anachrony defining the relationship between poem and reader means that the reader does not simply pre-exist the poem, as assumed by various kinds of reader-response theories and by cognitive stylistics. And neither is style a fixed quality of the work of art to be consumed, always in the same way, by readers. Indeed,

⁵⁴ Clark, "The Impossible Lightness of Reading" 84.

⁵⁵ Hart, *Dark Gaze* 193.

the impression one gets from reading “The Last to Speak” is that, as Hill writes, Celan’s poetry, “impossibly, bears witness to Blanchot as a future reader, who in his turn is called upon, impossibly, to bear witness” to it. Thus, the poem’s style is always open “to the forever impending instant” of reading, of encounter.⁵⁶ From this perspective, the notion of a common or ideal reader would seem to ignore the singularity of the poetic, including the singularity of the reading experience. If reading, like the human relation, is, in Hart’s formulation, “prior to private and collective relations”⁵⁷ and a relation marked not by convergence as much as by an infinite distance that never resolves into a unity, it becomes reductive, for instance, to think of reading as an activation of previously existing conceptual schemata shared by reader and poet. What the poetic suspends, in its anarchic non-essentiality, is the very idea of comprehension and activation of knowledge that is at the basis of reader-oriented theories of style. Moreover, if an ethical relation can only exist if there is an unbridgeable distance from the other,⁵⁸ the attempt to present style as various ways of triggering or tapping into conceptual schema is *non*-ethical (if not *un*ethical). In Blanchot’s words, “the relationship with the outside [is] never already given.” It is a “relationship without attachments and without roots.” To quote Celan’s “Schneebett,” “you are / up high, are / down low, I / turn toward the outside” (*LS* 67).

This leads to a second central insight informing a Blanchotian phenomenology of reading style: the distinction between the reader and the interpreter critic, or between the lightness of reading and the reductiveness of interpretations which seek to determine “what we must read and how we must read it” (*IC* 138). For Blanchot, genuine reading involves a double movement of listening and letting go, an openness to a process that flows with its own rhythms and tempo. “Hear, simply hear” (*IC* 329), urges one of the interlocutors in *The Infinite Conversation*, where we read how the lightness of reading “does not comprehend (strictly speaking), it attends” (*IC* 320). This, Blanchot suggests, is a direct lesson taught by Levinas: “understanding and assimilating does not suffice; what matters is to stay awake and be alert” (*PW* 125).

The differences between stylistic analysis based on notions such as conceptual schema and Blanchot may be seen, for instance, in the way Blanchot thinks of a *community* of readers. For Blanchot, the work calls forth a “community” of respondents

⁵⁶ Hill, “Distrust of Poetry” 994.

⁵⁷ Hart, *Dark Gaze* 206.

⁵⁸ As Hart argues, this is a major point of divergence between Blanchot and Levinas since “the one [Levinas] regards being-for-the-other, ethics, as marking an exit from the *il y a*, while the other [Blanchot] maintains that ethics can begin only if there is an Outside” (Hart, *Dark Gaze* 209).

who encounter the work as an affirmation of rules that “come into being and pass away with the singularity of the work,” that is, that are not simply rooted in previous artworks and that may not be valid for future works (*BC* 6). As Iyer puts it, “an opening occurs when a community of respondents is born with the work who each countersign the work, and are each implicated in its unfolding.”⁵⁹ *Community*, a term which becomes increasingly central in Blanchot, does not refer to a group of people who come together consciously to carry out a common task, but to a chance encounter that could never have been envisaged and that suspends the social demands of unity and a sense of *telos*. The community is drawn to the work of art but, in its worklessness, the artwork withdraws and thus disperses the members that it seems to bring together. Such a conception of *community*, based on interruption and dispersal rather than unity, brings to the fore a clear divergence from Gadamer’s thinking in terms of a community of readers. While Gadamer and Blanchot share a fundamental preoccupation with the singularity of the work, and both write against interpretations of the work according to preconceived conceptual schema or methodology, Gadamer writes how poetry is “intended for the members of a shared language community, a world in which the poet is just as much at home as his listeners or readers” (*WHO* 129). Discourses of “truth,” “understanding” and being at “home” in a language contrast significantly with Blanchot’s insistence on foreignness, the outside, and impossibility, and this is also at the heart of Derrida’s divergence from Gadamer. As Blanchot writes in “The Unavowable Community,” separation is what, paradoxically, regulates the relation in a community: “Each member makes a group only through the absoluteness of the separation that needs to affirm itself in order to break off so as to become relation” (*UC* 13). These are the terms in which Blanchot reads Celan’s “Speech-Grille”: “We are strangers,” together alone “round between bars” (*Celan* 107).

This movement of singularisation towards an encounter but also maintaining separation is also related to Blanchot’s thinking of the image as something that resists absolute translatability into conceptuality. The reader, for Blanchot, has a “double” relation to the image (*IC* 324). On the one hand, he activates familiar meanings associated with certain images. This is what conceptual metaphor theory tries to formalise by analysing style as a triggering of shared metaphors. On the other hand, however, the image is also a “figure of the unfigurable, a form of the non-formal” (*IC* 324). The image, in its singularity, is both transparent and opaque, translatable and unique. For instance, Blanchot notes how eyes are a dominant image in Celan. But if

⁵⁹ Iyer, *Blanchot’s Communism* 45.

eyes conventionally connote sight, communication, feeling, in Celan they are also stones “detached from the person, eyes one could think are solitary and impersonal.” They are “disembodied, deprived of any ability to communicate” (LS 63). This form of singularisation also corresponds to two kinds of image clusters that Blanchot identifies in Celan: firstly, those, like snow, night and ashes that make us “believe in a relationship with a reality or matter that is powdery, soft, light, perhaps welcoming”; and, secondly, images like stone, chalk, gravel or the sterile whiteness of snow “without increase or growth [...] at the bottom of what is bottomless” (LS 69).

A form of reading that responds to the singular eventhood of style would then not try to categorise the image in terms of ready-made concepts but allow surprise, the force of a beginning that interpretation seeks to close off by telling us how an image should be conceptualised or, in terms of style, how style triggers already existing concepts. In this sense, reading is non-teleocratic, “fundamentally without justification.” It does not signify back but “points” forwards, “saying nothing, concealing nothing, [it] opens space.” It points towards the future because it does not yet speak. Blanchot cites Celan:

We are, when we speak with things, always in the process of questioning them to know where they come from and where they are going, a question always open, endless, indicating the Open, the empty, the free—there where we are far outside. It is this place that the poem looks for also. (LS 69)

Reading style involves being open to this futurity rather than the foreclosure of teleocratic theories.

The image, as an aspect of style, gains singular force through two apparently contradictory movements. As Clark shows, in order for the singularity of the image to be acknowledged, one has to see the image in the context of the poem or text in which it appears as a whole and which it affects with its presence. This form of singularisation, in Celan, is taken to the extreme not just by words but also by caesuras, blank spaces, and interruptions. As Ginette Michaud pertinently asks, “can a blank be quoted?”⁶⁰ Can it, for instance, be reduced to a category in a taxonomy of images? Can it be seen as a stylistic device associated with a theme? There is a sense in which blank spaces are a major stylistic marker in Celan, but, in this case, style is not a linguistic feature in Celan’s poems as much as an experience of interruption in the readers’ encounters with

⁶⁰ Ginette Michaud, “Singbarer Rest: Friendship, Impossible Mourning (Celan, Blanchot, Derrida),” *The Oxford Literary Review* 31.1 (2009): 79–114 (87).

Celan. As Blanchot writes, Celan's poetry creates a "saturation" of signification through nonverbal means:

And what is speaking to us in these poems which are often very short, where words and phrases seem, by the rhythm of their undefined brevity, surrounded with white space, is that this white space, these stops, these silences, are not pauses or intervals that allow the reader to breathe, but belong to the same rigor, one that authorizes only a little relaxation, a nonverbal rigor that is not supposed to convey meaning, as if the void were less a void than a saturation, an emptiness saturated with emptiness. (LS 57)

The white spaces involve an intensification of the encounter rather than gaps in the meaning-making process of reading concerned with concepts. These are knots, instances, where poetry signifies by not meaning anything particular. The blank space refuses to be conceptualised, acting as a form of limit case to the obscure side of the image in their untranslatability.

However, as Clark puts it, "the exact opposite is also true [:] an image is also singularised, made freshly 'beginning', precisely by its detachability from its context."⁶¹ There is something singular in citing a line or an image elsewhere, a form of repetition that abounds (internally) in Celan's poems. Eyes, for instance, keep returning:

*Eyes blind to the world,
Eyes in the crevasses of dying,
Eyes eyes. (LS 61)*

But these eyes are by no means always the same:

*There will be, next to our own,
another eye,
foreign: silent
beneath the eyelid of stone. (LS 65)*

These images, and sometimes whole phrases and sentences, recur in Celan's poetry; however, they are also a stylistic marker in Blanchot's reading of Celan and here they attain, in some instances, the power of aphorisms. For example, "*Flower—a blind man's word*" and "*Your eye, as blind as a stone*" (LS 67), removed from their poetic context—the poem "Flower" ("Blume"), which complements images of closure with images of openness—and put next to other images of eyes indicating emptiness and darkness, attain a singular force that is derived from Celan's poems and their being cited elsewhere.

⁶¹ Clark, *Singularity* 112.

Blanchot's reading of Celan thus broaches a key question: "how can we discover the obscure without exposing it to view?" (*IC* 51) How does one read style in a way that countersigns the singularity of the other which is never to be grasped absolutely lest it be killed? Given the structural necessity of the reader in the economy of the work, avoiding reading altogether would signify a refusal to let the work "be" in the first place and, therefore, would be even more destructive than interpretation itself. Indeed, Blanchot not only speaks of the ineluctability of reading but also of the inherent necessity of *commentary* in the work itself. Blanchot writes how "the more a work comments upon itself, the more it calls for commentary" (*IC* 391). Again, Celan's poetry enacts such dynamics. Not only is his poetry readable alongside his prose writing, which is often a theoretical discussion of poetry that is clearly amenable to application to his own poetry, but the radical undecidability of his poems demands commentary.

Commentary, therefore, is not a parasitic activity in relation to the work but a response to the singularity of the work demanded by the work itself. Nonetheless, the question of *how* to respond to the opacity of the singular remains. Blanchot addresses the issue in relation to Levinas's practice as a philosopher and how his writing is faced with the problem of speaking about *saying* with the language of the *said*. "How," asks Blanchot, "can philosophy say, expose, or present itself without thereby, in using a certain language, contradicting or compromising itself?" (*PW* 148) This, clearly, is also a matter of style that concerns the language not only of philosophy but also of commentary. In which style should commentary be written in response to the style of a work being read? Iyer argues that "one cannot do this in the language of the philosopher. [...] For the commentator cannot treat language, the 'matter' of thought, as the outward form of a content that can be articulated in other forms."⁶² The singular work resists, in its obscurity, the simple separation of style and subject matter that thematic and formalist approaches seem to be based upon. This makes the formulation of a *method* of how to read style—a procedure to be followed in different cases—antagonistic to the singularity of the work's eventhood.

The alternative may then be to respond to the work by inhabiting the work's style, and by, as Iyer puts it, thinking "*from* a language, to essay a response in a language and an idiom."⁶³ In doing this, the commentator writes creatively, as a writer more than as a critic or philosopher. He responds to the work by repeating it, thus

⁶² Iyer, *Blanchot's Communism* 41.

⁶³ Iyer, *Blanchot's Communism* 41.

singularising the work both by identifying its uniqueness but also by moving away from it with his own response. Blanchot both writes about and enacts this kind of responsiveness in his reading of others. Reading requires the reader's complete attention to the read but also his singular abandonment to what is essentially a "foreign" language, a language coming from elsewhere. Blanchot's response to other writers, his adoption and incorporation of stylistic aspects of their work into his own writing, is in itself a defining characteristic of Blanchot's style, always open to voices from elsewhere, a protean response to the outside.

In "The Last to Speak," quotes from Celan abound—both separated from Blanchot's own commentary in German and French or English (in the original and translation, respectively) and within the commentary itself, often indicated with the use of italics. Michaud writes of Blanchot's response to Celan as

translation-interpretation [...] of Celan's poems, quoting them without specifying their source, nor their titles at times, translating and commenting at once, more and more making the translation itself the place of the reading, while at the same time leaving some lines untranslated, thus constantly crossing over the line of commentary [...]. [T]he voices of one and the other become more indistinguishable, while remaining apart and distinct.⁶⁴

On one level, translation, like citation, singularises the work through repetition. On another, it may be said, style, rather than being simply untranslatable, is precisely that which calls for translation. Style, some may argue, is untranslatable and, therefore, any discussion of stylistic features in a text should engage with the original. This view of translation has contributed to the translator, as Blanchot himself puts it, being labelled an "enemy of God" by trying to profit from reconstructing the Tower of Babel that God decided to destroy (*F* 58). Translators themselves tend to feel as "lacking in [their] own language all of what the original work promises in present affirmations" (*F* 60).

Blanchot, however, approaches the question of translation from a radically different perspective and writes that there is an element of obscurity or untranslatability in a text, a foreignness of the language to itself which, paradoxically, *demand*s translation. Thus, translation is not meant "to make the difference disappear" by producing an equivalent version in a foreign language; it is "the play of this difference," as accentuated by Blanchot's retention of the German version alongside his translation of Celan's poems (*F* 58).

⁶⁴ Michaud 80.

Blanchot revisits Benjamin and his suggestion that translations should try to make a gesture toward a superior language where all the mysteries of different languages would be reconciled. Instead, Blanchot suggests that translation accentuates the difference, the otherness and the foreignness that exists within the original itself (*F* 58). Through its otherness, the translated text rekindles the difference to itself that makes the original call for commentary and translation in the first place, while making visible the otherness of language in the so-called original text through a process not of resemblance but of what Blanchot calls “identity on the basis of an alterity” (*F* 59). Translation is a form of reading that “translates” or accomplishes the future “becoming,” the drift towards the other always already present in the original itself. The effect that this has is that of the same work appearing in what seem to be two versions in two foreign languages rather than in an original and in a foreign language. This is a form of singularisation that echoes the effect of citation discussed above.

Now, the foreignness of language even when it is expected to be at home in itself is precisely what Gilles Deleuze identifies as being the mark of style. For Deleuze, in fact, a great stylist is someone who does not conserve the conventional syntax of a language but has the ability to create a foreign language within his own language through syntax that pushes the language to its limits. The language inhabited by the writer is made to “stutter” and “stammer” by being pushed to “its limit, to its outside, to its silence.”⁶⁵ Translation thus becomes that which, rather than inevitably failing to capture untranslatable style, actually reiterates and recreates style’s foreignness in another foreign language. Style is not that which is necessarily lost in translation but that which calls for translation, both into a different language and, in the sense used by Derrida in “Des Tours de Babel,” into commentary.

To conclude, what are the implications of reading Blanchot’s style in his own terms? Michael Holland speaks about the mixed reception of Blanchot, arguing that while some see Blanchot as an anachronistic writer who should be consigned to the past, others, like Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Derrida and Foucault, not only embrace Blanchot but actually suspend judgment in accepting his premises almost absolutely. Holland suggests that this kind of response is too passive: Blanchot’s “methods and practice are not just accorded equal status with those of their ‘host’ [...] but granted a precedence which leaves them immune to critique, unreflected upon.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Deleuze, Gilles. “He Stuttered,” in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso, 1997) 107–114 (113).

⁶⁶ Michael Holland, “The Time of his Life,” *Paragraph* 30.3 (2007): 46–66 (59).

Hart too has spoken of the effect that Blanchot's style tends to have on his readers and commentators. Echoing Christopher Fynsk, who remarks about "the strangeness of [Blanchot's] language: a force, at times, that one associates with sacred texts," Hart describes the "Bible effect" of Blanchot's work, and argues that Blanchot's writing tends to exert a powerful fascination on readers evoking the respect usually devoted to the "sacred" or to "holy writ."⁶⁷ There seems to be a spell of fascination that captivates the reader and draws him closer to Blanchot while simultaneously leaving him outside, unable to grasp or understand completely that which draws him closer. It is a spell that, as Derrida suggests, calls for a "pas d'é-loignement," that is, simultaneously, a "step" of distancing and a "stop" to this separation (*PA* 37).

In front of Celan's poems, Blanchot himself is "[f]ascinated" and, in "reread[ing] these words, themselves always inscribed under fascination," he feels both the call and the withdrawal of the poetic (*LS* 83): "There is night, but, in the night, also eyes—eyes?—scars in place of sight, they summon, they attract, so that one must respond: *I am coming*, I am coming with a hard growth in my heart" (*LS* 85). A paradoxical dynamic of imbrication and rupture is created between Blanchot and Celan, but also between the reader and Blanchot.

In a sense, one may argue that Blanchot's readers run the risk of succumbing to a state of passive enthrallment that, as Hart puts it, "makes us stall."⁶⁸ It is not insignificant, in this respect, that Blanchot sees childhood as the paradigmatic "moment of fascination" (*SL* 33) and that he speaks of the "nearly innocent" pleasure of reading, as opposed to the reductiveness of interpretation (*IC* 318). In this respect, it could be said that fascination permeates our response to not only Blanchot but also to others who, like him, in walking the tightrope between the philosophical and the poetic, step forward *with* style and *through* style. Fascination, after all, is also the "experience of the person in prayer before an icon," the experience of "being drawn endlessly toward the divinity."⁶⁹ Confronted by that which, like the divine, is fascinating, "one is transfixed, unable to escape" as if from a "ghostly spectacle."⁷⁰ However, it may also be said that this magnetising and yet distancing effect that Blanchot performs in his reading of Celan, and that fascinates Blanchot's readers, is perhaps inextricable from the event of style itself—the event of encountering the singularity of the other through reading that is also writing—so that to rationalise the experience or to worry about losing control of

⁶⁷ Hart, *Dark Gaze* 164.

⁶⁸ Hart, *Dark Gaze* 140.

⁶⁹ Hart, *Dark Gaze* 140.

⁷⁰ Hart, *Dark Gaze* 126.

oneself in the process results in obscuring the singularity of style, foreclosing the aleatory, the impossible.

CHAPTER 4: DERRIDA AND STYLE

4.1 Introduction

Derrida's work calls into question teleocratic theories of style grounding "the philosophy of literature" and "all the possibilities of literary criticism."¹ The conceptions of style that arise through Derrida—as a performative event, as openness to the aleatory, as an anti-teleocratic mark of singularity that is always already countersigned by the other—provide an an(-)archic challenge to thematic criticism and its "search for the signified" (*OG* 160) as well as the essentialisation of style as a formal determiner of "literariness," which still ties "the *play of form* to a determined substance of expression" (*OG* 59).

Like Blanchot's, Derrida's writing responds to the singular demand of the other with style and in style. Style is inescapable so that, for instance, the attempt by "every philosopher [to] den[y] the idiom of his name, of his language, of his circumstance, speaking in concepts and generalities that are necessarily improper" is undercut by writing that is inevitably autobiographic (*SP* 35). On the other hand, thinking of style as the proper idiom—style as one's property, proper representation of one's self or inimitable signature—is to miss the open singularity of style, its always being haunted by the style of the other and the ear of the other to come. Rather than a teleocratic expression of self or the appropriate complement to subject matter, style enacts an anachronic response to chance not within the confines of a project of writing, but in the context of openness to the future which marks deconstruction.

Through Derrida, style becomes conceptual and formative. Following Heidegger and Blanchot, Derrida makes it impossible to separate thought from the formulation or enactment of this thought in language and his work escapes summarisation. Indeed, Derrida's style of interruption, his predilection for figures, such as paronomasia, homonymy and antonomasia, which highlight contingency and untie the simple dichotomy of signifier and signified, his formulation of syntactical constructions whose force goes beyond semantic signification at the lexical level, mean that, in his writing, as Hobson puts it, "[d]iscursive content is part of something more than the sum of the phrases."² The performative and constitutive force of style in Derrida's work makes style ineluctable in any reading of his work willing to

¹ Gasché, *Tain of the Mirror* 262, 266.

² Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998) 188.

countersign the singularity of Derrida's writing. Accounts limited to the identification and exposition of certain notions, motifs or arguments are reductive; one responds to the singularity of style by countersigning the uniqueness of the otherness of style through a singular intervention in style and with style.

4.2 *Style, Truth, and Philosophy*

Derrida's insistence on the ineluctability of style is a simple yet radically subversive challenge to certain kinds of philosophy. Traditionally marginalising style, philosophy posits style as a foil to its own quest for truth and dreams of being what John P. Leavey Jr. describes as "ventriloquism without speech," a language that transcends individual idiosyncrasies towards a mathematically unambiguous language that guarantees generalisability.³ Countering this, very early in his career, Derrida insists on how style is inscribed within not only philosophical language but conceptuality itself. He contrasts Husserl's attempt to elucidate style by "reduc[ing] or impoverish[ing] empirical language methodically to the point where its univocal and translatable elements are actually transparent" (*G* 103) to Joyce's literary style with its evocation of "the greatest potential for buried, accumulated and interwoven intentions within each linguistic atom" (*G* 102). Both of these positions, while seemingly unbridgeable, ultimately collapse into the other through what Alan Roughley calls their "shared teleology, the respective, ideal, yet impossible languages for which they strive."⁴ Joyce's multilayered style "can only succeed by allotting its share to univocity," to translatability and communication. Husserl's attempt to conceive what Hobson calls an "ideal repeatability of thought without the interference of language except as pure meaning,"⁵ on the other hand, has "to admit an irreducible, enriching, and always renascent equivocality" (*G* 103). Just as, even when it aims at absolute untranslatability through density of style, literature is ultimately, to a certain extent, always translatable, "no philosophy exists that may be absolutely formalized in a reduction to a conventional or technical language" (*ATS* 11).

The ideal of an absolutely translatable language—a styleless language of "pure meaning"—is destabilised by the philosopher's signature and philosophy's "adherence

³ John P. Leavey Jr., "French Kissing," in Julian Wolfreys, John Brannigan, and Ruth Robbins ed. *The French Connections of Jacques Derrida* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 149–164 (156).

⁴ Alan Roughley, *Reading Derrida Reading Joyce* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999) 6.

⁵ Hobson 46.

to natural language" (*ATS* 11). National and personal stylistic markers impose a form of untranslatability, which can never be absolute if there is going to be intelligibility. Philosophy seeks to forget the proper name, but style names through its recognisability and iterability. This is an issue which Derrida explores by juxtaposing Nietzsche and Hegel. Nietzsche signs repeatedly in his texts through autobiographical elements, his name, and genealogy. On the contrary, Hegel "presents himself as a philosopher or a thinker, someone who constantly tells you that his empirical signature—the signature of the individual named Hegel—is secondary [and] pales in the face of the truth." Not only can his signature "disappear without a loss" but its erasure is "even necessary" for this will "prove the truth and the autonomy of the system." However, this seeming opposition between Nietzsche and Hegel soon collapses. Despite appearances, Hegel "signs just as clearly" as Nietzsche and he finds it difficult to dispense with his name. Conversely, Nietzsche has great trouble signing because while he would like to sign, his signature is eternally deferred and differed and "will not sign just once by stating an identity" (*EO* 57).

Derrida's recurrent thinking of/in style has created resistance to his work based on the false caricature of him being a postmodernist thinker who replaces meaning and truth with style. For instance, arguing that the contemporary position that "there is nothing substantive to be said anymore" inevitably leads to the consolation that "there remain ways of saying, rhetoric and stylistic conceits," Nicholas Davey attributes Derrida's style to his supposed interest in "the notion of a limitless potential for variant meanings within language, the assertion of no meaning-in-itself."⁶ Repeating the well-rehearsed simplification that deconstruction drags philosophy into "the purely rhetorical and endlessly interpretable,"⁷ Davey argues that the style of deconstruction poses a "threat" that, like a "stile," must be overcome, and our response to the question of style posed by deconstruction should be an attempt to counteract a "negatively nihilistic" dimension which "threatens to incapacitate philosophy's faith in the meaningfulness of its insights."⁸

However, deconstruction is not simply a *style* devoid of or dialectically antagonistic to argument. In a conference confronting Derrida with analytic philosophers, Derrida argues that "there are no fronts" and his "style has something

⁶ Nicholas Davey, "Beyond the Mannered: The question of style in philosophy or questionable styles of philosophy," in Caroline Van Eck, James Mcallister and Renée Van de Vall ed., *The Question of Style in Philosophy and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 177–200 (177).

⁷ Davey 182.

⁸ Davey 178.

essential to do with a motivation that one finds in analytic philosophy” (AD 84). Deconstruction is actually described by A. W. Moore when defining analytic philosophy as showing “a *commitment* to the truth” (AD 59). The difference lies in deconstruction “not taking for granted the definition of truth as tied to declarative sentences”; Derrida thinks of truth not in terms of *adaequatio* or *alētheia* but in terms of “an engagement which calls for performative gestures” (AD 84). Using a phrase inherited from Augustine, to “*make* the truth,” to refer to a kind of truth that, unlike the phrase “to tell the truth,” does not presuppose information, “presentation” or the bringing to knowledge of what “is” (CF 48), Derrida speaks of responsibility to a truth that “remains to be defined,” which is analogous, in some ways, to “the truth of someone who tells the truth in a testimony,” that is, something which can never be verified by a third person and that may always be “false [...] in a theoretical sense” even if spoken “truthfully” (AD 85).

Style does not simply function within the teleocratic, constative structures of representation but also appears as performative aspect of the event of truth as witnessing. Style is thus not chronologically secondary—reflecting or obscuring an independently existing truth—but fundamentally implicated in the *making* of truth as openness to the future, to the other, to chance. Writing does things through style. It *is* through style. This is why Geoffrey Bennington compares any attempt to “explain” or “contain” Derrida by translating his texts into neatly packaged, transparent arguments devoid of stylistic obscurities to a form of neutering, a (mis)reading that is “fated to be blind” to aspects of language which go beyond thematisation (AD 39–40). Such studies are built on the false premise that argument can be separated from style.

The inextricability of argument and expression, or conceptuality and style, as it arises through Derrida’s thinking, is highlighted by Bennington’s Derridian essay on the “Index.” In particular, Bennington shows the impossibility of compiling a comprehensive *index rerum*, an index of concepts, which requires the compiler to “distinguish between a purely verbal occurrence of a word, and a thematically or conceptually significant occurrence” as well as to recognise the presence of a concept when it is not named directly.⁹ With Derrida’s style, the problems for the compiler are amplified because, apart from resisting thematisation, it performs an element of play through, for instance, paronomasia, antonomasia, punctuation, and syntactical undecidability that disperse fixed associations between signifier and signified.

⁹ Geoffrey Bennington, *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (London & New York: Verso, 1994) 277–278.

Indexing presupposes semantic transferability but, in Derrida, syntactic and grammatical features often carry conceptual force and may occasionally disturb the very distinction between words that carry meaning and words that are used for grammatical purposes. “Pas,” for instance, can serve both as a categoreme (the noun, “step”) and as a syncategoreme (the adverb of negation, “not”). The implications of this paronomastic undecidability, a form of immediate internal doubling of the word that dislocates the signifier/signified dyad, can be seen in two phrases Derrida writes in relation to Francis Ponge’s signature: “L”*érection-tombe. Pas d*’homme” (*SP* 56). Not only do we find the working of paronomasia across content words in “*érection*” (two nouns: “monument” and “sexual arousal”) and “*tombe*” (noun and verb: “tomb” and “falls”) but we are also faced with two ways of reading “pas,” that is, as a noun (“step”) as well as an adverb (“not”). The effect is syntactic rather than semantic in the sense that “the suspense is due only to the placement and not to the content of words” (*Diss* 220). Style in Derrida is not the *expression* of concepts that may be indexed but performative, the work of the aleatory, the contingent, and the marginal.

In this, Derrida’s writing overlaps with literature, which often undergoes “sacralisation” by being thought in terms of the inextricability of style and meaning (*EO* 149). While, as will be seen below, “sacralisation” does not, in itself, forbid reading but actually demands it, several schools of criticism ignore the eventhood of literature, the undecidability between the absolutely singular and its iterability or translatability that generates the force of the poetic or the literary. For instance, political theories that posit style as a manifestation of ideology teleocratically reduce the text to the expression of a previously existing phenomenon. Conceptual metaphor theory, which interprets stylistic variations in texts as the triggers of commonly shared conceptual schemata, is also reductive in providing an index or taxonomy of concepts or metaphors that a specific text is said to depend on.

J.G. Ballard’s story, “The Index,” performs the limits of such approaches. The story consists of a short Editor’s Note and an Index to “the unpublished and perhaps suppressed autobiography of a man.” This man’s life history seems to not be traceable anywhere else except in this index and the editor wanders if “the suppressed autobiography [is] itself a disguised *roman à clef*” or if “the entire compilation is nothing more than a figment of the overwrought imagination of some deranged lexicographer,”¹⁰ particularly because the compiler indexes himself in the index. The

¹⁰ J. G. Ballard, “The Index,” in Martin Amis ed., *The Complete Stories of J. G. Ballard* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010) 940–945 (940).

index, which replaces the missing text, is primarily an *index nominarium* of people and places. Entries are arranged in such a way as to create a narrative full of wit, irony, as well as tragic elements. For instance, we read under the entry for “Hitler, Adolf”: “invites HRH to Berchtesgaden, 166; divulges Russia invasion plans, 172; impresses HRH, 179; disappoints HRH, 181.”¹¹ Henry Rhodes Hamilton is thus impressed and disillusioned by Hitler in the space of two pages of autobiography. While the index style of the story does have literary force, the question arises as to whether it would be possible to compile an index to index Ballard’s story. In a way, the task should be easier than indexing practically any other literary text because the story is presumably already diluted to its bare essentials: names and events. However, no index could stabilise the performative force created by, for example, the juxtaposition of items, the use of page numbers for the purposes of plot development and humour, the introduction of names and places whose role in the life of HRH remains impossible to decipher, and more.¹² As Ballard’s story shows, then, there are in literature (as in Derrida’s and Blanchot’s writing, which, it may be argued, carries “poetic” force) certain aspects of style that escape indexing or thematisation because they function not through semantic transference but through performative eventhood.

Derrida’s problematisation of the hierarchical dichotomy of style and meaning is not a dialectical reversal. He shows how the essence of the sign is conditioned by a structural iterability that always already “splits the identity of the sign *a priori*” (LI 190) and while in classical accounts of ideality, the ideality of the sign is immune from the variability of the particulars, in his account the two are essentially linked. Any word, phrase, or sentence must be repeatable for it to be understandable but, as Bennington puts it, “these repetitions [...] cannot be *identical*” because if they were they would still be the same sentence. Therefore, the first occurrence “already implies the necessary possibility of its own alteration, simulation, untruth”¹³ and this undercuts theories of language—like Saussure’s—based on the neat correspondence between sense and reference.

The iterability of the sign makes it always open to the necessary possibility of citation and thus to what Bennington describes as “contingency, eventhood and mere probability.” A word, but also an event, is thus singular only in it being open to iterability which splits its singularity. The dynamics of iterability allows us to think of

¹¹ Ballard 943.

¹² The paronomastic play on HRH’s abbreviated name (reminding us of “His Royal Highness”) is another such instance.

¹³ Bennington, *Legislations* 289.

style non-teleocratically. Rather than a fixed and unchanging complement to or expression of meaning, style can be thought as arising, always anew, in the eventhood of the work, within the “undecidability between auto- and hetero-reference.”¹⁴

4.3 *Style and the Proper*

Iterability problematises not only teleocratic theories of style but also copyright laws, such as those of the United States, based on the distinction between idea and expression, whereby the idea, unlike expression, is not subject to copyright.¹⁵ Derrida’s thinking unravels the notion of style as *le propre* (appropriate representation and one’s property). While the law would want to make style one’s own, a form of signature that guarantees authenticity, the inherent iterability of style makes it open to depropriation.

One way of thinking about this loosening of the mastery of style by the signatory is through Derrida’s writing about “autobiography.” As Kronick reminds us, autobiography is conventionally described as “the laying bare of [one’s] soul [or] the recapitulation of the inner life,”¹⁶ that is, a written expression of one’s life, in one’s own proper style. Derrida, however, thinks of autobiography as writing open to the necessary possibility of the intervention of the other that precedes the self rather than an expression of the self. The temporality of autobiography departs from linear teleocracy and welcomes the future as the signature “becomes effective—performed and performing—not at the moment it apparently takes place, but only later, when we will have managed to receive the message” (*EO* 50). It is the “ear of the other that signs”—that which countersigns—and this is what “constitutes the *autos* of my autobiography” (*EO* 51). This makes the signature an “autobiothanatological narrative of the infinite return of an other already in advance of the one who signs.”¹⁷ Rather than something one possesses, it arises as always necessarily detachable from the signatory and performed only by the countersignatures that respond to it. If style is a form of signature, it cannot be completely mastered by the signatory.

The implications of this depropriation of style and the signature can be seen, for instance, by setting it against theories of style based on the logic of the proper. One

¹⁴ Bennington, *Legislations* 293.

¹⁵ “In no case does copyright protection for an original work of authorship extend to any idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, principle, or discovery, regardless of the form in which it is described, explained, illustrated, or embodied in such work.” *Copyright Act of 1976*, 17 U.S.C. §102(b) (1982).

¹⁶ Joseph G. Kronick, “Philosophy as Autobiography: The Confessions of Jacques Derrida,” *MLN* 115.5 (2000): 997–1018 (1000).

¹⁷ Kronick, “Philosophy as Autobiography” 1014.

thinks, for instance, of Dante's theory of the "illustrious vernacular,"¹⁸ which he develops by discriminating between "good" and "bad" types of language and which he expresses in terms of generic and social distinctions. The proper illustrious style—suitable for knowledgeable men of authority—is masculine and it dispenses with the mother tongues of different regions as well as feminine and childlike vocabulary. Dante's descriptive and prescriptive theory, in line with classical theories of decorum, associates the speaker's gender with the style that is suited to him. Style is thus made to represent the presence of the speaker in the sense of "source" as discussed by J. L. Austin, who speaks of being present in the first person active voice "by [the writer] appending his signature."¹⁹ Derrida, on the other hand, "risk[s] a hypothesis" in an interview: "The sex of the addresser awaits its determination by or from the other. It is the other who will perhaps decide who I am—man or woman" (*EO* 52). The signature waits for the countersignature and it must do so repeatedly as it remains open to future readings and interventions. As Derrida argues, the claim to absolute singularity, propriety and presence that the signature makes is always already disturbed by the potential absence of the signatory in a way that makes this potential nonpresence a necessary condition of the signature itself. While the signature marks the "having-been present in a past now" of the signatory, "a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer" (*SEC* 328).

Style is sometimes compared to a paraph, the flourish at the end of a signature originally meant as a precaution against forgery, that is, against others signing in one's name. It is also seen as that which may be plagiarised, a possession that may be stolen and appropriated by the other. Style, then, would be a mark of individuality, a way to discriminate and establish differences. This is the way style is defined by researchers developing software for attribution studies, such as, *Signature Stylometric System*, developed by Peter Millican, which processes electronic texts for stylistic comparative purposes.²⁰ Style can also be incriminating when, for instance, it signs for the writer even if the writer may not want to leave any traces of his presence. Forensic stylisticians often resort to style in order to solve authorship problems in legal and criminal cases, as in plagiarism or, more perilously, in tracing the author of an incriminating document. To think of style as a signature, then, is to broach issues of authenticity, authority, and

¹⁸ Aristide Marigo and Pier Giorgio Ricci ed., *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in *Opere di Dante* Vol. 6. General editors Vittore Branca, Francesco Maggini, and Bruno Nardi (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1968).

¹⁹ J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962) 60–61.

²⁰ Peter McMillan, *Signature Stylometric System*. Web. 15 Oct 2010.

<<http://www.philocomp.net/humanities/signature>>.

presence: style as a reminder of authorship, a flourish of individuality and recognisability against the threat of plagiarism or anonymity.

As Derrida argues, the emphasis on originality and ownership is a central aspect of the birth of literature as a relatively recent institution and this makes style decisive. Literature depends on the concept of the archive, which permits canonisation, as well as on laws upholding copyright and prohibiting plagiarism. While literature is not reducible to either of these two conditions, it would not exist as an institution without them (*NA* 399). Style as signature can allow for the identification of authorship. Style becomes a hidden signature to be uncovered by the researcher, like the signature on Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's "The Beheading of St. John the Baptist" (1608)—an altarpiece at St. John's Cathedral in Malta—which came to light through restoration of the painting in the 1950s. Indeed, the researcher who seeks to attribute a work to its proper author is also a restorer who restitutes to the rightful author that which is truly his. Style, then, is a tool for restitution, as demonstrated, for instance, in the extensive debate on the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, a debate in which style has recurrently been seen as a decisive key.

Derrida's formalisation of the signature, as Clark explains, does not involve a simple denial of authorship, as in claiming that a text does not belong to a particular writer or that a style cannot be linked to a specific writer, but an opening to "the structure of non-belonging, non-propriety, that affects any possible signature or proper belonging."²¹ It is not a question of choosing between having a style or not. As Derrida puts it: "The bar does not pass between the signature and the absence of the signature, but *through the signature*" (*SP* 34). The signature enacts what Derrida calls "the paradox of the singular event": for a connection between a source and its individual paraph or style to be recognised, the absolute singularity of the event of the signature must be iterable and reproducible (*SI* 42). In the words of Nicholas Royle, while one may wish to be inimitable and to underscore that uniqueness in literature—for instance, through an individual style—the desire to write is "also about an engagement with the fact that death, machine-like repetition and otherness are always inscribed in the workings of the name and the signature."²²

The repercussions on the understanding of style in terms of "the economy of exemplary iterability" are far-reaching (*SI* 43). The loss of mastery over style is also the condition of its readability. If style were to be teleocratically and exclusively tied to the

²¹ Clark, *Sources* 173.

²² Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 194.

writer as its source or origin, style would not be readable. This does not mean that the singular style cannot be thought or recognised but that style as signature, in its irreplaceability and uniqueness, is also iterable and thus always already divided. Writing, indeed language, must be iterable by the same as other and by the other. For the written to be written, it must continue to “act” and be legible even if the author no longer answers “for what he seems to have signed” (*SEC* 316). The case of Caravaggio’s signature brings these dynamics to light. This painting is the only one by Caravaggio to physically bear his signature. However, the painting doubles and splits the signature. Caravaggio inscribes his own name at least twice, not only with the letters “f Michelang.o.” but also with his immediately recognisable, tenebrous chiaroscuro style. While both these forms of signature are gestures of appropriation, the signing is open and in demand of countersignatures. Not only is Caravaggio’s signature literally fragmented, demanding anyone watching the painting to complete the name by adding the remaining letters to ‘f. Michelang.o’ (Fra Michelangelo), but, being placed in St. John’s dripping blood in the painting, it has led to numerous and conflicting interpretations, including, that it is a proclamation of Caravaggio’s knightly status and that it is a way of either confessing his guilt in the murder of Ranuccio Tommasoni or of predicting his own violent death.²³ The signature in the painting is already doubled and divided; it immediately points beyond itself and demands the viewer’s interpretations.

An absolutely singular style would be unreadable and indecipherable; and, not only are idiosyncratic styles inherently subject to repeatability but the more singular a style is, the more demanding of iteration and countersigning it becomes. In this respect, one may refer to Derrida’s understanding of the notion of *oeuvre*. While usually one thinks of an *oeuvre* as the lifework of a writer and hence as something that is intimately rooted in the author as a creative personality, Derrida thinks of it as a singular untranslatability that, paradoxically, creates the conditions of its readability. The *oeuvre* is “something that remains, that is absolutely not translatable, that bears a signature,” but “the signature is not necessarily the narcissism of the proper name or the reappropriation of something that belongs to me” (*ATS* 14). Certain works—and this is a characteristic that turns a work into an *oeuvre* for Derrida—show the ability “of producing the conditions of legibility of that which has been produced” (*ATS* 15). Rather than just being determined by the context in which they are read, an *oeuvre*

²³ See Genevieve Warwick ed., *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2010) 15.

affects the context in which it is read. Style, in an oeuvre, is not only a common trait or mark across various works belonging to the same author but also a context-changing aspect of the work which affects the reader and demands his singular response. Caravaggio's painting is an oeuvre and, so is the work of Celan, Ponge, and Joyce, as discussed below.

Derrida's thinking brings discourses of property into crisis and this has particular import in contemporary debates about style and plagiarism. Derrida's suggestion is not only that a text is always open to plagiarism, but that writing is necessarily a form of (informed) plagiarism. This is an aspect which Derrida explores in relation to Joyce, whose *oeuvre*, like Ponge's, not only affects the context in which it is read but seems to absolutely pre-inscribe its future readability. As Derrida discovers in his own writing, "you can say nothing that is not programmed on this 1000th generation computer—*Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake*," so that one can only be "in memory of him [...] overcome by him [...] obliged by him" (*TJ* 147). Throughout his career, Derrida admits, he is haunted by Joyce, whose "ghost is always coming on board" (*TJ* 149). However, Derrida's relation to Joyce is also Joyce's relation to what comes before him. *Finnegans Wake* is itself a "detached fragment of software" that is bigger than it, that is, "all the culture, all the history and all the languages it condenses, puts in fusion and fission by each of its forgeries." Joyce's novel, like Derrida's texts, thus inevitably *forges* anterior software, making distinctions between original and copy problematic. However, to forge is not only "to counterfeit" but also "to make." Joyce's text "forges, stamping invention," and in so doing, it goes forward in singular directions not completely programmed by what comes before. If a text is necessarily a forgery and a plagiarism of other texts that it "exploits" and "parasites," it is also "bigger and more powerful than the all powerful which it drags off and reinscribes elsewhere in order to defy its ascendancy" (*TJ* 148). Thus, on the one hand, "all we can say after" Joyce "is already comprehended" by Joyce; we plagiarise him and he pillages us a priori. On the other hand, "the new marks carry off, enlarge and project elsewhere—one never knows where in advance—a programme which appeared to constrain them" (*TJ* 149).

The control that a writer who "invents" a style or uses it for the "first time" may have on his invention is thus problematised. The signature is "aleatory" (*PS* 36), open to future countersignatures, those of the original signatory himself, but also those of others who may *countersign* by, as Bennington suggests, appealing to the "contestatory value" that the prefix *counter* carries (*DB* 165). A style is not only recognisable through its being reiterated as the *same* style in *different* texts by the same author, but also in being

countersigned, appealed to and carried away by others in the form of parody, pastiche, and also forgery.

Plagiarism is a particularly pressing question in the context of the university and the increasing emphasis on the development and use of software and other mechanisms for its detection. Being able to cite the work of others and writing in a particular academic style are a must in achieving “academic excellence” and the failure to abide by these requirements may lead to disciplinary measures, the most serious of which is being excluded from the university as an institution. However, through the logic of the law of contamination, the formulation of laws can only happen simultaneously with the recognition of transgression. In this respect, the declaration of authenticity that one is expected to sign at the beginning of a dissertation is a “test of authentication [...] part of the very structure of the signature [which] amounts to saying that ‘forgery’ is always possible” (*LI* 133). The stylistic rigidity imposed by the university on the writing of dissertations creates a tension in texts like this between the institutional demands and the ethical demand to countersign the style of the other by responding singularly to the singularity of the other’s signature. How to write about Derrida (but also about Blanchot, Celan and Gadamer), whose thinking problematises the simple condemnation of plagiarism by allowing us to think, at least to a certain extent, of writing as an openness to the other—thinking as repetition—in the context of the stylistic and generic requirements of submitting a doctoral dissertation?

This begs the question of whether it is accurate to say, like Emily Apter, that if one were to stretch Derrida’s arguments one would arrive at the conclusion that “there can be no such thing as artistic robbery since all texts are essentially thievable pieces of language”?²⁴ Does Derrida make the problem of plagiarism redundant by presenting language as inherently plagiarisable? In response to this question, it is important to note that, as Claire Colebrook points out, the notion of plagiarism “already assumes a *de jure* distinction between existing, archived and past sources on the one hand [...] and created and present acts of research [...] on the other.”²⁵ A plagiarist thinks in terms of origins, authorship and theft by, paradoxically, employing the language of the other as his, appropriating it and signing it, trying to fix it under his name. In Colebrook’s words, “Plagiarism *in general* [...] is not repetition as such, but repetition that presents itself as a first time.”²⁶

²⁴ Emily Apter, “What is yours, ours and mine,” *Angelaki* 14.1 (2009): 87–100 (90).

²⁵ Claire Colebrook, “On the Uses and Abuses of Repetition,” *Angelaki* 14.1 (2009): 41–49 (41).

²⁶ Colebrook 46.

Derrida's style, to be discussed in more detail later, might be illuminating here in showing how what he advocates and performs is not theft but a kind of *informed* plagiarism, whereby the writing of the other is echoed, inhabited and redoubled in a way that preserves the voice of the other as other while also carrying it away in singular directions. Thinking is enacted through the countersigning of others: Artaud, Blanchot, Husserl, Heidegger, Celan, Joyce, and more. Rather than theft, this is a form of lending to the other, to that which, in being written, asks immediately to be read or countersigned and is hence inherently indebted to the reader for its very existence. As Colebrook puts it, in Derridian terms, "the condition for the possibility of thinking is an essential and unavowable debt"; and, one may add, this debt is reciprocal between the signatory and the countersignatory.²⁷ Thus, a style that repeats the style of the other without trying to present itself as an original is not a form of plagiarism (which deceptively presents itself as a first time when it is not), but an acknowledgment of being "within" language and hence always already countersigning and asking to be countersigned. Blanchot's practice in relation to Char and Celan is a useful parallel here and, as will be shown below, similar dynamics occur in Derrida's own reading of Blanchot and Celan.

The various levels of complexity associated with style as a form of signing are laid bare in *Signéponge/Signsponge*, which provides a powerful challenge to "those excessively loose or crude machines which are as much those of biographical or psychological criticism (or literature) [...] as those of formalist or structuralist criticism (or literature)." Biographical criticism may ask whether a text is authentic or apocryphal (thus taking it as a given that there is a signature linking the text and the writer) but "as to the very strange structure of this place and this taking-place, the critic and the philologist (and various others) do not as such ask a single question" (*SP* 22). Biographical criticism gravitates towards the "outside" of the text, towards the poet as what Hobson calls an "end-station," for instance, by describing style as an expression of the poet's individual personality.²⁸ Critics taking the phenomenological route by advocating "the return to things themselves" remove the poet from his teleocratic standing as origin of his poetry and replace him with the "things" to which poetry is seen as returning. Ponge's poetry is often read in these ways but both approaches are essentially teleocratic in that they reduce poetry to either a reflection of its creator or of the world it captures in words. Formalist approaches to style are reductive too in their

²⁷ Colebrook 44.

²⁸ Hobson 127.

exclusive focus on the role of linguistic features in style; they focus on the “inside” of the text, “leaving the signature on the outside and sheltered from its being put on stage, into play or into the abyss.” Ultimately, as Derrida insists, the externally-oriented biographical or phenomenological approaches on the one-hand and immanent formalism on the other “are opposed, but symmetrical” (*SP* 22).

Derrida’s reading of Ponge’s signature problematises attribution studies. His critique does not in any way concern their reliability, and Derrida does not claim that knowing who wrote a text is irrelevant or uninteresting. However, “the philological fuss about apocryphal works is never bothered by the slightest doubt” about “the status [...] of a paraph” (*SP* 24). It is assumed that a text belongs to a signatory or a number of signatories working in collaboration and the only doubts that arise relate to who the signatory or signatories are. Attribution studies and forensic stylistics that see style as a signature ask “whether or not [the signature or paraph] has taken place,” that is, whether style can determine authenticity and ownership, but ignore “the event of the signature [...] the commerce between the said author and his proper name, in other words, whether he signs when he signs, whether his proper name is truly his name and truly proper” (*SP* 26).

Through a reading of the signature effects in Ponge’s poetry, Derrida exposes what can be called a splicing of the edges between what are conventionally thought of as the inside and outside of a text, thus disrupting any attempts to formulate arguments based on a division between the space outside the text where the signatory signs and the text itself which is signed, for instance, through individual style. The title is immediately indicative of the multiple directions that Derrida follows. Both the English and the French versions, *Signsponge/Signéponge*, paronomastically provide at least two permutations: “signs/Ponge” (“signe/Ponge”) and “sign/sponge” (“signe/éponge”). “Signéponge” also allows for another possible reading: “signe é Ponge,” (“sign is Ponge”). Indeed, one of the central issues that Derrida’s text investigates is the antonomastic wavering of “Ponge” between functioning as a proper name and a common noun. The reference to the sponge, a seemingly worthless thing, is central. The sponge captures the undecidability which contaminates while possibly retaining the possibility of the singular signature. Ponge writes about the “sponge” (“l’éponge”) in “The Orange,” in which the sponge is described as “a muscle” that performs a “vile exercise” when it “fills up with air, clean or dirty water, whatever.” Unlike the orange, which gives itself almost completely to the oppressor when it is squeezed, the sponge

always “regain[s] face after enduring the ordeal of expression.”²⁹ The sponge recalls the “impossible idiom of a signature” because it can be “proper” (“clean” or “one’s own”) or “improper,” and properly in tune with singularity (“propre” as propriety) or not. As Derrida puts it, “the sponge remains undecided and *undecidable*” bringing to the fore the mutual contamination of the proper name and the common noun, the absolutely singular and its inscription into language (*SP* 64).

This undecidability also undercuts the notion of style as absolutely proper. Ponge’s work revises the notion of mimesis as an imitation of things, a notion which often leads to style being defined in terms of suitability to the subject matter. Each object that Ponge writes about demands to have its absolute singularity respected and thus seems to sign the style of its writing. As Derrida puts it, the thing demands “a writing of itself that would be idiomatic, appropriate to the thing and appropriated by the thing.” In this way, the poem would be both “signer and signed,” proper and property (*SP* 46). Different things would then require different poems, each with its own individual style, proper and unique to the thing but also appropriately unique and idiomatic in itself, making the poem, as Clark puts it, “a thing in the same sense.”³⁰ This results in material aspects of language thickening, as in, for instance, the verticality of the graphic form of “i” helping to make the word “Pin” (“pine tree”) the “elementary idea of tree” (*SP* 30).

However, the demand of the proper, the attempt to capture the uniqueness of the thing in an absolutely singular style, is ultimately impossible in the sense that such a poetic demand, in being made of language, must submit the object to the law of generality and iterability. It involves capturing “the thing as other” in language while allowing it to speak for itself. This implicates Ponge’s poem in an imperfect *mise en abyme* that disturbs absolute singularity. Not only is the absolutely singular unreadable but the singular is always already divided by being exemplary of its own singularity. As such, Ponge’s poetry is antonomastic, implicated in a continuous shifting between the proper and the common, between naming and describing. The materiality of the language makes the poems work as proper names by disrupting the possibility of forgetting the actual poem in some kind of movement towards general meaning, but for there to be legibility, the poem must mean something and this makes it waver towards it

²⁹ Francis Ponge, *The Voice of Things*, ed. and trans. Beth Archer (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971) 36.

³⁰ Clark, *Sources* 158.

being a description that others can read. While Ponge wants to make style absolutely proper to the thing, style is always open to readability.

The propriety of style as signature is also at work in relation to authorship. Ponge tries to make poetry a uniquely proper signature, written in a style that is proper to him as origin. In this respect, Derrida identifies three “modalities of signature” at work in the poems (*SP* 52). The first refers to the act of someone “engaged in authenticating (if possible) the fact that it is indeed he who writes” or produces the work by representing his proper name in a signature. The second modality is “style, the inimitable idiom of a writer, sculptor, painter, or orator” which the signatory may “leave by accident or intention in his product.” Caravaggio’s chiaroscuro style is an already discussed example of this modality but so are several features of Ponge’s language in his poems. Ponge goes to the extent not only of signing at the end of his poems but also of signing within the poem through the different permutations of his name. However, as Derrida shows, by signing the text and inserting the signature into the body of the text, “you monumentalise, institute, and erect it into a thing or a stony object” and, in doing so, “you also lose the identity, the title of ownership over the text: you let it become a moment or a part of the text, as a thing or a common noun” (*SP* 56). From a proper name (appropriate and one’s own) identifying the singularity of the writer, the signature inscribed in the text starts to function as an iterable common noun. Rather than strengthening his possessive hold onto the work, in signing within the text, the writer loses hold of the text and he is effaced by it. What *Signsponge* plays out is a dynamic of signing that disrupts notions of property and authority. While Ponge might “wish to sing the praises and fame only of those who sign,” to sign in one’s proper name or with a style and idiom that is absolutely one’s own, language is always already moving towards the general or the improper, changing one’s name into a common noun (*SP* 32).

The third modality of the signature is what Derrida calls the “general signature, or signature of the signature.” This refers to these situations where the work “signs itself” as an act of writing, folding itself on itself thereby creating an abyssal situation (*SP* 54). Ponge’s “Fable,” for instance, turns on itself in a vertiginous and abyssal way:

With the word *with* begins then this text
Of which the first line states the truth (*PS* 8).

To use the distinction between *use* and *mention* that deconstructs itself, one can say that the word “with,” like the two lines as a whole, is both used and mentioned. The two lines describe the poem “Fable,” at one level, from the outside, but in so doing they are

actually performing what they describe. The poem performs simultaneously both “hetero-reference” and “self-reference” by performing what it says it says (it really begins with the word “with”) while at the same time representing what it does (it shows how the poem starts with the word “with”). The poem, in representing itself, refers to itself, while it seems that the poem is precisely made of its representing itself. Thus, in Ponge’s “Fable” there is no real reference to which this poem seems to refer. This abyssal structure creates infinite redoubling that problematises immediately any claims for the notion of style as proper expression of a thing or of an author, that is, what Clark describes as “a pure signature [that] would be a pure event of unique and unrepeatable (self) designation.”³¹

Being able to “fold all three [modalities] into a single one” is, for Derrida, Ponge’s peculiar “style, his paraph” (*SP* 56). What seems to make Ponge’s work identifiable as Ponge’s is precisely the way he signs in his work and the way his work presents itself as a signature but also how the performativity of his poetry and its openness to readability disperses the absolute singularity and propriety of style.

4.4 *Style and Invention*

Derrida’s quasi-formalisation of the dynamic of iterability can account for the relationship between the “absolutely singular” work and the “history, context, and genre” within which it appears in ways which echo but also differ in significant ways from Blanchot’s thinking about the “work” and the a-temporal space of literature (*SI* 67). Through Blanchot, one thinks of style in terms of revolution understood as “anarchic temporality” prescribed neither by a negation of past realities nor by the actualisation of a future project. On the other hand, Derrida formalises the inherent iterability of the new or innovative, arguing that whereas “the *act* of invention can take place only once, the invented artefact must be essentially repeatable, transmissible, and transportable.” Thus, “to invent [...] artistic styles,” which are singular events, “is to produce iterability and the machine for reproduction and simulation” (*PS* 34).

Their respective attitudes to the May 1968 events crystallise their divergent positions in relation to revolution. While, for Blanchot, May 1968 is a revolutionary break that suspends time and opens a space of absolute possibility, Derrida speaks of how the law and the institutions can never really be suspended anarchically even if they

³¹ Clark, *Sources* 166.

may be shaken. His “critique of institutions,” he says, “sets out not from the utopia of a wild and spontaneous pre- or non-institution, but rather from counter-institutions” (*ATS* 50). The transgression, for Derrida, can never be free of the law, just as the law is always contaminated, made illegal by the necessary possibility of transgression. This is the law of law; as Joseph G. Kronick puts it, “the law must repeat itself in order to maintain itself as the law” and this reveals its necessary illegality, being outside the law.³² While invention is singular, announcing the singular arrival of that which has not appeared before, it is also infinitely iterable in being dependent on recognition and legitimation and subject to codes and laws. The word “invention” implies a departure from conventional rules but something can only be recognised as innovative against the measure of these same rules. An invention which presents itself as a unique “first time” can only receive its status by being recognised as such by the law it redefines and therefore never really remaining a “one and only instant” (*PS* 6).

For Derrida, however, invention also necessarily refers to the singular countersignatures that mark the signature, the iterations and repetitions of the same always differently that respond to the demand of a text. There is inventiveness of style also in responding, always singularly, to an invention. Derrida enacts this inventiveness repeatedly through the styles of his responses to others, as in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. The title of the first version of this text was *The Question of Style* but Derrida states immediately that “it is woman who will be [his] subject,” even if “one might wonder whether that doesn't really amount to the same thing” (*S* 37). More specifically, Derrida is here interested in the figure of woman as she appears in Nietzsche and as she is ignored, “skirt[ed]” and “abandon[ed]” in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche (*S* 85). Derrida is also interested in style, Nietzsche's style, or rather the plurality of his styles that do not necessarily coincide with sense or meaning.

Through a wide range of linguistic resources like homonymy, homophony and paronomasia, *Spurs* performs undecidability, that of woman, truth, but also of style. As Derrida shows in a stylistically impressive introductory movement in his text—an inventive countersignature to Nietzsche—style seems to have phallic characteristics since in “the question of style there is always the weight or *examen* of some pointed object,” such as a “quill,” a “stylus” (“plume”), a “stiletto” (“stylet”) or a “rapier.” Wielded like a rapier, style may viciously attack “what philosophy appeals to in the name of matter and matrix, an attack whose thrust could not but leave its mark, could

³² Joseph G. Kronick, *Derrida and the Future of Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 41.

not but inscribe there some imprint or form.” Style, in this sense, is that which signs even when the philosopher would rather not. However, style is also receptive, a rapier used to defend oneself against an attack by style “as one bends or recoils before its force, in flight, behind veils and sails (*des voiles*)” (*S* 37). Style, seemingly masculine in form, is thus also associated with female veils and, in its inventive undecidability, it is left “to float between the masculine and the feminine” (*S* 38). For Derrida, style functions in “the manner of a spur of sorts (*éperon*),” which like a boat’s rostrum (a kind of spur or “*éperon*”) breaks waves in surging ahead but which, like a rocky point in a harbour (“*éperon*”), breaks advancing waves. Spurring style marks in attacking but also defends against “the terrifying, blinding, mortal threat (of that) which *presents* itself, which obstinately thrusts itself into view.” It protects the “presence, the content, the thing itself, meaning, truth,” and although it may have been retracted or subtracted, it “has nevertheless left behind a mark, a signature” (*S* 39).

The undecidable economy of style—attractive and repulsive at the same time, hence never close—thus seems to function like an umbrella, a pointed object which, at the same time, is surrounded by veils. This is the undecidable umbrella that Nietzsche writes about in a notebook, more particularly in the phrase, “‘I have forgotten my umbrella’,” which is framed by quotation marks and which Derrida insists cannot be pinned down to a specific meaning or a specific context. Even though Nietzsche’s handwriting may be recognised, the meaning and the signature that appropriates “I have forgotten my umbrella” remain, in principle, inaccessible (*S* 125). To sign in one’s name does not ensure property over what one signs.

Like the question of woman, the question of style is undecidable in Nietzsche. Style is liberated from readings defined by “the horizon of the meaning or truth of being, liberated from the values of the present’s presence.” In ripping the “veil/sails” (“*voiles*”) of truth, thus disrupting any oppositions (veiled/unveiled; unveiling/dissimulation), style suspends the search for “content, thesis or meaning” (though it does not destroy it completely as that would be the same thing as affirming it) (*S* 107). The unveiling of truth through or despite style becomes an interminable question, remaining eternally as a question. The phrase “I have forgotten my umbrella” affirms the possibility and necessity of something (like Nietzsche’s whole oeuvre) not having a decidable meaning, a possibility that Derrida sees as provoking and disconcerting any hermeneut willing to fix a text’s truth or content. This is the text’s nonsecret secret: it remains open and close at the same time, closed in its being cryptically “undecipherable” but also always open to future readings. In other words,

the text is “folded/unfolded [...] just an umbrella that you couldn’t use” (*S* 137). Style, like the umbrella that cannot be pinned down, suspends “the decidable opposition of the true and the nontrue” (*S* 107).

What *Spurs* tells us about style or what “Nietzsche was calling style [...] woman” is thus that “there never has been *the* style [...] *the* woman [...] *the* sexual difference” and that “if there is going to be style, there can only be more than one” (*S* 139). Nietzsche’s styles waver, without repose, between the systematic and the “parodying heterogeneity of the style, the styles” (*S* 99). They are heterogeneous, not reducible to the content of a single thesis; but they are not just style devoid of truth because if they were they would still fall into a fixed dichotomy between style and truth. Nietzsche signs repeatedly and in different ways (and styles). The plural “Nietzsches”—the multiple “names, masks and signatures” (*SI* 35)—put into question the “*gathering*” of the logic of oneness and unity that has dominated metaphysics since Aristotle and that Heidegger sees in Nietzsche (*ISI* 68).

Like Nietzsche’s, Derrida’s work is also radically inventive and heterogeneous in style—epistolary, conversational, fragmentary etc. It morphs according to the subject or thinker it countersigns, or the occasion that it marks; as Derrida admits, he “almost always writes in response to solicitations or provocations” (*SI* 41). His works sign singularly by countersigning always differently, never allowing us to formulate one description of Derrida’s style that would grasp it fully. As Kronick argues, “Derrida’s work does not gather itself—consists in not gathering itself—in a signature. And in this consists its singularity—it is recognizable by the other because it does not reappropriate itself.”³³ The inventiveness of style is not only to be found in the originality of an original but also in the countersigning of the other, the invention of the other.

4.5 *Style and the Law*

While Derrida writes about the ineluctability of the law inscribing invention, he also insists on the ethical demand or responsibility to always be open to the possibility of an “other invention,” something we dream of, “the invention of the entirely other, the one that allows the coming of a still unanticipatable alterity” (*PS* 39). What are the implications, in this respect, of, for instance, university courses in creative writing or governmental funding of the “creative industries” with the expectation of a return on

³³ Kronick, “Philosophy as Autobiography” 1006.

investment? Derrida suggests that the reduction of the new to calculability is what “all governmental policies on modern science and culture attempt [to do] when they try [...] to program invention.” Ultimately, this is an “order” where there is “the invention of the same” and no absolute surprise. Once again, the echoes of Blanchot can be heard here but there are also key differences (*PS* 39). Blanchot often expresses a commitment to an absolute and categorical “refusal” that not only transgresses law but is actually absolutely, at least momentarily, free from law. Derrida, like Blanchot, is interested in invention “for which no horizon of expectation as yet seems ready, in place, available,” but he also suggests that “it is necessary to prepare” for “the coming of the other” and that this waiting or beckoning to the other whose arrival is never sure and always in the future—*a-venir* (“*Viens*” or “come”)—is what deconstruction is all about (*PS* 39). One knows *a priori* that an inventive style is constitutionally iterable and repeatable but one never knows or programmes in advance when and how this will happen in fact.

Similar questions arise in relation to composition and academic writing classes in educational institutions at various levels up to university. Such classes are often meant to introduce students to the proper styles in different text types, and they are often based on specific textbooks and their style recommendations. One famous example is William Strunk Jr.’s style manual, *The Elements of Style*, which was originally written for in-house use at Cornell University in 1918, and which has been used repeatedly in composition classes (particularly since its republication by E. B. White in 1959) or listed as one of the suggested texts in research methods courses. Indeed, the general understanding of style that arises from this text persists within the institutional context of the University, which considers the mastery of the style of academic writing (including structure, citation techniques, the compilation of bibliographies, argumentative development, and other stylistic matters) to be a decisive requirement for the conferment of degrees. Strunk’s manual is primarily prescriptive, focusing on rules of usage, principles of composition, and other formal matters. It defines what is permissible in stylistic terms and the common errors to be avoided. The introductory chapter lays down the *raison d’être* of the manual:

It aims to give in brief space the principal requirements of plain English style. It aims to lighten the task of instructor and student by concentrating attention [...] on a few essentials, the rules of usage and principles of composition most commonly violated [...]. It is an old observation that the best writers sometimes disregard the rules of rhetoric. When they do so, however, the reader will usually find in the sentence some compensating merit, attained at the cost of the violation. Unless he is certain of doing as well, he will probably do best to

follow the rules. After he has learned, by their guidance, to write plain English adequate for everyday uses, let him look, for the secrets of style, to the study of the masters of literature.³⁴

Strunk's focus is heavily suggestive of the tradition of rhetoric and its emphasis on *correctness* of use and respect for the masters. The rationale behind the manual is inevitably instrumental, taking style as a principle of clarity, an essentially teleocratic aspect of writing meant to enhance the effectiveness of the students' work within an academic context. The "masters of literature" are also understood in teleocratic terms as their work is mainly conceived as instructive to "the reader" in grasping "the secrets of style."

A cursory look at some of the stylistic norms prescribed by Strunk—most of which are rigorously followed in this dissertation, a text produced for and to be assessed within the institutional framework of the university—exposes the inventive gap within which the style of some of the thinkers being discussed operates. Strunk, for instance, speaks of the need of beginning "each paragraph with a topic sentence" and avoiding "a succession of loose sentences." These rules, together with the general emphasis on reducing ambiguity, are broken, for instance, by Blanchot's paratactic sentences and Derrida's heavy reliance on paronomasia. Within the context of Strunk's criteria, therefore, some of Blanchot's and Derrida's texts may be deemed to be written in "bad" or improper styles, and transgressing the norms of clarity.

"Bad" styles were notoriously "rewarded" by *The Bad Writing Contest* run by the journal, *Philosophy and Literature*, between 1995 and 1998. Prizes were given to "the ugliest, most stylistically awful" passages in academic writing, and winners were deemed to have been guilty of churning out obscure and impenetrable styles.³⁵ Such styles were blamed on the rise of literary theory in English departments and dismissed as conveying "the effects of rigor and profundity without actually doing serious intellectual work." The meaning of the winning sentences was deemed to be irrelevant as the aim of these writers, according to the judges, was to "beat readers into submission" before their great minds.³⁶ Irrespective of the validity of the aesthetic evaluation of the judges, syntactical clarity and stylistic simplicity are taken to be prerogatives of "good" style. Some of Derrida's writing, with its undecidability and what Derrida calls the "liberties" he takes, would surely be suspicious under these

³⁴ William Strunk Jr. *The Elements of Style* (New York: Private printing, 1918) 1.

³⁵ Denis Dutton, *The Bad Writing Contest: Press Releases 1996–1998*. Web. Aug 2011. <http://denisdutton.com/bad_writing.htm>.

³⁶ Dutton, Denis. "Language Crimes: A Lesson in How Not to Write, Courtesy of the Professoriate." *The Wall Street Journal* 5 Feb 1999. Web. Aug 2012. <http://denisdutton.com/language_crimes.htm>.

criteria. Derrida's writing is far from grammatically inaccurate. Derrida insists he "detest[s] grammatical mistakes" and when he "transgresses," he does so with full awareness of the rules being transgressed (*ATS* 43). However, what the prize does not consider is the possibility of inventive thought being engendered, precisely, through what it deems to be "bad writing" or bad style, such as, for instance, the syntactical undecidability (not inaccuracy) of Derrida's writing or by the frequent use of paratactic sentences in Blanchot.

The *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing Third Edition* (used for this dissertation) shows a greater awareness of the effects that style manuals have on the possibility of the new. Style guides are not only meant for academic writing at University (which tends to be heavily prescribed in terms of stylistic requirements) but scholarly publishing in general, which may allow for different levels of stylistic freedom. In her *Foreword*, Domna C. Stanton argues that a style guide can never prescribe everything and that the norms "are historical, cultural, and contingent phenomena and thus provisional and subject to change." As such, the laws it lays down are inherently open to future revision. However, what they offer to the user is "mastery" of the scholarly style. Using the word "mastery" or related terms five times in seventeen lines, Stanton reminds us how, despite the changing protocols, the fact "[t]hat presentational conventions embody rules of apprenticeship for attaining mastery is as true in scholarship today" as it has been for a long time.³⁷ In order to be considered part of the institution—in this case, the publishing industry or the academic world—one has to "master" the rules of style, which also means being mastered by or subject to already existing rules. Stylistic mastery, it seems, would thus involve being "before the law [...]" the position of a subject who respectfully and submissively comes before the representatives or guardians of the law" (*BL* 201). It involves adhering to that which is written by the writers of the style manuals or dictated by the guardians of the institutions.

Stanton's "Foreword," however, unlike Strunk's introductory chapter, is more complex than a simple assertion of the need to follow stylistic conventions. Showing an awareness of how stylistic restrictions are also, inevitably, conceptual restrictions and, hence, politically significant, Stanton embraces attempts to be innovative in academic writing and to not be afraid of the difficult, that is, of that which may not be clear to a general audience. Citing Judith Butler—one of the "winners" of the Bad Writing

³⁷ Domna C. Stanton, *Foreword*, *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* 3rd Ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2008) xi–xxi (xii).

Contest—she explains how “linguistic [and stylistic] difficulty may thus be necessary for doing the demanding work of critical thinking.”³⁸ Stanton invites the readers to think of the manual as “an open book that we can rewrite in future editions, for future generations.”³⁹ The legislator is thus opening the law to change and modification by the cases of the future which, in defying the present laws, will have to be cases of illegalities or the work of outlaws. Using Bennington’s words uttered in another context, it may be said that Strunk’s “attempt to enforce institutionalized rules [...] is profoundly reactionary, and therefore profoundly anti-political, because it forecloses the possibility that the other be a legislator.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, Stanton’s foreword tries to remain open to the possibility of the other rewriting the same, of the future outlaw impinging on future laws. However, ultimately, Stanton’s essay—perhaps inevitably—confirms the instrumental and teleocratic ethos of style guides. In inviting “scholars [to] work collaboratively and proactively with others to change the contingent and provisional protocols of scholarly presentation that the *MLA Style Manual* lays out,” Stanton still tries to recuperate the (future) new/illegality into the statute of the law. In Stanton’s foreword, there is openness to the future but this is a programmed openness whose consequences are already laid out: formulating a more comprehensive list of prescriptive rules for future style guides.

Is it, then, in any way possible to write outside the institution and without any consideration of the stylistic conventions that are formalised in style sheets? As Bennington writes, any affirmation must “always compromise with the law which, for its part, must also assume the affirmation it is often supposed to repress.” Any style, however groundbreaking, is ultimately inscribed within the law that it seeks to overcome, and there is a certain “naïveté [in] opposing or believing one could oppose law in general” but also in “wanting to replace the old laws with new ones” (DB 240). Deconstruction does not urge us to think in terms of a formalist desire for moments of defamiliarisation that “get blunted into an achieved familiarity which would in turn need to be transgressed by new inventions” (DB 250). Rather, “if deconstruction had a goal or regulating idea, it would be: that something come about, that something happen, that there be some event” (DB 264). The style sheet’s urge to be comprehensive—for instance, the *Chicago Manual of Style* has grown from 203 pages in its first edition to

³⁸ Stanton xvii, citing Judith Butler, “Values of Difficulty,” in Jonathan Culler and Kevin Lamb ed., *Just Being Difficult? Academic Writing in the Public Arena* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 199–215 (209).

³⁹ Stanton xix.

⁴⁰ Bennington, *Legislations* 4.

1026 in its sixteenth edition—betrays the desire to reduce the possible gaps rather than, as Bennington thinks of the Derridian event, as “making a void to welcome this event” (*DB* 264).

The question of the relation to the law or the institution is—Derrida shows in a patient reading of Kafka’s “Before the Law” in an eponymous essay—nowhere as pertinent as in literature. Derrida sees Kafka’s story as especially relevant because not only does it, as a “literary object,” share its “conditions of possibility” with the “law” (*BL* 191), but it is also both a parable and a performance of “a law of singularity which must come into contact with the general or universal essence of the law without ever being able to do so” or, in other words, the “*paradox* or *enigma* of being-before-the-law” (*BL* 187). Circling around the question “What is literature?” Derrida reads Kafka’s story as showing how a text, before which we as readers (like the countryman) stand, “cannot establish law unless a more powerful system of laws [...] guarantees it” (*BL* 214). Just like the guardian facing the countryman in Kafka’s story is backed up by more powerful guardians behind him, the text can only present itself as literature with the backing of “the set of laws and social conventions that legitimates” literature (*BL* 214). As a modern institution established, Derrida tells us, “between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe,” literature is founded on legally backed notions such as uniqueness, authorship, property and genre (*BL* 215). The laws that make a text “literature” in the modern sense of the term are rooted in history; in the Middle Ages, texts would be protected by different norms and would be “more readily delivered to the transformative initiatives of copyists or other ‘guardians’” (*BL* 214). This historical shift coincides in many ways with the shift from style understood within a rhetorical tradition to style as a fixed property of the individual work and as expressive of personality. As Derrida writes, the work only becomes “literature” at “a certain period of the law that regulates problems involving property rights over works, the identity of corpora, the value of signatures, the difference between creating, producing, and reproducing, and so on” (*BL* 215). Individual style, from this perspective, becomes an institutional marker of literature, a sign of possession, something to be protected from plagiarism through appropriate copyright laws.

However, what in Derrida’s view takes literature close to the law is not only the way literature can only exist as such through the guardians of the law but also through the way it problematises laws or institutional markers, including, for instance, notions of genre and proclamations of essence. In this respect, comparing Kafka’s story to the same words published posthumously in *The Trial* is instructive. As Derrida suggests,

despite the words in the two texts being the same, the different relations with their borders mean that we are faced with “entirely different work[s].” The implication is that it is not genre (on a wide level) or individual style (at the level of the author) that makes a literary text different from others—in this case the two texts are practically identical except for the omitted title in the novel version of the passage—but “the movements of framing and referentiality.” Literariness is thus more a relation to the law than an essence of a text, be it stylistic, generic, or thematic (*BL* 213).

4.6 *Style and Temporality*

In organic theories that prioritise a principle of unity, one finds that even though subject matter may not be prioritised, style is still understood teleocratically in terms of its integration with the subject matter. Irrespective of whether critics conceive style as somehow detachable from content or inextricably bound to it, they are still upholding a dichotomy which, in Attridge’s words, is “associated with a static understanding of the art object.”⁴¹ Accordingly, the critic considers the work as a fixed creation that can be accessed, analysed and interpreted at any time in ways which elucidate what the text is about, different aspects of its form, including style, and the relationship between its form and its content. Similar assumptions about the fixity of style are also at the basis of political theories which posit style as a reflection of ideology as well as, for instance, recently developed methods in corpus stylistics, which may perform statistical analyses of texts in search of significant points of deviation or convergence in the linguistic fibre of texts as style and authorship markers.

The temporal structure of style that arises from these theories is teleocratic, linear, and fixed. Derrida, on the other hand, allows us to think style non-teleocratically, in terms of an-archy and anachrony. Against “the idea of the book,” which “always refers to a natural totality,” he often writes in fragments or in aphorisms which perform time differently (*OG* 18). His text on Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet”—a play about haste and arriving always too early or too late—brings out the anarchy and anachrony of the aphoristic style in various ways. The title-word “contretemps” in “L’aphorisme à contretemps” is translated as “countertime,” thus suggesting going *against* time, but in both English and French “contretemps” also suggests unexpected accidents which may impede your progression, mishaps of the type that recur in Shakespeare’s play.

⁴¹ Attridge 107.

As Royle points out, the word “contretemps,” in French, also “refers to being ‘out of time’ or ‘off-beat’ in the musical sense” (AC 416). Derrida’s aphorisms may be off-beat, out of joint, proceeding at an inconsistent tempo, varying in length, focus, and direction. Sometimes, they proceed chronologically, taking on motifs started in previous aphorisms. Occasionally, they go back, echoing in different ways what was said earlier. At other times, they depart completely from a sense of progression through an abrupt shift in focus. In this sense, an “aphorism is exposure to contretemps” (AC 416):

Aphorism is the name.

As its name indicates, aphorism separates, it marks dissociation (*apo*), it terminates, delimits, arrests (*horizō*). It brings to an end by separating, it separates in order to end—and to define [*finir—et définir*].

An aphorism is a name but every name can take on the figure of aphorism. (AC 416)

“In the beginning,” we read, “there was contretemps” and the three opening aphorisms perform this “initial anachrony” (AC 416). There is no introduction, no laying out of a telos or goal for the text. Words recur (“Aphorism,” “name,” “separates”) and syntactical constructions reappear with varied modulations (“(An) Aphorism is the/a name”). If the aphorisms were waves, they would be very unpredictable ones, sometimes coming to an end with the abrupt force of a one-liner and sometimes lingering on the shore, before expiring, for more than a full page of text. The aphorisms, with their numbering, seem to be islands of meaning separated from each other by always coming to an end but, as Derrida writes, “an aphorism never arrives by itself [...]. It is part of a serial logic” (AC 416). The logic, however, is disrupted: “One aphorism in the series can come before or after the other, before *and* after the other, each can survive the other” (AC 417). In returning through echoing in other aphorisms, an aphorism seems—like Romeo and Juliet as well as their names—to have survived its death only to die again. And if aphorisms may return, “[n]othing is absolutely assured, neither the linking nor the order.” Derrida’s aphoristic style, like Blanchot’s fragmentary, is open to the aleatory, to chance, to a future that can never be known a priori. The aphorism, therefore, works within the dynamics of an “exemplary anachrony, the essential impossibility of any absolute synchronisation” (AC 418).

Derrida’s aphorisms do not only *express* the anachrony of the aphorism; they perform it. The text is not simply written in aphoristic style, representing in an appropriate form Derrida’s ideas about aphorisms. It performs fragmentation thus

bringing fragmentation to thought. And it does this by not presenting itself as an original first time but as a response, a countersignature, not only to the demand to write for a contemporary performance of the play but also to Shakespeare's original play, which is a reworking of other plays. The text is an aphorism that is located (im)possibly in a series of singular aphorisms, which are also countersignatures (Shakespeare's, his predecessors', and many others). Just like every aphorism, the text is not a closed unit, the fixed monumentalisation of a moment in time, but a response always open to the countersignatures of the future which may or may not arrive. The last aphorism in the series of thirty-nine (the odd number makes the series seem imperfect, interrupted, elliptical) thus ends but does not close the series. Derrida speaks of the "absolute aphorism," the "[e]nd of drama" and the "[c]urtain," which, like Angelo dall'Oca Bianca's painting, "Morte di Giulietta e Romeo," at Juliet's house in Verona, tries to freeze the moment of the death of the couple. In so doing, however, Derrida reopens the aphoristic text to further countersignatures by gesturing at how the play is countersigned by the painter and how "Tourism" and the "December sun in Verona" echo and respond, singularly and differently, to the crowds gathering in sunless Verona at the end of Shakespeare's play (AC 433).

The economy of the literary, its open singularity that makes it unique but also inherently and necessarily iterable—countersigned and open to countersignatures—opens the text, de-monumentalises it. The work is no longer to be conceived as a fixed object—with all the repercussions this has on theories of style—but as constantly in flux according to the structure of singularisation. The eventhood of style recurs, in the form of singular encounters rather than as universality. Ben Jonson thinks of Shakespeare's works as "not of an age but for all time"; Shakespeare is "alive still," "a Monument without a tomb," whose eternity is assured by a projection into time of the "Soul of the age." For Jonson, Shakespeare's style or "his well torned and true filed lines" reflect the bright light of his "mind and manners" so that his works are marked by his name (shake-spear) and his signature, which "shake[s] a lance, / As brandisht at the eyes of ignorance."⁴² However, the force of the literary, for Derrida, is not the effect of a monumentalisation of the name into the work through style or the bypassing of historical circumstance in capturing an essence of human nature, the gist of universality. It is more the effect of an internal re-mark that opens that which is unique and irreplaceable to an infinity of further singular responses. What passes the test of time by

⁴² Ben Jonson, "To the memory of my beloved, The Author Mr. William Shakespeare and what he hath left us," *The Works of Ben Jonson Vol. 3* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1910) 287–9.

resisting erosion, then, is not only the monument or the inscription of one's name on it⁴³ ("My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings / Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!"), but also the work's living on through its inherent openness to future singular readings (like those of "a traveller from an antique land," Shelley's persona, and readers).⁴⁴ Style, in this sense, is to be located in the constantly fluctuating events of encounter that split and double the original and once-only flourish of the stiletto (or spear) that would monumentalise the text.

In a recent newspaper interview, Paolo Coelho dismissed Joyce's *Ulysses* as "pure style": "There is nothing there," he says.⁴⁵ However, what makes Joyce's novel resist (bio)degradability is precisely its (never absolute) unreadability. The singular "force" that such unreadability might have cannot be a simple escape from meaning, as Coelho implies. If this were so, "one would have to say that absurdities, logical errors, bad readings, the worst ineptitudes, symptoms of confusion or of belatedness are, by that very fact, assured of survival (*BIO* 845–6)." Indeed, as Bennington puts it, "reading as such occurs only as and in the experience of the unreadable."⁴⁶ The singularity of a text, in order to remain, must continue to generate different readings while not being completely captured by thematic interpretations. The *economy* of the literary lies in "the event of a singularity powerful enough to formalize the questions and theoretical laws concerning it." Joyce's *Ulysses* has this singular literary force. Its untranslatability and unreadability remains even as it initiates supplementary readings or countersignatures (*SI* 42).

As Kronick argues, "deconstruction's 'singular' contribution may be that it prepares for the coming of the countersignature, the aleatory signature that exceeds or opens the world/event to another experience." The event of a work of literature is thus not a one-off and unchanging experience which the reader reproduces by rediscovering the sacred unity of style and content in the work. It is, rather, something that comes about by the "necessary transgression or contamination that leaves no event in the purity of its singularity."⁴⁷

⁴³ See Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 85–123 for an original discussion of the ways Shakespeare (like Ponge) inscribes his proper name and signature into his work.

⁴⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias," *The Works of P. B. Shelley* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994) 302–303.

⁴⁵ Rodrigo Levino, "'Ulysses' was harmful to literature, says Coelho," *Folha De S. Paulo* 4 Aug. 2012. Web.

⁴⁶ Geoffrey Bennington, "Editorial," *The Oxford Literary Review* 33.1 (2011): v–vi (v).

⁴⁷ Kronick, *Future of Literature* 33.

The work as an event, therefore, is always open, incomplete, undecidable. This is what Geoffrey Hartman misses when he speaks of Derrida's improper "mixing" of genres in *Glas*, repeatedly condemning what he describes as "the persistence, the seriousness, with which an intelligence of this order [Derrida's] employs devices that may seem to be at best witty and at worst trivial."⁴⁸ Hartman's claim is that Derrida's "puns, equivocations, catachreses, and abusive etymologies, these double entendres and double takes, these ellipses and purely speculative chains of words and associations" are all there is to Derrida's thought, in the sense that Derrida seems to "doubt [...] that philosophy can get beyond being a form of language."⁴⁹ Hartman sees Derrida as indulging his "will to write" by producing a "graveyard of meanings,"⁵⁰ an excessive proliferation of indeterminacy that risks sliding into a "nihilistic [...] Dionysian revel."⁵¹ However, rather than stylistic indeterminacy, Derrida is interested in undecidability, which is not indetermination but *différance* or non-identity with oneself as a condition of determination. Indeed, as an encounter between the two in Jerusalem shows, "the gulf between Hartman and Derrida" ultimately concerns a "question of style" in the sense that while Hartman sees Derrida as having "faced that question of style" and worked "within it," Derrida "wouldn't call this style"—if style is understood as a writer instrumentally "us[ing] a given language" and "leav[ing] his mark on the form"—but a way of exploring the "hidden possibilities of language" (*DC* 6). In other words, Derrida does not see himself as employing style teleocratically and instrumentally (as if style could be distinguished from thought) but as inhabiting language. Undecidability is an opening to the future rather than a product of the will. Derrida's style is not so much characterised by a programmed indeterminacy as by a responsive undecidability that, in turn, demands countersignatures.

4.7 *Style and the Aleatory*

To think style nonteleocratically is to remain open to chance, to the aleatory, to the countersignature of the other that may or may not arrive. Style, in being open to the future, is not the product of a creative project but that which makes possible the surprising and the unexpected:

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Hartman, *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) 24, 22.

⁴⁹ Hartman 22–23.

⁵⁰ Hartman xiv.

⁵¹ Hartman 80.

It is perhaps necessary to free the value of the future from the value of “horizon” [...] a limit from which I pre-comprehend the future. I wait for it, I predetermine it, and thus I annul it. Teleology is, at bottom, the negation of the future, a way of knowing beforehand the form that will have to be taken by what is still to come [...]. That which defies anticipation, reappropriation, calculation—any form of pre-determination—is *singularity*. (*ATS* 21)

Style manuals conceptualise style as a skill that one can refine and perfect with the aim of being in complete control of one’s writing. Against this desire for power, Derrida speaks of a form of weakness in front of “the incalculable, chance, the other, the event” (*ATS* 61). This does not involve inaction, an unwillingness to do anything when faced with absolute singularity, but the creation of a space or a void in which the other may arrive and interrupt the flow of temporality. It involves a form of impossible negotiation of the future, the enactment of “a kind of opening—as the Bible puts it—[...] for the *arrivant*—maybe Elijah, maybe anyone at all” (*ATS* 31). “One has to calculate as far as possible, but the incalculable happens [*arrive*]: it is the other, and singularity, and chance, without one’s being able to do one’s part” (*ATS* 61). “Thinking,” faced with the impossible, is not the formulation of a project but begins “with what we cannot do” (*N* 194). Against the need to be in control, to programme the future (style manual) or to annul surprises by reducing the other to the same (for instance, in the way conceptual metaphor theory taxonomises style as variation of already existing and shared conceptual schema), Derrida speaks of how the “relation to [...] chance [...] leaves us completely disarmed” (*ATS* 63).

Derrida’s style as well as his interest in the style of others, such as Mallarmé and Ponge, gestures towards a “science de l’aléa” (*SP* 118). Against the ideal of gathering oneself in consciousness—as in the traditional understanding of autobiography—Derrida opens writing to the aleatory. “Aléa,” which stems from the Latin word “alea,” meaning a game involving chance or a throw of the dice, is the contingent, that is, as Hegel defines it, “something that is not self-possessed and is alien.”⁵² The aléa names the otherness within the same, the splitting at the origin that, for instance, disrupts the notion of style as the absolutely proper. Aléa moves against controlled necessity, introducing chance into the law.

Ponge’s style seems to be dictated by this law of contingency. In relation to the “sponge-cloth,” which Ponge mentions as one among millions of other possible and imaginable things he could write (about), Ponge asks, “Pourquoi pas la serviette-

⁵² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 431.

éponge?”⁵³ Why write about sponge-cloths? Or better, why not? This is, as Derrida points out, almost a provocation by Ponge, suggesting the “necessity of the arbitrary, the law of contingency in which the effect of the proper name is to be recognised” (*SP* 88). Contingency, the arbitrary, becomes central to his poetry so that the name (Ponge) repeatedly becomes an object (éponge) in a dynamic that echoes the antonomastic wavering between thing and poem. Would Ponge have written the same things had he had a different name? A Derridian answer to this question would be, as Hobson argues, that “in Ponge’s poems [...] by the mere fact of being linguistic, his name can acquire possibilities of sense, it can be remotivated, and thus rendered non-accidental.”⁵⁴ The name of the poet, through the laws of chance, becomes defining of the poet’s idiom and of his style. Thus, the poet’s style is made necessary by the contingency of his name.

The way Derrida allows us to think of style as opening to the aleatory, the event that “only happens under the aegis of the impossible” (*N* 194) resonates with Mallarmé’s thinking in “Le Coup de Dés” and, in particular, the dispersal of his poem through “spacing.” In his “Préface” to the poem that shatters conventional expectations of layout with sprawling words and phrases of different fonts and different sizes spread in an irregular but rhythmic manner across several pages, Mallarmé speaks of how this poem’s “novelty” (“nouveauté”) is essentially a matter of the “spacing of reading” (“espacement de la lecture”).⁵⁵ Indeed, dislocating the Western conventions of the page and reading—line by line, from left to right, from top to bottom of the page—Mallarmé’s poem’s event of style happens in the reading rather than in the expression of a subject matter. The poem is open to a multitude of singular readings that negotiate the gaps created by the mechanics of the text.

The situation that arises is somewhat paradoxical, as highlighted by the words in the biggest font scattered through the poem: “Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hazard” (“A throw of the dice will never eliminate chance.”) As Hill argues, this formulation, which encapsulates the open singularity of the poem, posits chance and necessity as inextricable: “If chance cannot be eliminated by the throw of the dice, it follows that chance, denying itself, becomes, as a result, a form of necessity. But if necessity remains necessary, the poem has no chance of being written.”⁵⁶ For Derrida, literature is the negotiation between the law and that which challenges the law, leaving

⁵³ Francis Ponge, “Pages bis,” in *Proèmes* II (Paris: Gallimard, 1948) v, as cited by Derrida (*SP* 89).

⁵⁴ Hobson 127.

⁵⁵ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N’Abolira Le Hasard*. (Librairie Gallimard [copyright by Nouvelle Revue Française] July 1914.) This is the first publication of the poem in book form. Text available at <http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Mallarme-Stephen_Coup_1914.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Leslie Hill, “Blanchot and Mallarmé,” *MLN* 105.5 (1990): 889–913 (892).

a space for the impossible, the *avenir* (“to happen”) that cannot be programmed a priori. In this respect, style is anarchic, confronting the existing institutions, but also an-archic, an opening to the future void that would welcome the unpredictable or the impossible. Derrida acknowledges the way in which what Mallarmé calls the “blancs” (“white spaces”) “take on importance” (“assument l’ importance”)⁵⁷ in displacing and opening the book, the system, the oeuvre, “to some undecidable resource that sets the system in motion” (*P* 3). As will also be seen in a discussion of Celan’s poetry, through Derrida one thinks of style as performative, an event of interruption, of disarticulation, of suspended temporalities.

4.8 (Derrida) Countersigning Style (in Derrida)

Style, in Derrida, as in Blanchot, is inventive. Rather than functioning as a vehicle for the effective transmission of content or previously existing ideas, style enacts a performative dimension that allows thought to come into being. Style, then, is not just an aspect of a playful relation to philosophy or an attempt to create equivocation or ambiguity, but a decisive aspect of writing that, in its undecidability and openness to the contingent, allows unexpected and inventive movements of thought to appear. While Derrida does *have* style—his style or styles, in their impressive heterogeneity, are not only recognisable but also often, if not always convincingly, imitated—Derrida is not simply a *master* of style but someone through whose texts, so to speak, style happens. Indeed, if there is something singularly Derridian in Derrida’s writing, it is precisely the loosening of style from the tyrannical clutches of the signatory as a sole possessor and originator of language. As Bennington puts it, deconstruction exposes how “the question ‘when?’” is “unanswerable.”⁵⁸

The voice of the other, of others, thus comes to play a decisive role in inhabiting Derrida’s style or allowing itself to be inhabited by his writing. As Apter argues, “what such a style complicates is the distinction between the style and voice of the source, and the use or commentary of the commentator.”⁵⁹ Thinking, through style, thus arises as a debt to and by the other, an acknowledgment of inventiveness in the form of repetition as difference and as an invitation to countersignatures. The occasion, the context, the

⁵⁷ Mallarmé, “Préface,” in *Un Coup de Dés*.

⁵⁸ Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 11. As Bennington shows, deconstruction is not simply something that Derrida *does* (later) in relation to previous texts.

⁵⁹ Apter 44.

subject being discussed also play a decisive role, as Derrida's texts morph, always inventively, into different styles depending on that to which they respond:

Faced with the singularity of the world event, I have to respond to it singularly, with my signature, in my own way, not as an aesthetic fetish, but to take a responsibility. It happens to me [*ça m'arrive*] and I have to respond, me, with my language, my age, my history, my *ductus*, my way of writing, of making the letters, even if it is illegible. Naturally one has to invent, not in the sense of fiction but in that of the performative: here is a response to a given situation, if it is a signature then it too has to be an event, in its way, modestly, but it has to have the form of something that is not simply constative—it too, like all acts of responsibility, has to pledge itself, to give as a pledge. (*ATS* 79)

Style is a matter of responsibility in the relation to the other, an aspect of witnessing to the singularity of the other through a style that is, in itself, a singular response. Clearly, then, style is never simply just a rhetorical or aesthetic matter. It is not exclusively a matter of language but something that also goes *beyond* language (through language) into the realm of the ethical and the political. Viewed in this way, Derrida's style thus reveals an intrinsic political dimension *throughout* his career. While, for instance, Herman Rapaport speaks of a "late Derrida" showing an unprecedented interest in politics and ethics, one may say that Derrida's style is always political, oriented towards a singular response to the other and open to the contingency of future countersignatures.⁶⁰ While, as Hobson puts it, there is "something private and even privately eccentric" in Derrida's style, this uniqueness often originates from an intensive close reading of others (poets, like Ponge, Mallarmé, and Celan, as well as philosophers like Plato, Husserl, and Heidegger).⁶¹

Derrida's relation to Blanchot is one such instance of an encounter in which Derrida responds singularly to the singularity of the other, countersigning by creating something singular that, in turn, demands other countersignatures. This response to the (style of the) other through style is seen in "Pas." This essay revolves around Blanchotian words like "*pas*" and "*sans*" as well as phrases such as "*pas sans pas*" and "*sans sans sans*" that bring into action different forms of "negativity" which, in Mark C. Taylor's words, are "neither precisely negative nor positive, neither exactly present nor absent."⁶² As Hobson argues, this kind of language is typical of Derrida who, "in lexemes and in phrases [...] constructs effects of language which frequently

⁶⁰ Herman Rapaport, *Later Derrida: Reading the Recent Work* (Routledge: New York, 2003)

⁶¹ Hobson 225.

⁶² Mark C. Taylor, "nO nOt nO," in Harold Coward and Toby Foshay ed., *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) 167–198 (168).

allow something which acts as a negative to work under what is said.”⁶³ It is significant that a Derridian signature effect arises from the reading of an other, Blanchot, whose style is already marked by the inhabiting of the language of the other. Style, then, rather than a gathering into oneness, arises in its openness to multiplicity.

The case of “pas” illustrates this co-contamination of signatures and styles—a redoubling of the already doubled—that brings different thinkers together through their countersignatures while keeping them at a distance.⁶⁴ Derrida speaks of his relation to Blanchot’s texts in terms of a “*pas d’é-loignement*,” a distant proximity, a paradoxical relation that Blanchot describes in terms of being “seize[d] and ceaselessly draw[n] close, even though” one is left “absolutely at a distance” (SL 33). In a style heavily marked by Blanchot’s distinctive idiom—paradox and paronomasia abound in a text echoing the Blanchotian conversational style—Derrida writes how in “in every *récit* of Blanchot, this *pas* is at stake,” and in this essay he is interested in “*la démarche d’un pas*,” the “(dis)approach of a no/pace [stop/step]” (PA 21). Derrida’s return to the word “pas” in Blanchot, however, is not a return to the origin of a problematic, but to what is already a countersignature to the Heideggerian *Entfernung*, the “de-distancing” or “distancing” of the near and the far. Derrida explains, while the thing certainly can be near, “the near or proximity is not near” in the sense that the “essence of the near is not any more near than the essence of red is of the colour red.” The more one tries to come close to the “proximity of what approaches,” the more is one pushed back by the “completely other—and therefore the infinitely distant—” of proximity. The same paradoxical logic is at work in the relation to the “far” and this posits the near and the far in a “double-bind” that “affects *all*, all that *is*, that is, all that presents itself, *is present*” (PA 25). The other can only approach us “as other” in “distancing itself” while it can appear as an “infinite alterity only in drawing near.” In Derrida’s words, “[i]n its double *pas* [step/not], the other dislocates the opposition of the near and the far, without however confusing them” (PA 26).

Derrida’s style in this essay is engaged in a relation of fascination to Blanchot’s style, a simultaneous attraction to and rebuttal by the style of the other that is already, in itself, a countersignature of the other (Heidegger). The undecidability of Derrida’s style is responsive to similar inventiveness in Blanchot’s texts. In the opening movement of “Pas,” Derrida explores the undecidability of the word “*viens*.” “—*Viens* ‘Come’” is a

⁶³ Hobson 230.

⁶⁴ This paragraph is based on Mario Aquilina, “‘Let me (not) read you’: Countersigning Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116,” *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics*, 1. 2 (2011): 79–90 (85).

summoning of the other to whom one is always indebted. As the first word of “Pas,” it functions as an address by one of the interlocutors to the other whose first intervention is to “interrupt” the first speaker and thus respond to the first speaker’s demand for communication. However, “*Viens*” also appears in inverted commas, as a citation of “that strange word [...] in [Blanchot’s] *Death Sentence* [*L’Arrêt de Mort*]” as well as in implied but transparent inverted commas in questions such as “Is *viens* a word?” As one of the interlocutors in “Pas” reflects, therefore, “*viens*” is both a citation of Blanchot, in whose works the word appears frequently, as well as an address to the other interlocutor in “Pas.” Significantly, this doubling of the word as both citation and address is already at work in Blanchot’s *Death Sentence*—the source of the citation—for instance, where the narrator speaks of how “to her [the other] I say eternally, ‘Come,’ and eternally she is there” (BR 186). Citing Blanchot’s “*viens*” in “Pas,” Derrida cites that which is already, simultaneously, a form of citation and address thus making “*viens*” a word that is always already redoubled and hovering undecidably between citation of and address to the other.

In other words, “*Viens*,” like “pas,” is one of those terms in Derrida that, as Clark puts it, “do what they ‘describe’.” Just like “pas” does not simply “name” a “double movement of approach and distancing” but “performs it,” “*viens*” names and performs the call to the other.⁶⁵

In line with Derrida’s investment in language and style elsewhere, the term “pas” in his readings of Blanchot is not part of an attempt to, as one of the interlocutors puts it, instrumentally “play with an indiscreet insistence on the language [or] exhibit an economical mastery” (PA 26). This is not simply word-play or a flourish of linguistic virtuosity. On the contrary, as Clark argues, the “term, as it were, *imposes itself*” with style doing the thinking.⁶⁶ And “pas,” in imposing itself, imposes its own style of discourse. As one of the interlocutors asserts, “the strange rhythm this (dis)approach imparts to our discourse, to the choice of words, to the construction of our phrases and sentences, to the idiom of the word ‘pas’” is part of what one senses “is at stake in this *pas d’é-loignement*” (PA 25–26). Indeed, style is here both a consequence of the movement of thought triggered by “pas” and crucial in forming such movements of thought in the first place.

Clearly, much hangs on what ultimately is a matter of contingency, that is, the paronomasia brought into play by the word “pas.” Indeed, an idiosyncratic practice in

⁶⁵ Clark, *Sources* 137.

⁶⁶ Clark, *Sources* 136.

relation to Derrida's style is precisely the centrality of what may traditionally be seen as inessential functions of language in the formulation of thought. Paronomastic relations are particularly subversive because, as Derrida argues, through the working of paronomasia, we witness "the fortuitous resemblance, the purely simulated common parentage" of words between which "there is no communication of meaning" but whose doubling "set[s] something off" (P 45). In the "Foreword" to *Glas*, a text replete with paronomastic effects, Derrida surprisingly insists that "there is not one single *pun*" in this text (GL 17). However, what Derrida contests is the conventional understanding of punning in terms of "the free play, the complacent and slightly narcissistic relation to language, the exercise of virtuosity to no profit, without economy of sense and knowledge" (GL 18). Derrida is not interested in style as "mastery over one's language" or in punning as a simple narcissistic exercise overflowing in equivocation. Paronomasia has conceptual force, showing how language performs movements of thought that escape absolute control. Stylistic features like paronomasia function within an "economy of sense and knowledge" and, in Clark's words, they are "inseparable from the movement of thought they perform."⁶⁷

The play on *idée* in "The Double Session" is particularly illuminating. The word "idea" ("idée") has a specific meaning in Plato, which Heidegger synthesises as "the nonsensuous aspect of what is physically visible" and as "that which constitutes the essence" in the sensuous (QT 20). Instead, as Ulmer shows, Derrida proposes the possibility of "idée" guiding thought "not by the forms of sight but by the sounds of puns or the distribution of letters."⁶⁸ Thus,

The reader is now invited to count the dots, to follow the needlepoint pattern of *i*'s and *ique*'s [-ic or -ical]. Perhaps he will be able to discern, according to the rapid, regular movement of the machine, the stitches of Mallarmé's idea, a certain instance of 's and a certain scattering of dice ['s]. (238)

As Barbara Johnson points out, the syllable "dé" in "idée" is both the letter "d" and the word "dice" in French (D 238). For Mallarmé, writing is "Un coup de dés," a throw of the dice, and, in a similar way, the idea is often "put to work hypomnemically" in Derrida's texts.⁶⁹ Rather than referring to a signified concept in a Platonic vein, "idée" starts referring to the letters and phonemes of the word "idée" and associations with other similarly-spelt or similar-sounding words start to gather. As Rapaport argues,

⁶⁷ Clark, *Sources* 146.

⁶⁸ Gregory Ulmer, "Op Writing: Derrida's Solicitation of Theoria," in *Displacement: Derrida and After* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) 29–55 (34).

⁶⁹ Ulmer 34.

paronomasia contributes to Derrida's "attempt [...] to perform language so that the 'step' of philosophy is no longer dissociable from the step or not [*pas*] of language resisting metaphysical, mimetic recovery."⁷⁰

Derrida's style of the aleatory puts into motion those aspects of language that Aristotle excludes from the realm of metaphor. Aristotle defines metaphor as "giving (*epiphora*) the thing a name (*onomatos*) that belongs to something else."⁷¹ For Derrida, this definition shows that Aristotle accepts both the assumption that nouns designate a meaning and that, in metaphor, what is transported is the designation of meaning at work in nominalisation. Aristotle calls metaphor *epiphora onomatos*, and, in Derrida's view, *onoma* here includes nouns, verbs and adjectives—all of which are intelligible by themselves—but excludes articles, conjunctions, prepositions and other "elements of language which according to Aristotle have no sense by themselves." In Aristotle, metaphor involves the transfer of that which is "nominalizable" while words which resist "nominalization would remain foreign to metaphor" (*WM* 33). Now, since nominalisation works on the basis of "complete and independent signification [...] independently of any syntactic relation," metaphor, from an Aristotelian perspective, would be "a transfer of categorematic words, and not of syncategorematic words *as such*," that is, of words not involved in operations of nominalisation. Thus, as Derrida puts it, "the anagrammatic, using parts of nouns, nouns cut into pieces, is outside the field of metaphor in general, as too is the syntactic play of 'joints'" (*WM* 41).

That which is excluded by Aristotle's definition of metaphor as transference of nominalisation is, on the contrary, fully at work in Derrida's style of the marginal. Going against the assumption that signs are closed units built on a correspondence between signifier and signified, Derrida shows that meaning is not only at work semantically, within the sign as a unit, but also syntactically, through relations of context and difference. In this sense, paronomasia plays a prominent role in Derrida's style of the aleatory. While a pun is often thought of as being a rhetorical figure used mainly for humorous purposes or as a device whose doubling effects make it inappropriate in philosophical language, as Ulmer argues, Derrida demonstrates "the power of thought residing in [what are often described as] 'decorative' devices."⁷² In such situations, reading is slowed down by the numerous possible ways of

⁷⁰ Herman Rapaport, "Paronomasia," in *Heidegger & Derrida: Reflections on Time and Language* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) 104–174 (139).

⁷¹ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1457b6–7 as cited in (*WM* 31).

⁷² Ulmer 41.

understanding the words that are layered onto each other thus allowing the force of syntax, punning and grammatical joints to be strongly felt.

Another figure that carries a radically subversive power in Derrida's style is antonomasia. What makes certain instances of Derrida's use of antonomasia particularly intriguing is the frequent substitution of names by words that are also related paronomastically (and contingently) to the names themselves as in the play on Ponge/éponge in *Signéponge*. One cannot help but sign in writing, including with style; however, that signature does not guarantee any kind of absolute control over the text or style, which are always already read and countersigned. In *Glas*, for instance, Genet's signature is appropriated by Derrida himself in showing how his own relationship with his signature is in many ways similar to that of Genet and his signature. *Glas* quotes an extract from Genet's *Le Journal du voleur* in which the narrator considers someone else's name, "Armand," and then shifts to a consideration of his own name, "Jean Gallien," a "random pseudonym" with the siglum "J.G" (GL 6). The next shift is once again based on a contingency as it is noted that, in Genet's *Funeral Rites*, the siglum is "J.D, Jean D," something which introduces Jacques Derrida's own siglum into the discussion. While Genet's *Funeral Rites* is dedicated to Jean Decarnin, Derrida exploits the ambiguity brought about by the initials, J.D. The coat of arms with the capital letter "D" is engraved on the hearse that carries the corpse to its tomb. Thus, it names a corpse. Now, in writing *Funeral Rites*, Jean Genet in some ways takes over the identity of Jean Decarnin, not only because of the similar first name but because, in mourning, he is "at once the double of the dead [...], the one who remains alive after him, his son, but also his father and mother" (GL 6). Derrida, in echoing Genet's words in *Funeral Rites*, brings attention to the issue of writing as a form of mourning. As Ian Maclachlan writes, Derrida "characterizes his *own* activity in *Glas* as the reactivating, the taking on the role of a dead man [as] Genet's notion of mourning as the performance of the dead man's role is extended to the activity of reading."⁷³ The *Funeral Rites* of J.D thus refers both to Genet's text about J.D and to J.D's *Glas* ("death knell"). While Genet "has always been afraid that someone will steal his death" and "has, in advance, occupied all the places where that (ça) dies" (GL 6) by sprinkling his signature throughout his texts (in the manner of Ponge), Derrida, as Maclachlan puts it, "is enacting as well as reporting Genet's death: by taking the initials and the quotations from *Pompes funèbres* [*Funeral Rites*] and applying them to himself and to his theory of the signature."⁷⁴

⁷³ Ian Maclachlan, *Jacques Derrida: Critical Thought* (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2004) 73.

⁷⁴ Maclachlan 79.

Operations of signing and countersigning take place in style and in Derrida's relation to style as other. While style, like a signature, marks and identifies, its inscription in language makes it always already open to the countersignature, the aleatory, and to its potential reaffirmation or dispersal.

4.9 *Reading and Translating Style*

With Derrida, one thinks of the possibility of reading, translating, or commenting about style not in terms of a parasitic, derivative or secondary relation with an original text but in terms of the reciprocal demand and debt between the work and its countersigning. Translation, reading, and commentary are not simply ways of capturing, conceptualising, or describing this eventhood of style as a past event but fundamentally implicated in the economy of style as an event whose temporality is the openness to the aleatory, to the chance of the future. The resultant thinking of style is an-archic and non-teleocratic, suspending conceptions of style as representational, instrumental, or as the narcissistic expression of personality.

Derrida, in many ways, echoes Blanchot's view of reading as a necessary aspect of the structure of the work and of translation as not a secondary, derivative "task," but an inherent demand lodged within the eventhood of a work. The countersignature names the repetition of difference that always already marks the signature. One responds to writing by "countersigning" in reading, saying "yes" to the work which was there before (*SI* 69). However, the work presupposes reading and, while it is there before the reader, "it begins by calling for the co-respondent countersignature" (*SI* 70). Indeed, the event of style is marked by paradoxical anachrony whose implications can be seen via a contrast to other theories of reading. Culler, for instance, argues that in order for any reader to "understand" a text he needs an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse. Meaning is actualised in "the act of reading" and the task of literary criticism should be the explanation, not of texts themselves, but of "literary competence."⁷⁵ Similar assumptions underlie conceptual metaphor theories that study the schemata that make understanding possible for the reader, thus reducing style to different manifestations of universals. Derrida, on the contrary, claims that "[b]y definition the reader does not exist. Not before the work and as its straightforward 'receiver.'" The reader, "whose competence cannot be identified," is "'formed', 'trained', instructed, constructed, even engendered" by the work. However, there is a

⁷⁵ Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* 132.

further twist as the reader, in being “*invented* by the work,” is not simply produced by the work but also, paradoxically, “found by chance.” Echoing Blanchot’s style of paradoxical anachrony, Derrida speaks of how the reader is both a product of the work (hence consequential to it) and found by the work (hence already existing). Readers, then, should not be seen as having a “competence” which allows them to process or digest the style of a work but as being given, in reading, “a competence which they did not possess before” and which allows them to countersign style. The work is thus an institution that “teaches” the reader to be a reader. However, this happens only if the reader, in turn, “*is willing*, to countersign” (*SI* 74). Thus, as Derrida puts it, while the “performativity of the text produces its receiver [...] in no way does it pre-exist it.” The structure is that of a gift which becomes a gift not on the basis of a giver who would give to a receiver but only “at the moment when [the receiver] receives it [...] decides the destination and [...] says ‘it is me who answers’ or ‘it is me’” (*WB* 200). And since there is no work without reading and no style without its countersigning, the creation of the reader by the work is also “an inaugural performance” of the work and of style (*SI* 74).

Derrida’s thinking, in this respect, differs significantly from Heidegger’s conception of the commentator-reader as a channel for the work to come into being which erases itself to let the work be. Derrida highlights the paradoxical structure of reading whereby it countersigns the singularity of the signature it encounters but also necessarily betrays it by leading it off elsewhere through the creation of “another signature just as singular” (*SI* 69). The singularity of style is thus not only at work in the signature that is countersigned and that creates its own readers, but also in the singular countersigning of reading itself. Thus, one speaks not only of the style of the original (whose status as original is problematised) but of the style of commentary that reads, translates, and countersigns. Indeed, writing about Derrida—or, better, “after Derrida”⁷⁶—poses the question of how to countersign his work, especially since there is a performative element in deconstruction that takes it close to literature and hence demands similar responses. Derrida’s work, in many ways, creates its own readers but, as Royle argues and shows in texts like *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* and *After Derrida*, one’s writing about Derrida may be “‘in the manner of,’ ‘in agreement with,’ ‘in honour of’ and even ‘in imitation of’ Derrida’s work [but] *at the same time* there

⁷⁶ In the various senses discussed by Royle in *After Derrida* 4, rather than in the chronological sense of the term.

[have to be] differences.”⁷⁷ To countersign Derrida means to be at once sensitive to Derrida’s style but also to write in an inventive, performative and singular style that is and is not Derridian. In this respect, it is worth noting that, according to a logic which curiously reverses that of several copyright legislations, within the context of postgraduate scholarship, inventive, “original research” is a fundamental requirement in terms of ideas but not encouraged in terms of style. Indeed, as discussed in relation to the style sheet, academic competence is expected to be shown through the “mastery” of already existing stylistic conventions, rather than through singular and incalculable events of style. This limits the possibility of responding performatively to the singular event of style.

The singularity of reading, translating or commenting that is envisaged by Derrida distinguishes his work from Gadamer’s affirmation of what Clark calls “the utopian idea of a common reader to come”—even if this is tempered by the simultaneous demand for reading to be sensitive to that which is singular in each poem, each work. Derrida is suspicious of any discourses of “community,” and he would only consider the term in a sense that is detached from its “classical sense,” that is, not only as an alliance that “does not cancel out the singularity of the allies but, on the contrary, accentuates it” (*ATS* 24–25). The singularity of reading clearly runs counter to theories based on notions such as “ideal” or “average” reader which not only erase the singularity of the style of the specific work in looking for generalities but also ignore the singular style that, in turn, is demanded in performative and inventive countersigning.

Derrida’s insistence on the singularity of the countersignature may account for the hints of resistance in relation to reading writers like Ponge and Joyce, whose work is characterised by “omnipotence” (*UG* 292). In view of what Derrida calls the “*leaving to be desired*” of the work, its “leaving the other room for an intervention by which [...] the other will have been able to sign in my text” (*ATS* 31), Ponge’s poems or a book like *Ulysses* may come across as “too ingenious, industrious, manipulatory,” as “*adding itself on* to everything,” and as never leaving “its luck to the incalculable simplicity of a poem” (*UG* 293). In other words, they threaten the aleatory in future readings by being too forceful in the way they create their own readership.

As Clark points out, one of the reasons for the high stakes around the literary and the possibility of its translatability and readability is that, if “the multiplicity of idioms, dialects and language” presented itself as “irreducible” and not “masterable,”

⁷⁷ Royle, *After Derrida* 4.

“philosophy and science would meet a fundamental check.” Derrida urges us to ask whether “the literary [may] be related to the issue of singularity as that which resists subsumption into general laws,” embodying a limit of untranslatability and uniqueness to philosophical or scientific discourse.⁷⁸ Style is fundamentally implicated in this debate. Whether conceived as an absolutely singular mark of the proper that refuses translation or whether it is thought in terms of an organic integration with content, style is often understood as the limit to translatability.

This argument is often given a political dimension in discourses that speak of a national style or language that is meant to identify something inalienable and unique in a population. This kind of language would be “idiomatic” since, as Derrida reminds us and as the word’s etymology suggests, “idiom [...] means *the proper*, what is proper to” oneself, a people or a place (*SQ* 99). For instance, in his 1765 “Preface to Shakespeare,” Samuel Johnson argues that “there is, in every nation, a stile [style] which never becomes obsolete, a certain mode of phraseology so consonant and congenial to the analogy and principles of its respective language as to remain settled and unaltered.”⁷⁹ For Johnson, Shakespeare manages to capture “a conversation above grossness and below refinement, where propriety resides,” and this is what makes his language persist in time.⁸⁰ The nationalistic implications of the search for an essential style that remains “settled and unaltered” due to its “propriety” to a national language can be seen even more clearly in Robert Frost’s view that

Poetry and the other arts [...] mark national characters better than anything else. [...] The language barrier has so much to do with individuality and originality that we wouldn’t want to see it removed. We must content ourselves with seeing it more or less got over by interpretation and translation. We must remember that one may be national without being poetic, but one can’t be poetical without being national.⁸¹

Poetry, for Frost, is an expression of an untranslatable national idiom that is “proper” to and the “property” of a national or cultural essence.

Countering the conception of style as an untranslatable essence, Derrida argues that “a work that appears to defy translation is at the same time an appeal for translation; it produces translators, and new protocols of translation.” Indeed, as Derrida

⁷⁸ Clark, *Sources* 151.

⁷⁹ Samuel Johnson, “Preface to Shakespeare,” in Walter Raleigh ed., *Johnson on Shakespeare: Essays and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908) 9–63 (19).

⁸⁰ Johnson 20.

⁸¹ Robert Frost, “Message to the Poetics of Korea (1957),” in Mark Richardson, ed. *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) 192.

notes, despite the style of his own writing being rooted in the French idiom through its heavy reliance on paronomasia, homonymy, neologisms, and other “linguistic oddities linked to an idiom,” it has “not discouraged translation” but actually witnessed several translations that are “events” in their own language (*ATS* 16). As he writes in “Living On / Border Lines,” translation is fundamental in ensuring the survivability of a text. While, in “Border Lines,” Derrida expresses the desire to “take charge of the Translators’ Note himself”—a fantasy of power analogous to Ponge’s and Joyce’s almost complete determination of their readers—he also insists on the need of translators translating the text for it to survive, to live on through “the procession of one language into another [...] over the border of another language, into the language of the other” (*PA* 105). Indeed, the more seemingly untranslatable a style is, the greater its demand for translation.

This demand for translatability is not posthumous to the writing of the text but always inscribed within an internal difference. Derrida speaks about his relationship to French as a language that is very close to him but at the same time something of which he never feels in possession. This, as Royle notes, leads to images of “touching, tampering or meddling with language,” that is, of a simultaneous proximity and separation, in Derrida’s account of his own style.⁸² In this respect, Derrida contrasts thinkers like Foucault, Deleuze and Lyotard who, despite their “differences in style [...] maintained a common relation to the French language,” with Lacan, who, like him, “has a way of *meddling with* [*toucher à*] the French language, or of *letting himself be meddled with* by it.” Language is thus not something one possesses but something with which one engages in a “hand-to-hand struggle [*corps-à-corps*],” the result of which is an individual idiom or style. Ironically, while Derrida chooses Deleuze as an example of someone whose style does not “make the French language tremble” (*FW* 179–180), Derrida’s own bodily images of strife echo Deleuze’s characterisation of style, precisely, as “the foreign language within language” which makes “one’s language stutter, face to face, or face to back” and as “the *boom* and the *crash*.”⁸³ Style is thus not a fixed and static aspect of language that is untransportable but an internal difference that, in its eventhood, always already calls for translation, reading, commentary.

Derrida sees this relationship of exteriority to one’s own language in Celan’s “bodily struggle” with German (*SQ* 99). It is not so much that Celan, who spoke Romanian at school, did not master German, that which is most proper to German, but

⁸² Nicholas Royle, *In Memory of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) 91.

⁸³ Deleuze 113.

that no language can *ever* be appropriated because of an aporetic “double law” that Derrida formalises elsewhere through an autobiographical unravelling of his own relationship to French as a Franco-Maghrebian:

*We only ever speak one language—or rather one idiom only.
We never speak only one language—or rather there is no pure idiom. (MO 8).*

The impossibility of appropriating one’s language has the paradoxical effect of setting “into motion all sorts of gestures of ownership and appropriation,” and “linguistic nationalism” is one such “naïve gesture” (*SQ* 101). Indeed, what is furthest from our reach in language is its idiomaticity or that which “resists translation” (*SQ* 102). What cannot be possessed or made one’s property is the proper idiom or that which would remain absolutely singular.

Aware of the dangers of taking arguments of the singularity of style too far, Derrida dissociates one’s desire for “linguistic difference” from “nationalism.” If the idiom, even one’s idiom, is always “other,” beyond one’s grasp, then the idiom is always both “my home” and “the other’s home.” To respect the other’s idiom—the idiom is always that of the other—would then be to “resist any nationalist temptation” (*SQ* 102). For Derrida, Celan’s relation to German does just that: “Celan produced an idiom; he produced it from a matrix, from a heritage, without, for obvious reasons, yielding in the least to nationalism” (*SQ* 103). Celan tries “to leave a mark, a singular signature that would be a counter-signature to the German language and, at the same time, something that *happens* to the German language” (*SQ* 102). Celan’s poems are a gesture of *approchement* but not of appropriation; they are a poetic “event that marks language” (*SQ* 99). Celan’s style respects “the idiomatic spirit” of German while displacing it, scarring it and modifying it uniquely and singularly. This dual logic, for Derrida, is an inherent part of the event of style. To inherit an idiom or a language is never to “receive passively something that is already there” but to “reaffirm through transformation, change and displacement” (*SQ* 104). In a movement that echoes the relationship between Derrida’s style and French, Celan countersigns German through a style that is entirely other within the same.

Problematizing Jakobson’s theory of translation, which is based on the assumption that “one can determine rigorously the unity and identity of a language, the decidable form of its limits,” Derrida argues that the internal multiplicity of language and of style, their never being simply proper or someone’s property, is, simultaneously,

both a limit to their translatability and a demand for translation (*EO* 110).⁸⁴ With translation, one is therefore caught in a double-bind. There is a limit to translatability which is set by the difference that cuts through language, but this internal difference demands to be translated by, as it were, always already having started the movement of translation.

This argument is recurrent in Derrida's writing but, as Derrida himself puts it, the "example of Babel [...] can provide an epigraph for all discussions of translation." The "biblical récit" of Babel describes how the Shems ("Shem" means "name" in Hebrew) (*EO* 100) want "to make a name for themselves" (*EO* 101) and impose their language onto the rest of the world through the tower they build (*T* 104) but God interrupts their building and "imposes his name on their tower" by saying "Babel." Essentially, this is a battle of proper names, but, as Derrida notes, within the language of the *récit*, the word "Babel" is not only a proper noun and hence the untranslatable name of God but also the common noun "confusion," which also describes the multiplicity of tongues that is imposed on the Shems (*EO* 101). Thus, there is an *immediate* "intralinguistic translation" at work in the word "Babel" through the confusion of the proper and the common within the name of God itself (*T* 109). This, Derrida insists, is not what Jakobson means by "intralingual translation" because while Jakobson speaks of this kind of translation as the rewording of "common nouns and ordinary phrases," the kind of translation at work in "Babel" is, impossibly, between a proper and a common noun (*T* 110). Simultaneously, then, God seems to tell the Shems: "Translate my name [...] but at the same time [...] You will not be able to translate my name because, first of all, it's a proper name and, secondly, my name, the one I myself have chosen for this tower, signifies ambiguity, confusion, et cetera" (*EO* 101). Translation seems thus to be both "necessary," due to its always already being in performance within language itself, and "impossible," in that what cannot be translated is the performative difference between languages within language (*T* 108).

In Celan's poetry, the word "shibboleth" is paradigmatic of a similar form of untranslatability that marks the poetic. As Derrida explains, "shibboleth," which can mean "river, stream, ear of grain, olive twig" in a range of languages, was used as a password "at the crossing of a border under watch" (*SQ* 22). What was really essential in the word was not its meaning but its pronunciation. The Ephraimites' fatal

⁸⁴ See Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in R. A. Brower ed., *On Translation* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1959) 232–9 (233). Jakobson defines "intralingual" translation as paraphrase.

indifference “to the diacritical difference between *shi* and *si*,” their inability to pronounce the “shi” of shibboleth like the people of Jephthah—the Israelites of Gilead—made them risk their lives at the border if they attempted to escape Ephraim (*SQ* 23). “Shibboleth” is thus also a “*No parasán*,” a limit to translatability, a barred passage marked by a difference internal to every language. In Celan’s “In eins,” (“In One”) we read:

(Dreizehnter Feber. Im Herzmund
Erwachtes Schibboleth. Mit dir,
Peuple
de Paris. *No parasán*.)

Thirteenth of February. In the heart’s mouth
An awakened shibboleth. With you,
Peuple
de Paris. *No parasán*.

“[T]he marked differences of languages in the poem”—German, Hebrew (“Schibboleth”), French (“Peuple / de Paris”), and Spanish (“*No parasán*”)—make translation always already subject to an aporia, a non-passage (*SQ* 29). “Shibboleth,” for Derrida, precisely “marks the [...] insignificant difference as the condition of meaning” (*SQ* 28). “In eins” thus projects the condition of singular multiplicity. It is a unique poem that condenses “several times at once, several languages within a poetic act” (*SQ* 29).

Therefore, for Derrida, it is “the unique occurrence of a performative force,” more than “any name or any truth of adequation,” that makes a work untranslatable (*T* 113). The issue in the Babel *récit* and in Joyce—but also in Derrida’s writing as well as in Celan’s poems—is not the “restitution of meaning”; this problematises translation as traditionally understood, that is, “the transportation of a meaning or of a truth from one language to another” which also presupposes the possibility of “univocality” (*EO* 140). The implications for style are decisive. If translation is traditionally conceivable on the basis of a separation between content (that which is fully transferable) and style (the untranslatable proper), what happens to translation when the proper and untranslatable element of a work becomes the performative, upon the basis of which one cannot separate style from content? How to translate, for instance, the “paronomasia,” homonymy or verbal play that, according to Jakobson, “reigns over poetic art.”⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Jakobson, “Closing Statement” 238.

The inseparability of style from meaning in the poetic is, Derrida argues, that which makes us think of the poetic in terms of the “sacred text in which meaning and literality are no longer discernible as they form the body of a unique, irreplaceable, and untranslatable event” (*T* 132). “This,” writes Derrida, “is surely the relation we have to literature, in spite of all our denegations in this regard” (*EO* 152). What “comes to pass in a sacred text is the occurrence of a *pas de sens*” (“step and stop of meaning”). The poetic, unlike philosophy which aspires for the ideal of maximal translatability, resists conceptualisation beyond literality: “It is an event which communicates nothing [;] it says nothing that would make sense beyond the event itself. That event melds completely with the act of language” (*T* 133).

However, it is precisely this untransferable uniqueness that calls for translation. In “The Task of the Translator,” Benjamin speaks of the demand of the original for translation, for survival. The task of the translator would thus be motivated by the debt of a “subject who finds him/herself immediately indebted by the existence of the original” (*EO* 122). What Derrida adds to Benjamin is an awareness of how the so-called original “is the first debtor [;] it begins by lacking and by pleading for translation.” Just like God’s sacred name is both untranslatable and “pleads” for translation, “the *double bind* is in the law” of the sacred text, the poetic and the original (*T* 118). Thus, it is not so much that translation is justified by the original but that translation “is the law” of the original (*EO* 153).

While one may want to think of style as that which is absolutely untranslatable, as the proper idiom—both personal and national—or as that which is lost in translation, a singular style can only be read if it is always *a priori* translatable and translated into some form of generality. The singular “loses itself to offer itself” in the sense that, to appear, the singular must divide and thus no longer remain absolutely singular. Indeed, as Derrida argues, an “idiom effect” or “an effect of absolute properness can arise only within a system of relations and differences.” The pure idiom or the proper style, like the proper name, “is right away inscribed—structurally and *a priori*—in a network where it is contaminated by common names” (*EO* 107).

4.10 Derrida and Celan: Style as Interruption

Style as not simply a mark of individuality or as an appropriate reflection of meaning. Style as interruption, as caesura, as the performative event that arises from the lacunae, temporal suspensions and moments of inversion. Style as the advent of the new through

a singular reinscription of the national idiom. Style as a paratactic and paronomastic disarticulation of language inscribing a singularity that is, always already, open to future encounters. Style, in other words, as it can be read in Celan's poetry through a Derridian lens.

For Derrida, Celan is a poet of the poetic in the sense that his work crystallises "the experience of singularity" (*SI* 67), the economy of literature in its paradoxical singularity that is always already open to repetition and in its wavering between untranslatability and the demand for translation. The predominance of dates in Celan's poetry, in this respect, is crucial. The date, like Celan's poetry, has to waver between two extremes that could annihilate it either by "remain[ing] encrypted" in its absolute singularity or by, on the contrary, revealing its secret and "mak[ing] itself available to all" (*SQ* 36–7). In Celan's poem, "Huhediblu," for instance, what does "September" allude to in the line "under the / date of Nevermansday in September"? If what is being named is an event that Celan alone or Celan and a few others are "able to commemorate," then, with the death of these witnesses, the "Nevermansday in September" will eventually "no longer signify at all" (*SQ* 36). The date, if absolutely singular, becomes nothing or "Nevermansday." If, on the other hand, "in an apparently inverse hypothesis, nothing is encrypted in the date," "the September- / roses" of "Huhediblu" belong "to the same generation" of "die / Niemarndsrose," that is, the "No-One's-Rose" of Celan's poem, "Psalm" (*SQ* 37). The singular is lost both in absolute untranslatability and translatability and, therefore, it is obliged to always move between the two poles, which are not alternatives and neither do they exclude each other. The date, the poem—all Celan poems are "dated" in being open towards a future encounter with the other (*SQ* 16)—offers itself in losing itself. The poem, while being rooted in a singular event, is implicated in readable language. However, "its readability is paid for by the terrible tribute of lost singularity" (*SQ* 37). What may have been encrypted in the date is "effaced" at the very moment of the date presenting, remarking, and thus de-parting itself "in order to address itself to the other" (*SQ* 13). This is poetry as "*partage*," both partition and partaking, division and sharing (*SQ* 8).

Style in Celan is an event inscribed within these dynamics of the singular. Celan's style is often described as difficult and obscure. However, as Lacoue-Labarthe argues, the demand of the singular that seems to accompany the "'idiomatic' threat: the threat of hermeticism and obscurity" can only be recognised once there is an encounter. The difficulty of Celan's style is addressed to and constituted by the reader's

countersignature.⁸⁶ It is a singular date that returns always singularly, again and again. Celan's style is the unique signature or date that is always already countersigned and repeated; it is a non-teleocratic mark of the unique, but also a mark that is *a priori* split and doubled by its call for translation, reading and commentary. It is the unique which institutes "a law or an injunction that demands a response."⁸⁷ Thus, style arises, performatively, in the event of the encounter through which it asks us to read it and yet not to read it, to bear witness to it but not try to force it into a confession of its secrets.

Gadamer too speaks of Celan's lyrics in terms of the "untranslatable" (*TM* 577). However, Derrida and Gadamer take markedly different routes. Discussing his "missed encounter" with Gadamer at the Goethe Institute in Paris in 1981, Derrida acknowledges his and Gadamer's "common sensitivity to the limits of translation" (*SQ* 136–7) but emphasises the fact that Gadamer, while speaking of the untranslatability of poetry, leaves open the possibility of the absolute translatability of other kinds of language. Derrida, on the other hand, would question the absolute translatability of any form of language, including science and philosophy. Secondly, for Gadamer, poetry has the effect of bringing to the fore "the particularity and foreignness of language" while for Derrida the singular is always already marked by the law of iterability that splits the "original" and makes it inherently doubled and impure (*B* 16).

Their differences are also seen in their different styles of reading Celan. While Gadamer tends to draw what seems a lowest common denominator about a poem, saying the least possible about what the poem is "about," emphasising the ambiguities in the poems but still identifying what Derrida calls the "subject of [each] poem" (*SQ* 150), Derrida emphasises the demand on readers not to interpret, leaving the "undecidable undecided" (*SQ* 145). Derrida gestures towards a repeated refusal to interpret while quoting the poems. For instance, he writes, "[w]e can 'read' this poem, we can desire to read, cite and re-cite it, while giving up on interpreting it, or at least on going over the limit beyond which interpretation encounters, at the same time, its possibility and its impossibility" (*SQ* 87). The reciting compulsion, the "by heart" desire of "Che cos'è la poesia?" stems from this limit to intelligibility or transparency of meaning. The secret must remain possible even as it is being revealed. Gadamerian hermeneutics is, for Derrida, on the opposite side of dissemination, which preserves indecision and interruption.

⁸⁶ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Catastrophe," in Aris Fioretos ed., *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) 130–156 (142).

⁸⁷ Kronick, *Future of Literature* 32.

What Derrida has in mind about Celan's poetry, but also about "any poetic writing" (*SQ* 164), is "an excess that is not of the order of meaning" (*SQ* 165). He emphasises that dissemination is not ambiguity or "thematic plurivocity" (*SQ* 164), and he lists "spacing [...] rhythm, caesura, hiatus, interruption" that create a dissemination that is "irreducible to hermeneutics in Gadamer's sense" (*SQ* 165). Derrida does not contest the validity of Gadamer's interpretations of Celan but he proposes a different "ethics or [...] politics of reading" that would leave "the unsaid intact, inaudible" (*SQ* 166). This style of reading involves being attentive to but not trying to fill the gaps, the interruptions that posit a limit to reading. Indeed, the compulsion to learn Celan's poems by heart "stems from this limit to intelligibility or transparency of meaning" (*SQ* 87).

Style as interruption, then; style as a performative event rather than as an aspect of the constative aspect of poetry. Celan's style—resembling Derrida's—challenges the supremacy of nominalisation by appearing in the reading experience through moments where definitive meaning is suspended, left in the balance or in tension between undecidable variations. Punctuation, white spaces, syntax, and paronomasia, none of which functions on the basis of a correspondence between signifier and signified or the totality of a semantic unit, thus become decisive. As Derrida shows in his various readings of Celan, his poetry oscillates between producing "*itself* by *saying*, in an auto-deictic and performative fashion" and opening itself to the encounter with the addressee, as other (*SQ* 155). One such poem is this untitled tercet from *Threadsunns* (*Fadensonnen*):

You were my death:
you I could hold
while everything slipped from me. (*Celan* 297)

(Du warst mein Tod:
dich kannte ich halten,
während mir alles entfiel.) (*Celan* 296)

This poem stands on and turns around the colon at the end of the first, end-stopped line. The pause in between "death:" and "you" keeps in suspension two diametrically opposed motifs which are never resolved into a unity. The first verse associates "you" with "death" through the anachronic formulation that the other caused the death of the one who is speaking. The second verse, however, takes us into another direction. There

is what Werner Hamacher calls a “second of inversion,”⁸⁸ a turning of nothingness into being as the “you” who was the speaker’s death was also that which the speaker “could hold / while everything slipped from me.” The “you,” then, allowed the speaker to hold onto something by holding, providing a moment of respite from loss. “You” was both the speaker’s termination—his “death”—and his survival—something to hold. The oscillation between opposites is not only seen in between the first two verses but also between the second and third verse divided, in German, by a comma, and, in English, by a syntactical caesura. In the final verse, we are back to the sense of loss, to “everything” that “slipped” from the speaker. However, the undecidability is preserved rather than resolved through this second turn of the poem. Clearly, it would be reductive to think of style in this poem—an iterable singularity—as simply being a signature feature of language, for instance, the particular choice of imagery. While one may identify various poetic “devices”—for instance, the sonorous associations among words like “Du [...] Tod,” “dich” and “ich,” as well as “kannte” and “halten”—this approach would reduce the poem to the status of a fixed object when the poem itself seems to be perpetually in motion. Style is locatable in the performative dimension in this poem rather than an adequate complement to meaning or an expression of the unique personality of Celan. Indeed, the poem does not simply seem to *express* a ready made reality as much as express a reality that it brings into being through an encounter. As Gadamer emphasises, who “you” refers to is almost never clear in Celan’s lyrics. It could be poetry itself or someone close to the poet. However, this in itself is not as crucial as the fact that the poem is sustained by the interruption of definite meaning through the undecidability that is created in “you” being both a source of “death” and survival, and that is enacted in the encounter of the poem with the other to whom it is addressed (the other as reader).

The reductiveness of theories of style based on the notion that style is a choice among synonymous ways of expressing meaning, or as a complement to meaning, can also be seen through the poem “Counter-light” (“Gegenlicht”). As Hamacher shows in his analysis of the poem, the poem enacts “the law of inversion” in various ways as that which seems to be inexistent is made to be felt in all its present absence. We read how “In the soft window swings the soft door,” presumably a description of reflection, and how, on the other hand, “You are so near as though you did not linger here.”⁸⁹ As

⁸⁸ Werner Hamacher, “The Second of Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan’s Poetry,” trans. Peter Fenres, in Aris Fioretos ed., *Word Traces*, 219–266.

⁸⁹ As translated and cited in Hamacher 226.

Hamacher puts it, “the greater the distance, the nearer the figure” and the other way round.⁹⁰ This law is taken to the extreme in the lines:

From my hand you take the great flower:
it is not white, not red, not blue—yet you take it.

Expecting the actual colour of the flower after a series of negatives, one’s reading is stopped by a dash that interrupts the rhythm through a caesura. What follows is not a description of the flower but a clause that assumes its existence as “you take it.” The gap in between the series of negations and the wielding of the flower brings into existence a flower that, however, is never described. It is a flower that only exists in the event of reading the poem, always anew, each time singularly. Here, language creates rather than states; it is performative as well as constative.

The performative dimension of poetry as an event is also seen in another recurrent aspect of Celan’s poems, his use of neologisms, many of which are made of a word and a prefix of negation such as “Gegen” in “Gegen-licht” (“counter-light”) and “Gegen-verhängnis” (“Counter-fate”) (*Celan* 229). While Amy D. Colin argues that Celan creates his “new idiom” by bringing together both the known associations of the words (“connotations accumulated through the centuries”) and new meanings through the words being put together, his neologisms have a force that goes beyond the creation of new meanings.⁹¹ In this respect, it is worth noting how Celan sometimes, as it were, hangs his neologisms across two lines with the hyphen separating the two elements at the end of a line. Consider, for instance, this poem from *Breathturn* (*Atemwende*):

With the persecuted in late, un-
silenced,
radiant
covenant.

The dawn plummet, gilded,
cleaves to your co-
swearing, co-
scouring, co-
scribbling
heel. (*Celan* 239)

⁹⁰ Hamacher 252.

⁹¹ Amy Diana Colin, “Paul Celan’s Poetics of Destruction,” in Amy Diana Colin ed., *Argumentum E Silentio: International Celan Symposium* (New York: de Gruyter, 1987) 157–182 (171).

(Mit den Verfolgten in spätem, un-
Verschwiegenem,
Strahlendem
Bund.

Das Morgen-Lot, übergoldet,
Heftet sich dir an die mit-
Schwörende, mit-
Schürfende, mit-
Schreibende
Ferse.) (*Celan* 238)

The spacing of the poem and the physical shape of its language accentuate the gap or interruption between the components of the words formed, thus keeping them, at least momentarily, in tension, separated and not unified. The persecuted are both “silenced” (“verschwiegenem”) and “un- / silenced” (“un- / verschwiegenem”). Such compound words do not only alternate between a word and its negation but also work in suggesting and retreating possibilities of encounter and union as in the second stanza, where the possibility of writing, vowing or prospecting together with the other are interrupted, suspended—only to be reaffirmed—every time by the pause at the turn of the line. To quote a poem from Celan’s *Speech-Grille* (*Sprachgitter*), these interruptions may be said to perform “that instant [which] buzzes” “When the kingfisher dives,” that moment when the kingfisher approaches the water and its mirror-image is on the point of breaking the surface of the water and fly into the air:

Voices, nicked into
the smooth water’s green.
When the kingfisher dives,
that instant buzzes:

What stood by you
on each of the banks
steps
mown into another image. (*Celan* 89)

In Aris Fioretos’s words, “it is in the gray passage between effacement and salvation, between Already-no-longer and Still-here, that Celan’s poetry comes into existence.”⁹²

Such interruption, the suspension of meaning through inversion that sustains undecidability, problematises the notion of style as an expression of meaning and relocates it in style as an aspect of the performative event of poetry. As Hamacher puts

⁹² Aris Fioretos, “Nothing: History and Materiality in Celan,” in ed. Aris Fioretos, *Word Traces* 295–341 (303).

it, language in Celan's poetry starts to articulate "the withdrawal of the world" and is thus "no longer able to designate this withdrawal as an object." Language becomes "nothing more than the cut and strut of an incessant passing away."⁹³ Celan's poetry is thus a form of dispersal rather than gathering of meaning and, in this, it functions like paronomasia which, as seen above, is also decisive in Derrida's conception of style. As Hamacher argues, apart from paronomasia, Celan's poetry also often depends on multilingual play which, again, interrupts the neat liaison between signifier and signified. One instance of this comes from the line quoted above: "that instant buzzes:" ("sirrt die Sekunde:"). "die Sekunde," that is, the "second" or the "instant," reminds us of the Latin "secare," to cut off and, indeed, the phrase can be cut differently and read as "*diese Kunde*" ("this message"). As Hamacher shows, then, the "conduit [...] of Celan's poem is the self-interrupting, self-dismembering, distributing and redistributing, communicating and imparting speaking of language."⁹⁴ Rather than as a medium in between subjects—the poet and the addressee—language arises as a self-division—paronomasia rather than identity—that constitutes and performs its subjects.

As Jan Mieszkowski argues, semantic transference in Celan's poetry is also interrupted through syntax in ways which echo the undecidability created by syntax in Derrida's writing. The first line of the poem, "Sprich auch Du" ("Speak you too"), for instance, may be read in two ways: either as an invocation to the other to speak too (like others) or as an invocation to the other to speak (apart from doing something else) (*Celan* 76–77). Which of the two versions is considered determines a completely different reading of the poem. Is this a poem about the need of poetry to speak and thus be constitutive of itself or is it about the need to also speak about certain events thus positing itself as an "also ran"? As Mieszkowski puts it, "thanks to its syntax rather than to any ambiguity of its words, 'Sprich auch du' says one thing, but it *also* says another, or rather, it puts everything under the sway of *auch* ['also' or 'too']."⁹⁵ Syntax, then, creates undecidability which goes beyond semantic ambiguity.

It is in this sense that Lacoue-Labarthe speaks of Celan's poetry as "caesura" or as a "counter-word"—a gesture more than a meaning—like Lucile's cry "Long live the king" in Buchner's play "Danton's Death" that Celan writes about in "The Meridian." Celan's poetry is an event rather than a transmission of meaning, performative rather than constative, and this calls for a different, non-teleocratic theory of style: style as

⁹³ Hamacher 233.

⁹⁴ Hamacher 236.

⁹⁵ Jan Mieszkowski, "*Ich, Ach, Auch*: Certain Also-Ran Languages of Jacques Derrida," *The Oxford Literary Review* 33.2 (2011): 207–230 (220).

interruption, a knot of proximity and distance in the reader's countersigning of the poet's style.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Lacoue-Labarthe 137.

CHAPTER 5: NON-TELEOCRATIC READINGS OF STYLE

5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter brings together insights and motifs from the work of Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida to gesture towards the possibility of a non-teleocratic reading of style through a specific focus on Celan's lyric, "Flower" ("Blume"). Rather than providing a method to be applied elsewhere, an attempt will be made to respond to the open singularity of style in Celan's lyric. For comparative purposes, this will be preceded by counter-textual (with and against) readings of two approaches to style: first, Jameson's analysis of Joseph Conrad's style in *The Political Unconscious*, and, second, a stylistic approach to Celan's poem. Jameson conceives style as a manifestation of historical, social and ideological phenomena, while the various branches in contemporary stylistics reduce style to either a linguistic essence or, in more recent studies, to conceptual mental schemata in the reader. In this way, both approaches suppress the an-archic and anachronic force of style as a performative event open to the aleatory countersignature of the other.

5.2 Counter-textual Reading I: Jameson on Style in Conrad

Like other Marxian theorists, Jameson traces the origins of style to the "deeper drama of [...] the mode of production."¹ Style, for Jameson, is an aspect of form that *carries* (rather than simply expressing) "ideological messages [...] distinct from the ostensible and manifest content of the work" (*PU* 84). Style is teleocratically rooted in the temporality of its production; it is deemed to be intrinsically tied to the historical circumstances from which it arises to the extent that it is only a relevant concept in modernism.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson employs the "Freudian model of the unconscious" (*PU* 273) to theorise that the "ground bass of material production" is inescapable even when it is "managed," rather than highlighted by the text (*PU* 203). For Jameson, every text has a "political unconscious" and "[i]n the last analysis" *everything* is "political" (*PU* 5). Despite Jameson's primary interest in the ideology carried by formal aspects of literature, he recurrently resorts to close reading of style,

¹ Ian Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2007) 54–55.

reflecting his belief that history is “inaccessible to us except in textual form” and “our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization” (*PU* 20). For Jameson, textuality cannot be separated from the Real because our access to it can only ever come after its textualisation. As such, history may “only be apprehended through its effects” as they appear in textual form (*PU* 88). It is in this paradoxical way that the literary work is seen as being implicated with its historical subtext or political unconscious.

Urging us to “[a]lways historicize,” Jameson analyses a succession of nineteenth and early twentieth century texts by writers as varied as George Gissing, Henry James, Honore de Balzac and Conrad, showing how literary form can be understood as an ambivalent response to the changing dynamics of the modes of production (*PU* ix). In particular, Jameson concentrates on the changes that define the movement towards modernism and on how these changes are embodied in literature. As a literary period, modernism announces the autonomy of the work of art and the need to constantly experiment with stylistic innovation. Social realism and political engagement are seemingly sidelined in favour of a more concentrated focus on individual subjectivity, the construction and expression of limited points of view, and the development of highly-wrought and recognisable styles. Moving further away from the rhetorical expectation of following established models and conventions, early twentieth century modernists turn to literary language and mould it in their own image in an attempt to inscribe a sense of the individual self in form and style.

However, Jameson excavates the “unconscious” buried beneath this prioritisation of style—a “relatively recent phenomenon”—and finds that style comes into being “along with the middle-class world itself.” Unlike rhetoric, a pre-capitalist concern with the social dimension of language which presents “fixed” models to which the “most diverse temperaments” aspire, style provides a channel for the individual consciousness to distinguish itself (*MF* 333–334). In this respect, style—understood as individual signature or as a flourish of linguistic density—is a “middle-class phenomenon” that reflects the atomisation of middle class life: “Style thus emerges, not from the social life of the group, but from the silence of the isolated individual” (*CH* 122).

Jameson is severely critical of approaches like New Criticism and most forms of stylistics which study style synchronically to the detriment of the diachronic or historical dimension which he sees as grounding literature to the social. He contests the implication that “language perceived as style is everywhere an essential and constitutive

component of the literary work of art”; and “because style is a historical phenomenon,” he argues, “an absolute science of style [like stylistics] is impossible” (*MF* 335). Such theories of style, in bypassing ideology, are deemed to reinforce the capitalist reification of life which, in turn, creates the notion of the private individual and dissociates him from society, thus limiting his ability to act and change society.

In Jameson’s view, style is a modernist reaction to “capitalist reification,” a valuable end in itself, a guarantee of aesthetic worth. The value of style as a commodity triumphs over the sense of society as an organic whole and, in providing a channel for the expression of the originality of the isolated individual, style reflects the atomisation of middle class life in capitalism. For Jameson, the modernist commodification of style is clearly at work in Conrad, whose novels provide instances of “the impressionistic strategy of modernism whose function is to derealise the content and make it available for consumption on some purely aesthetic level” (*PU* 202). A transitional figure between nineteenth century realism and early twentieth century modernism, Conrad allows Jameson to demonstrate how historical changes are inextricably implicated in literary form and, more specifically, how his impressionistic and modern style is rooted in capitalism.

Jameson’s political account of Conrad’s style goes against the grain of accounts of modernism in terms of craftsmanship, formal innovation, and the making new of culture and aesthetics. Jameson argues that what happens in a modernist text like *Lord Jim* is a “negation” of realism which, dialectically, “continues to bear that content [...] within itself” (*PU* 255). The “modernist project” does not simply erase the historical and the social by creating texts as “free-floating object[s]” (*PU* 209), but “manages” these political elements by providing “substitute gratifications,” such as style (*PU* 256). Conrad’s texts evoke nineteenth century realism while simultaneously compensating for its loss through style. This makes style, for Jameson, not a response to primarily aesthetic demands but to a historical, era-specific “contradictory situation in the concrete world of everyday social life” (*PU* 214).

Conrad’s impressionistic style is thus teleocratically conceived as a “projected solution” to historical realities, not so much as an inventive “break with the past” but as “only one of those [styles] structurally available to the modernists” (*PU* 214). Of particular interest to Jameson is the Conradian privileging of “the capacity of sense perception” (*PU* 218), which he sees as defining Conrad’s “practice of style” and as situating Conrad as a literary equivalent to the impressionists in painting (*PU* 213). Perception, which is sidelined by modern science and capitalism due to its lack of

exchange value in a world dominated by considerations of calculation, measurement and profit, becomes the basis of Conrad's style. This is, as Jameson puts it, an aestheticising strategy which seeks to "recode or rewrite the world and its own data in terms of perception as a semi-autonomous activity." Perception in Conrad functions as an end in itself and this, in turn, transforms Conrad's style into an "art-commodity" (*PU* 218).

Among the several passages from Conrad that Jameson utilises in support of his argument, there is a description of a setting sun and an impending storm in *Typhoon*:

At its setting the sun had a diminished diameter and an expiring brown, rayless glow, as if millions of centuries elapsing since the morning had brought it near its end. A dense bank of cloud became visible to the northward; it had a sinister dark olive tint, and lay low and motionless upon the sea, resembling a solid obstacle in the path of the ship. She went floundering towards it like an exhausted creature driven to its death [...]. The far-off blackness ahead of the ship was like another night seen through the starry night of the earth—the starless night of the immensities beyond the created universe, revealed in its appalling stillness through a low fissure in the glittering sphere of which the earth is the kernel.²

Reading with Jameson, one can say that the "perceptual vocation" of Conrad's style is tangible here (*PU* 220). The emphasis is not on the sun and on the approaching storm but on the creation of "a new space and a new perspective" (*PU* 223). Phrases denoting perception, such as "became visible," "resembling," "seen through," and "revealed" are very frequent. This is complemented by the recurrent similes that, rather than describing, reinvent and recreate the sun and the storm. The sun seems to be on the verge of being extinguished, "like an exhausted creature driven to its death." The storm is eerily unfamiliar in appearing "like another night" and clouds start to resemble "a solid object in the path of the ship." Jameson suggests that Conrad's style in passages like these reifies perception itself into an object so that what the reader experiences is not the sun, the clouds or the storm but the aesthetic recreation of such objects through a filter of optical perception. In other words, for Jameson, Conrad's style of perception encourages the reader to mainly perceive style itself rather than the object being described.

Conrad's style is reified into a guarantee of aesthetic worth and this reflects the abstraction and detachment from social concerns that capitalism promotes. Departing

² Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus," Typhoon and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) 168, 171.

from Jameson's examples, one might test the validity of Jameson's analysis through a parallel reading of the opening passage from Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*:

London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun [...]. Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights [...]. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds.³

This passage echoes Conrad's in many ways. Once again, there is the evocation of a sun moving towards extinction ("the death of the sun") while similes defamiliarise London: the mud is so overwhelming that "it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus" and the fog surrounding the Londoners makes them seem "as if they were up in a balloon." However, the differences are decisive. Dickens, unlike Conrad, does not so much emphasise the act of perceiving this world but how hazy this world is. The recurrent use of proper nouns indicating time and place (London, Michaelmas term, Lincoln's Inn Hall, November, Holborn Hill, Essex marshes, Kentish heights) as well as the significant reduction in the use of verbs in the passage, through ellipsis and grammatically incomplete sentences, direct the reader's attention to the world being described and its objects rather than on the perception of this world. This is accentuated by the symbolic and political dimension in this passage which Dickens concludes by connecting the dense fog and slimy mud to "The High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners."⁴ Dickens's reader thus perceives not the process of perception itself as much as the moral and bureaucratic obscurity of Chancery in mid-nineteenth century London. This contrast seems to confirm Jameson's claim that in the nineteenth century, as exemplified by the passage from Dickens, style is a "form of packaging, a mannerism, [...] a 'supplement' to the novel product," and it is only in the twentieth century that the English novel starts supplying style itself (*PHL* 132).

Valuable in itself, style in Conrad and in modernism compensates for the loss of sacrality and quality in the increasingly quantified world of capitalism. For Jameson,

³ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977) 1.

⁴ Dickens 1.

modern style serves a dual role in its relation to history. It not only “seiz[es] on the Real in all of its reified resistance” but also provides a Utopian “attempt to stand beyond history”; it is both a product of ideology and something which counteracts its effects (*PU* 226). Paradoxically, therefore, the turn towards the seemingly autonomous and formal dimension of language is, for Jameson, a response to history and, in the final analysis, determined by history.

Jameson’s theory of style is based on relational and teleocratic conceptions. To think of style in terms of a performative singular event, however, one departs from the notion of style as *proper* manifestation of history towards style as inventive surprise, not simply a reflection but also a creation of the laws that determine its legibility. From this perspective, Jameson’s theory of modernist style as socially constructed and as a necessary reflection of capitalism is reductive. By presenting style as absolutely determined by history, Jameson risks neutralizing the singularising force of the poetic.

A non-teleocratic conception of style would also problematise Jameson’s categorisation of texts according to specific historical or literary eras, as if their significance were limited to the time they somehow express. As Peggy Kamuf writes, a literary text, if still read when the historical context “has subsided into archival compost,” has a relation to the future by “which it remains always to some extent incomprehensible by any given present.”⁵ Jameson’s reading of Conrad’s style dismisses chance, the aleatory, and the singular countersignature by defining style as a necessary reaction to history. Countering such a teleocratic approach, one thinks of style as a singular event regulated by an-archic and anachronic dynamics. Enacting paradoxical temporalities, style, rather than reflecting a prior truth, such as ideology in Jameson’s terms, projects what it seems to re-present. Such a performative understanding of style as an event would go in different directions not only to Jameson, but also to the definition of modernist texts as being primarily stylistically innovative, a formulation that risks dismissing the force of style once its innovations have been recuperated into convention. Style as an event remains singular through the singular countersignatures that it opens itself to, even when the historical background it arises from has passed.

⁵ Peggy Kamuf, *The Division of Literature: or the university in deconstruction* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 164.

5.3 *Teleocratic Conceptions of Style in Contemporary Stylistics*

The rapidly expanding discipline of stylistics or literary linguistics within English departments in Europe and the United States is the latest development in style studies. As suggested by its name, this field has at its roots a special interest in style; however, contemporary stylistics has branched out into various directions, retaining style as one of its central concerns but also frequently sidelining it for other issues.⁶

One of the most significant trends, in this respect, is the “cognitive turn” in the field, that is, the current attempt to integrate insights from cognitive linguistics, cognitive psychology, and science, thus turning away from formal analysis towards developing models and methods that account for and describe concepts deemed to underlie linguistic forms.⁷ The kind of “cognitive stylistics” being practised today is the result of at least three main strands of influence. Firstly, contemporary cognitive stylistics retains, to a certain extent, the formalist inclinations of early stylistics. To quote Donald C. Freeman’s succinct summary, in its early stages, “work in linguistic stylistics [could] be divided into three types: style as deviation from the norm, style as recurrence or convergence of textual pattern, and style as a particular exploitation of a grammar of possibilities.”⁸ Thus, some of the key terms for early stylistics were *choice*, *deviation*, and *foregrounding*, all of which privilege the understanding of style as a linguistic pattern within a system of possibilities. A second seminal strain is the emphasis on “cognitive” aspects of literature, as proposed by Fowler with the notion of “mind style,”⁹ as well as Ohmann’s work on style as “conceptual orientation.”¹⁰ Working on the formalist premise that style is a sum of linguistic features, Fowler and Ohmann sought to study how style is indicative of the mind or minds behind it, focusing on the way style in particular texts is characterised by deviational or recurrent linguistic devices that give readers an insight into the mind of the author, characters, or narrators. A third decisive trend in stylistics has been the prioritisation of the reader, as seen, for instance, in Stanley Fish’s “affective stylistics” and recurrent references to the “average” or “ideal” reader. Moving away from the understanding of meaning as immanent in a text, this reorientation towards the reader is at the heart of the cognitive

⁶ For a representative overview of contemporary stylistics see Lambrou and Stockwell ed. For a historical overview see Carter and Stockwell ed.

⁷ See Peter Stockwell, “On cognitive poetics and stylistics,” in Harri Veivo, Bo Pettersson and Merja Polvinen ed. *Cognition and Literary Interpretation in Practice* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 2005) 267–82.

⁸ Donald C. Freeman, *Linguistics and Literary Style* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970) 4.

⁹ Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel*.

¹⁰ Ohmann, “Generative Grammars and the Concept of Literary Style.”

turn and has led, among others, to the development of George Lakoff's, Mark Johnson's and Mark Turner's "cognitive metaphor" or "conceptual metaphor theory."¹¹

Cognitive stylisticians are interested in the process of reading, not necessarily of literature, since it is assumed that literature shares the same essential features as other kinds of discourse, and, therefore, what is needed is not a theory of literature but an application of theories of language developed in cognitive linguistics to literature. As a result, literariness comes to be seen as an effect of reading, what Guy Cook specifically defines as schematised value-assignment based on inferences and the fulfilment of, or deviation from, expectations. "Literariness," for Cook, is "discourse deviation"; a text acquires literary status when it "bring[s] about a change in the schemata of a reader."¹² The key difference from earlier formalism is that "deviation" is located within the conceptual schemata of the reader rather than within the linguistic features of the text itself. While this may initially seem to bring cognitive stylistics close to the necessity of the reader in the economy of the work as envisaged by Blanchot, Gadamer, and Derrida, cognitive stylistics retains a teleocratic outlook by conceiving the reader in terms of conceptual competence, an already existing set of schemata that may be triggered or extended by style. As Reuven Tsur (a cognitive stylistician) puts it,

[o]ne major assumption of cognitive poetics is that poetry exploits, for aesthetic purposes, cognitive (including linguistic) processes that were initially evolved for non-aesthetic purposes [...]. The reading of poetry involves the modification (or, sometimes, the deformation) of cognitive processes, and their adaptation for purposes for which they were not originally "devised".¹³

In other words, the poetic lies in the conceptual schemata within the reader and their potential transformation. To think of style as an anachronic event, on the other hand, is to consider the way style may *create* the reader who, in turn, *allows* the work to come into being through his singular countersignature.

In view of the shift to the reader, it is symptomatic that the term *cognitive stylistics* has now become interchangeable with *cognitive poetics*, suggesting a departure from an exclusive interest in style towards a taxonomic approach to schemata. One major consequence has been that of thinking of linguistic features—for instance

¹¹ See George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

¹² Guy Cook, *Discourse and Literature: the interplay of form and mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 182.

¹³ Reuven Tsur, "Aspects of Cognitive Poetics," in Elena Semino and Jonathan Culpeper ed., *Cognitive Stylistics: Language and Cognition in Text Analysis* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 279–318 (281).

metaphor—as being essentially formal aspects that act as a conduit for concepts. This reactivation of the hackneyed dichotomy of form and content that, as we have seen, is shaken to the core by Blanchot and Derrida, results in style being understood once again in teleocratic terms. If in the work of Fowler on mind style, style is understood as a reflection of the mind in which it originates or which it represents, in contemporary cognitive stylistics, style becomes an aspect of language that affects the reader's previously existing conceptual schemata and then disappears within them. Arguably, Lisa Zunshine speaks for many within the field when she says that one must study the “mental states brought in by what we broadly call elements of style, including figures of speech.”¹⁴ The teleocratic origin of style thus shifts from the author to the reader's mental concepts that style reactivates or modifies.

Providing a critique of cognitive stylistics through the work of Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida is in many ways exploring relatively uncharted territory. While two prominent stylisticians, Stockwell and Carter, have defined stylistics as “a form of hermeneutics,” citing Gadamer as an important predecessor, stylistics has not shown any real interest in the work of Derrida, Blanchot or any thinkers associated with post-structuralism or deconstruction.¹⁵ On the other hand, neither have there been any significant incursions into stylistics from theorists working within post-structuralism or deconstruction. The almost absolute indifference is reciprocal. One cause is the fact that, as Stockwell and Carter admit, “the field [of stylistics] largely sidestepped the theoretical quagmire by taking an explicitly practical approach.”¹⁶ Since its beginning in the 1960s, contemporary stylistics has mainly been concerned with the development and the fine-tuning of methodology, seeking more reliable and scientifically-sound approaches to its object of study. This happens at the expense of debates around its theoretical foundations, with stylistic studies often presenting themselves as “a method without an ideological or theoretical underpinning.”¹⁷ Indeed, it is significant that Carter and Stockwell, while invoking Gadamerian hermeneutics to justify their assumption that “readers come [to interpretation] with existing memories, beliefs and both personal and social objectives,” thus “condition[ing]” the “actualisation” of literary texts even before reading begins, miss a key aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics, that is, his

¹⁴ Lisa Zunshine, “Style Brings in Mental States,” *Style* 45.2 (2011): 349–356 (354).

¹⁵ Carter and Stockwell 296.

¹⁶ Carter and Stockwell 294.

¹⁷ Carter and Stockwell 293.

emphasis on the singularity of the poetic that defies universally applicable methodology.¹⁸

5.4 *Counter-textual Reading II: A Stylistic Approach to Celan's "Flower"*

Contesting the naïve belief that a method can be free of theoretical underpinning, a reading of Celan's "Flower" ("Blume") may expose the often unstated and yet always decisive assumptions at the heart of cognitive stylistics. Echoing the counter-textual reading of Jameson reading Conrad in the previous section, what follows is both an exercise in stylistics—an application of a method—and a critique of such an approach through a non-teleocratic understanding of style informed by insights from Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida.

Celan's "Flower" is not a random and neutral choice. Its resistance to being turned simply into an example of a general rule by performing an antonomastic wavering of language between the untranslatable proper and the shareable common calls for non-teleocratic readings that run counter to several assumptions in cognitive stylistics. The poem resists the tendency in stylistic approaches to treat the chosen texts as examples proving a method, as in Geoffrey Leech's instrumental justification of his selection of an excerpt from Dickens as "a handy way of [...] exemplify[ing] how the various themes" developed in contemporary stylistics "can be integrated in application to fiction writing."¹⁹ Addressing what he sees as the excessive determinism in conceptual metaphor theory, Tsur problematises this trend in stylistics by insisting on how each poem studied should be treated differently and on how his approach is based on the assumption that "all the work remains to be done in each particular case." However, significantly, Tsur claims that his is an attempt at "providing a theoretical tool for doing all the work in each particular case." Thus, once again, the "scientific" approach is instrumental in that it conceptualises the singular poetic effects on the reader as recuperable within an overarching theory.²⁰ The ultimate aim in cognitive stylistics is not so much to provide readings of particular texts but to understand the way readers read, understand and interpret texts. Within this framework, style is exclusively significant in terms of the effects that it may have on reading and reading processes.

¹⁸ Carter and Stockwell 296.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Leech, "Style in Fiction Revisited: The Beginning of *Great Expectations*," *Style* 41.2 (2007): 117–132 (117 my emphasis).

²⁰ Tsur 310.

There is an ingrained tendency in cognitive stylistics—reflecting its scientific aspirations—to move from the specific to the general, from linguistic “data” to the formulation of laws or, in the case of conceptual metaphor theory, the identification of shared metaphors and universal schemata. It is this unidirectional movement from the unique case—the only one time of an event—to the general law that Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida resist in their understanding of style as an event and that Celan’s “Flower” both gestures towards and resists:

The stone.
The stone in the air, which I followed.
Your eye, as blind as the stone.

We were
hands,
we scooped the darkness empty, we found
the word that ascended summer:
flower.

Flower—a blindman’s word.
Your eye and my eye:
they take care
of water.

Growth.
Heartwall by heartwall
adds on petals.

One more word like this, and the hammers
will be swinging free. *(Celan 105)*

(Der Stein.
Der Stein in der Luft, dem ich folgte.
Dein Aug, so blind wie der Stein.

Wir waren
Hände,
wir schöpften die Finsternis leer, wir fanden
das Wort, das den Sommer heraufkam:
Blume.

Blume - ein Blindenwort.
Dein Aug und mein Aug:
sie sorgen
für Wasser.

Wachstum.
Herzwand um Herzwand
blättert hinzu.

Ein Wort noch, wie dies, und die Hämmer
schwingen im Freien.) (Celan 104)

Starting from the premise that style is an accumulation of formal features, a formalist stylistic approach would locate the poem's literariness in those aspects of language that are foregrounded through deviational strategies. Such stylistic markers could also be used to outline the salient features of Celan's style. In the case of "Flower," one could focus on the prevalence of stone and eye images and metaphors. Literary metaphor, for Leech, is a stylistic feature that creates deviation, "a semantic oddity which demands that a linguistic form should be given something other than its normal (literal) interpretation."²¹ For instance, the metaphoric verse, "The stone in the air that I followed," possibly conveying the "blind[ness]" of the eye by presenting it as a stone, may be said to deviate from ordinary language and to be foregrounded in the poem. The high frequency of metaphor in "Flower" may also be seen as a form of deviation. "We" are presented as "hands" while "the word" is metaphorically presented as something that can "ascend." One could then identify such metaphoricity as a stylistic mark, one poetic device in a combination of such devices that—if identified in their totality—can yield the sum total of the poem's style. Corpus Stylistics is often used precisely to quantify this kind of deviation in support of stylistic description or else to identify previously unnoticed stylistic markers through statistical deviation.²² Approaching the poem through corpus stylistics would mean considering the poem as part of a wider database of poems by Celan that could be scanned for statistically significant deviations from a norm—which may include the work of another poet or another group of poems or texts by Celan himself. Such a study might identify the very high recurrence of certain words in Celan's oeuvre that also appear in this poem: "stone" ("Stein"), eye ("Aug"), and "We" ("Wir").

Another foregrounded stylistic marker is paratactic syntax. The poem includes a series of syntactic fragments; its verses often include only a subject, as in "The stone. / The stone in the air that I followed. / Your eye as blind as the stone. [...] Flower—a word for the blind." Subordinating conjunctions are mostly absent in between clauses (an exception being the final stanza of the poem). Thus, for instance, in the third stanza, as elsewhere in the poem, there is no syntactic connection between the first verse—

²¹ Geoffrey Leech, "'This bread I break': Language and Interpretation," in Donald C. Freeman ed., *Linguistics and Literary Style* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970) 119–129 (122).

²² See, for example, David L. Hoover, Jonathan Culpeper and Bill Louw ed., *Approaches to Corpus Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 2008).

“Flower—a blindman’s word”—and the rest of the stanza—“Your eye and mine:/they take care/of water.” This contributes to enhancing the undecidability of Celan’s poetry. Meaning is somehow created through connections of sense that the poem itself does not spell out but rather only suggests. In his analysis of John Keats’s “On seeing the elgin marbles,” Tsur speaks of a somewhat similar “ineffable experience” that “cannot be expressed in ordinary, conceptual language.” For Tsur, this ineffability is ultimately a biological phenomenon, a consequence of the inability of the language of the poem (“typical left-hemisphere brain-activity”) to “express” the “diffuse, undifferentiated” experience (“related to right-hemisphere brain activities”).²³ Through Tsur’s argument, Celan’s poem’s obscure style would be the result of a mismatch between language and the emotion or concepts conveyed.

A stylistic analysis may also focus on the recurrence of words and sounds in the poem. Alliteration, assonance, paronomasia and repetition are poetic devices often foregrounded in Celan’s poetry, as in “Flower,” contributing to a peculiar rhythm that is memorably exemplified, perhaps nowhere as hauntingly and also controversially, as in “Todesfuge” (“Deathfuge”). Conceiving style and meaning as interlinked but ultimately separate, a “functionalist” approach would highlight how formal, stylistic aspects mirror or convey aspects of meaning.²⁴ For instance, in the verse, “Blume—ein Blindenwort,” the alliteration of /bl/ brings together two words—“Blume” (“flower”) and “Blindenwort” (“word for the blind”)—that encapsulate the paradoxical oppositions that the poem embodies, that is, openness and closure, growth and death, regeneration and blindness.²⁵ Moreover, the stuttering language in the first stanza of the poem—characterised by parataxis, repetition, end-stopped lines and the use of caesura in the final two verses—could be said to contrast the relatively more syntactically coherent and less hesitant final stanza. This formal contrast could be linked to the tonal and thematic movement from the stuttering awareness of stony blindness at the beginning of the poem towards the possibility of resurgence and growth (“and the hammers will be swinging free”) that the word “Flower” suggests.

This kind of stylistic analysis resembles the work done by the New Critics, and it is based on the attempt to relate form with content, or style with subject matter. However, what contemporary stylistics adds to New Criticism—apart from the

²³ Tsur 301.

²⁴ See Talbot J. Taylor and Michael Toolan, “Recent trends in stylistics,” in Weber ed. 87–91.

²⁵ For a detailed formal and metrical analysis of “Blume,” see Peter Szondi, “Appendix C,” in *Celan Studies*, trans. Susan Bernofsky with Harvey Mendelsohn (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003) 109–113.

scientific aspiration to make analysis verifiable and falsifiable—is the opening of the duality of form and content to the reader. Indeed, starting from what Semino and Culpeper call “the cognitive assumption that linguistic patterns in texts reflect cognitive processes,” several recent approaches focus on the “cognitive processes” that style reflects or triggers not only within the poet but also within the reader.²⁶ It is in light of this opening to a form of cognitive competence and the desire to be “systematic” that interest in conceptual metaphor theory has recently intensified. One seminal text from which to start is George Lakoff and Mark Turner’s *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. This study, considered foundational in the field, proceeds from the premises that “metaphor is a matter of thought” and that “great poets can speak to us because they use the modes of thought we all possess.”²⁷ This leads the authors to identify a series of metaphors that poets and writers access and modify in their writing. For instance, King Lear’s words, “we came crying hither,” extend “the very ordinary metaphorical conception of birth as arrival [...] that we use when we speak of a baby being on the way.”²⁸ Examples of conceptual metaphors that subsume clusters of related but differing formulations abound and include *Life is a journey*, *Life is a play*, *Death is departure*, and *Time is a thief*. It is by being already familiar with ordinary metaphors through being part of a cultural and social community that readers can “mak[e] sense of” literature.²⁹

One implication is that different poems access the same basic conceptual metaphors, albeit in different ways and using different words. As such, “unique linguistic expression”—what is often called “style”—ultimately always leads to “common” conceptual metaphors. This teleocratic and expressive conception of style has the effect of annulling the possibility of the surprising or the aleatory in style which, on the contrary, Derrida and Blanchot insist on in their work. Irrespective of how creative and inventive the metaphors and the “idiosyncrasy of language” are, they are seen as ultimately leading to—and disappearing in—already existing universal concepts.³⁰ Singular variations of style are thus teleocratically recuperated as choices from a number of possibilities that lead to pre-existing thought structured in the form of basic conceptual metaphors.

²⁶ Semino and Culpeper ed. ix.

²⁷ Lakoff and Turner xi.

²⁸ Lakoff and Turner 1.

²⁹ Lakoff and Turner 2.

³⁰ Lakoff and Turner 50.

Confronting the issue of poetic inventiveness, Lakoff and Turner argue that “it is the masterful way in which poets extend, compose, and compress [basic metaphors] that we find poetic.”³¹ The different ways of using metaphor make comprehension “so much harder” than in ordinary language and this is perceived as poetic. Revealingly, therefore, the “poetic” for Lakoff and Turner is something that the reader finds difficult, such as a concentration of foregrounded deviational metaphors. In this context, style is understood teleocratically as an accumulation of poetic devices that impinge on the reader’s cognitive structures. As Lakoff and Turner insist, if we adopt this view of metaphor, “we have to distinguish metaphorical thought from the language that expresses that thought.”³² Thought is what really matters. Thought—often structured in terms of metaphor—is that which language, irrespective of style, *expresses* and that which determines the readers’ *understanding* of a poem. Ultimately, in poetry, “[w]hat is meaningful are not words, the mere sound sequences spoken or letter sequences on a page, but the conceptual content that the words evoke. Meanings are thus in people’s minds, not in the words on the page.”³³ Through this formulation, clearly, the singularity of the poetic, its singular resistance to absolute conceptualisation through style, is erased and forgotten. The singularity of style as signature—both in terms of the poet’s individual incision in language as well as what may be called, echoing Derrida, the singular countersignatures that read style, enact it, and depart from it—is forgotten and so are issues of context, genre and other institutional “borders” that, as seen through Derrida’s reading of Kafka, are constitutive of what we understand by literature.

More recent developments in conceptual metaphor theory can be seen in a seminal essay by Freeman, which presents metaphor as “embodied human understanding,” that is, a way of making sense of the world that is projected onto abstract experiences from our physical or bodily experiences.³⁴ Our bodily experiences construct “non-propositional schemata” that, in turn, allow us to make sense of abstract concepts. For instance, the bodily experience of “BALANCE”³⁵ is central to human consideration of the concept of “justice” and it allows us, for instance, to process a series of metaphors in the opening scene of *King Lear*, which Freeman focuses on in this essay. Freeman argues not only that the play is characterised by the recurrence of certain conceptual metaphors but that these patterns as well as their “interconnections at

³¹ Lakoff and Turner 54.

³² Lakoff and Turner 55.

³³ Lakoff and Turner 109.

³⁴ Donald C. Freeman, “‘According to my bond’: *King Lear* and re-cognition,” in Weber ed. 280–297 (281).

³⁵ Capital letters are being used for schemata as is customary in cognitive stylistics.

different structural levels” can be “*explain[ed]*” rather than simply described. For instance, Freeman claims that the same concept is at the heart of “dozens of examples in *King Lear* of metaphors of financial accounting that instantiate the BALANCE schema and many larger structures in the play.”³⁶ For Freeman, this approach improves on conventional criticism in that “these analytical claims can be confirmed or disconfirmed according to the accuracy with which these elements and structure and their projection are articulated.”³⁷

While in this essay Freeman speaks primarily about a play, he makes it clear that his theory may be applied to other genres and contexts, claiming that “cognitive metaphor provides accounts of language patterns that are isomorphic with larger imaginative literary structures.” For Freeman, therefore, literary texts are examples of larger conceptual units and this is an assumption that is often shared by cognitive stylisticians who, like Lakoff and Johnson,³⁸ may build their case on a wide range of textual sources without dwelling at length on potential generic implications. It would thus not be beyond the scope of Freeman’s approach to apply the conclusions of his essay on a Shakespearean play to Celan’s “Flower.”

Echoing Freeman’s approach, one could show how the poem manipulates, extends or compresses a series of metaphors that belong to wider conceptual schemata. What would become immediately apparent is the radical unconventionality and ambiguity of Celan’s metaphors. In this respect, as shown in this study and as will be argued in the next section in relation to Celan’s “Flower,” it is precisely this move from undecidability to clear concepts expressed crisply in short phrases like *Time is a thief*—typical of cognitive stylistic approaches—that the conceptions of style that arise from Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida resist. As Celan claimed in a conversation with Hugo Huppert in 1966, his poetry is characterised by “ambiguity” or “polysemy without mask” (“Mehrdeutigkeit ohne Maske”), that is, what may be described as a radical undecidability that refuses to be recuperated into simple concepts. Speaking about his writing, Celan specifically opposes the “overlapping” and “multifacetedness” of his poetry to the hide-and-seek behind metaphors or the prevalent use of “like” (similes but also metaphors) in poems, including the ones he wrote early in his life.³⁹

³⁶ Freeman 292.

³⁷ Freeman 293.

³⁸ *More than Cool Reason* includes examples from poems, plays, proverbs, and the Bible. Other studies also extend the approach to popular culture, journalism and other non-literary sources.

³⁹ Hugo Huppert, “‘Spirituell’: Gespräch mit Paul Celan,” in Werner Hamacher and Winfried Menninghaus ed., *Paul Celan* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), 319–324 (321).

Momentarily sidelining these concerns, let us attempt to counter-read “Flower” through conceptual metaphor theory by identifying the metaphors in the poem, linking them to metaphors *we live by*, and then determining which universal bodily schemata are at work in the poem as a whole. In the first stanza, there is an extended metaphor of an “eye”—more specifically, “your eye” or the eye of the addressee—described as a “stone.” The metaphor is modified by the simile, “as blind as,” which gives “your eye” a dead, unresponsive quality. One difficulty is already palpable: identifying who is being addressed is impossible if one is to approach the poem as the only source of information. However, one may relate this poem to others by Celan to validate the interpretation. Thus, in an attempt to understand the metaphoric import of “The stone in the air” one may refer to “Todesfuge” (“Deathfuge”) and the phrase “a grave in the air,” a phrase that Celan has described as being “neither borrowing nor metaphor” but an all too literal description of the fate of those cremated in the extermination camps.⁴⁰ Thus, “your eye,” here, may refer to the eye of the dead, possibly, as in other lyrics by Celan addressed to a “you,” the poet’s mother. This leads to conceiving the eyes as stone metaphor as an extension of the more widely known use of stone as a metaphor for death, unresponsiveness, and silence. At this stage, the lyric’s resistance to metaphoric transference is already apparent. While trying to determine the general import of the metaphors, we are drawn to the singular and impenetrable use of “your” in the first stanza. The attempt to generalise is thus immediately suspended so that, rather than discovering what hides behind the metaphor of the eye as a stone, we are left with an undeterminable situation which is an instance of style as a form of interruption, style as a performative event that gestures towards while suspending semantic transference.

The second stanza includes more metaphoric phrases. “We”—the persona and someone else—are presented as “hands.” Again, who “we” refers to remains ambiguous. Is the other of the persona the same other addressed in the first stanza or is this someone else? Hands are containers but they are also a part of the body closely associated to the sense of touch. Indeed, the use of the pronoun “We,” as opposed to the relatively detached “your eye” in the first stanza, suggests some form of communion, thus indicating that this is probably a different other to the persona. Referring to Celan’s own characterisation of a poem as a “handshake” or an “encounter,” one may thus understand the metaphor, “We were hands,” as conveying the sense of unity or

⁴⁰ Letter of 19 May 1961, partially quoted in Barbara Wiedemann-Wolf, *Antschel Paul-Paul Celan Studien zum Frühwerk* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1985) as cited in John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) 177.

communion with the other. However, as in the first stanza, the metaphor is here extended over a number of verses as we read: “We scooped the darkness empty.” Thus, the “we” as “hands” become digging hands: hands as shovels, maybe, but also more. As John Felstiner explains, the German word “schöpfen,” which he translates as “scooped,” suggests delivering a birth (“Schöpfung” is “conception”) or creation (as in Hayden’s “Die Schöpfung” or “The Creation”).⁴¹ Thus, these are hands which, in “scoop[ing] darkness empty,” create something. The union which leads to creation or conception suggests parenting, creating something out of nothing.

Celan’s very complex modification of conventional metaphors puts conceptual metaphor theory in crisis by taking metaphoricity to its limits, and thus exposing the other side of images, what Blanchot sees as the image’s capacity to resist absolute translatability into conceptuality. While conceptual metaphor theory quickly moves from the singular image (conceived as an example) to shared concepts, Blanchot makes us linger on the unfigurability of a singular style, its non-formalisable opaqueness. Darkness is often used as a metaphor for “nothingness,” absence. However, what “we” as “hands” do in Celan’s poem is “empty” the emptiness of darkness by creating something. In so doing, “we found / the word that ascended summer: / Flower.” Out of the darkness, through a second of inversion, comes a “word [...] Flower.” Flowers are conventionally used as a metaphor for life—often life that springs from death—but the word “Flower” in the poem, despite not being in inverted commas, seems to function more as a citation in the sense that what is discovered by the persona and the other is not a flower but the word “Flower.” In this case, what seems metaphorical is the way “the word [...] ascended summer,” (“das Wort, das den Sommer heraufkam”) as if the word “Flower,” like a flower, sprouted from the earth. The word ascends to higher ground. It brings life or, better, it is alive, being itself. This is what the “we” of the poem find in scooping the darkness empty. What is thus a highly compressed combination of metaphors remains undecidable and only several interpretative leaps allow us to claim that the idea of the word “Flower” ascending is metaphoric of life or creation.

This kind of detailed analysis—sustained till the end of the poem—would yield a long series of metaphors, including the ones we have already identified: *Death is stone*; *Human beings create life like hands scoop darkness*; *Words are like flowers*. There thus seems to be a constant return to two opposites in the poem: death and life. The rest of the poem continues along these lines. Eyes, associated with stones in the

⁴¹ Felstiner 106.

first stanza, are now sources of “water,” thus suggesting a different addressee to that of the first stanza. The next stanza also suggests the continuing ascension of life from death, flowers from stones. “Petals” are added “Heartwall by heartwall” (“Herzwand um Herzwand”). While “Herzwand” specifically refers to the human organ, source of life and often symbolically associated with love, the word is a compound of “Herz” (“heart”) and “wand” (“wall”), often made of dead stone.

Replicating what Freeman does in his essay on *King Lear*, one could use the insights gleaned so far from the analysis of metaphor to show how these metaphors are projected from pre-existing schemata that are part of our everyday bodily experience. At this point, one has to make an interpretative leap and propose these schemata on the basis of one’s reading of the poem rather than any external means of validation. Two of these schemata could be identified as GROWTH and CONFLICT. The hypothesis—subject to verification—would be that the poem’s various metaphors can be explained in terms of GROWTH of life from death and in terms of the CONFLICT between life and death. One claim made by conceptual metaphor theorists is that this approach has descriptive validity: the theory allows us to account for how we understand metaphors. As Freeman explains, “cognitive metaphor proceeds on the hypothesis that metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason,” a formulation that once again highlights how singular style is erased in a move towards the general.⁴² However, Freeman argues that the descriptive identification of such schemata is complemented by a more significant claim: his analysis is open to “falsifiability.” One could “invalidate” the schemata identified by showing that they “exist only at the level of text and not in larger structural units” and by showing that “a competing candidate source domain and metaphoric projection better explains these patterns.”⁴³ As one can see, falsifiability here does not refer to the refutation of cognitive metaphor theory but to the accuracy of its application. In the case of Celan’s “Flower,” both GROWTH and CONTRAST work not only at the level of metaphor but also at a wider, structural level. CONTRAST is seen throughout the poem with life and death clashing repeatedly. The move from the title, “Flower,” to the first words, “The stone,” is just the first of a series of such contrasts in the poem. On the other hand, there is a general movement of GROWTH in the development of the poem as it moves from its initial focus on the blindness of dead stone to the possibility of “One more word” allowing “the hammers” to “be swinging free” in the final stanza.

⁴² Freeman 292.

⁴³ Freeman 293.

Remaining within Freeman's approach, the question to ask at this stage is: "Is there a better way of accounting for the functioning of Schemata in this poem?" What Freeman means by "better" is arguably problematic. On the evidence of Freeman's own approach to *King Lear*, providing a better explanation may seem to depend more on the way the argument is presented by the critic in favour of a particular schema as opposed to another rather than any external justification for accuracy. An approach which aims at scientific credibility and validity, and which seeks to explain idiosyncratic aspects of language on the basis of universal schemata is thus grounded on the reliability of the researcher himself. Freeman tries to bypass this problem by using the concept of "embodied human experience." The implication is that the critic is reliable because he possesses the same schemata as anyone else, and he can somehow stand both as a holder and detached observer of these schemata. This creates a problem of circularity. Freeman's way out is ultimately a Kantian solution to the problem of grounding. As Bowie shows in an extensive discussion of this issue, in order to avoid the regress implied in establishing the rules that allow us to "judge that x is a case of it" [or, analogously, that a certain conceptual metaphor is a case of a wider schema for Freeman], "Kant invokes an ability of the subject which itself does not allow of a further grounding." This ability, talent, or art is called "schematism" and it connects "concepts, which must logically precede the data of cognition if they are to be able to subsume those data in judgements, and intuitions, the manifold data of cognition."⁴⁴ However, as will be shown below, Celan's poem may be said to offer a singular resistance to such connections of the particular with the rule, showing the limits to translatability of words into concepts.

Considering where cognitive stylistics is today, its relevance to style is problematic. As Line Brandt and Per Aage Brandt put it, in cognitive stylistics "linguistic expressions are seen as manifestations of relatively stable conceptual content governed by cognitive mechanisms that can be studied." Thus, the focus shifts from style to "the shared mental processes involved."⁴⁵ This has the effect, precisely, of recuperating style, the singular, and the unique into absolutely translatable generalities. On the other hand, even if style is identified as the peculiar way in which a particular poet presents or extends previously existing conceptual metaphors, style is still seen as a

⁴⁴ Bowie, *From Romanticism* 56–58.

⁴⁵ Line Brandt and Per Aage Brandt, "Cognitive Poetics and Imagery," *European Journal of English Studies*, 9.2 (2005): 117–130 (124, 127).

conduit for content, ultimately unimportant except as in its teleocratic triggering of schemata within the reader.

5.5 *Of Stones and Flowers: Towards Non-teleocratic Readings of Style*

While Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida are fundamentally concerned with responding to the demands of art, literature, or poetry, what each of them offers is not so much a method of reading as an attention to the paradoxically-always-singular-demand that literature has on us. It is to go against the grain of their work to try to read these thinkers in view of finding an approach or a method which can then be applied to any text. Indeed, the programmability of method and what Gadamer calls the “cult of the expert” (*GE* 170) are key assumptions in certain practices of reading literature—belonging to what Derrida provocatively describes as the “library of poetics” (*CC* 295)—that they problematise.

This reading of Celan’s “Flower” cannot present itself as an imitable model or dismiss other approaches to style as insignificant or unnecessary. What it proposes is a greater attention to style or, more precisely, to a non-teleocratic understanding of style as a singular incision that, while gesturing towards the “other,” towards meaning, remains not absolutely beyond conceptualisation but beyond absolute conceptualisation. Both *using* and *mentioning* Derrida’s thinking in this respect, one may, to quote Michael B. Naas, focus on poems “as examples and not simply as examples of some general rule or concept” (*OR* xxiii).⁴⁶ A singular reading of style inevitably enacts a logic of exemplarity but resists functioning “as a neutral or transparent model or *telos*” for thinking style (*OR* xxxii). It recognises the way a poem is occasional and, in so being, “an irreducibly singular event and, in as much as it takes place, that which necessitates comparison, contextualisation, and analysis” (*OR* xxxix).

Reading Celan’s “Flower” and what has been called Celan’s “radically individual poetic idiom” or style,⁴⁷ one may start by taking a short detour to “the grave in the air,” the line from “Deathfugue” that Celan describes as being “neither borrowing nor metaphor.” In a letter, Celan speaks of how poems are an “encounter” with one’s readings and thus “metaphors” may be creatively recollected. As an example, he cites the image found in “Deathfugue” of the “man” who “lives in the house [and] plays with his vipers,” which he suggests has mythic sources. However, while he signs the letter as

⁴⁶ Michael B. Naas, “Introduction: For Example,” in *OR* vii–lix.

⁴⁷ Nicholas G. Meyerhofer, “The Poetics of Paul Celan,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 27.1 (1981): 72–85 (81).

“Old-Metaphors Dealer,” Celan also points out what Felstiner terms “one vital exception”: “The ‘grave in the air’—my dear Walter Jens, in *this* poem, God knows, that is neither borrowing nor metaphor.”⁴⁸ The grave in the air in “Todesfuge” may initially be thought of as metaphorical, possibly describing drifting souls, but the phrase resists metaphorisation by making sense literally in describing how human beings have been disintegrated and dispersed into the European air.

A dual movement of singularisation and what Lacoue-Labarthe calls “metaphor (or image) destruction” may also be seen at work in “Flower.”⁴⁹ As suggested above, the word “Flower” may function metaphorically as an image of something that is fed “water,” grows, and “adds on petals.” It represents “Growth,” a resurgence from death and thus the cycle of life, as in the verse, “It’s time the stone consented to bloom,” from Celan’s “Corona” (*Celan* 29). However, the word “Flower” in the eponymous poem is also a citation of the word “Flower,” possibly the first word uttered by Celan’s twenty month old son, Eric, in 1957.⁵⁰ If this were so, the word “flower” would be commemorating a specific occasion, Eric’s entry into the world of language. Echoing Derrida’s readings of Celan’s dates and poems as dated, one may say that “Flower” remains undecidable, wavering between metaphor and citation. An antonomastic process is thus at work in the poem: “flower” is both a name identifying something unique—both the title of the poem itself and also the word uttered by Eric—as well as something open to generalisability and metaphoric transference. In this way, the word “Flower” mirrors the singular and general function of words in language: the word “Flower” can name an individual flower but it can also be used to refer to any flower, and thus, like every other word, be detached from its absolute singularity in order to be understood.

“Words, like flowers” (“Worte, wie Blumen”) then, as in Hölderlin’s “Brot und Wein.”⁵¹ Celan’s “Blume” is engaged in an intertextual dialogue with Hölderlin’s poem and this re-enacts the movement of open singularity, the antonomastic wavering between the proper and the repeatable at work in the poem. As de Man writes in his reading of Hölderlin’s poem, “in poetic language words are not used as signs [...] but in order to *name*” (*IS* 3). However, at the same time, no naming can resist absolutely the drive in common language towards communicability. Poetry aspires towards the word

⁴⁸ Letter of 19 May 1961, partially quoted by Wiedemann-Wolf and cited in Felstiner, 177.

⁴⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe 130.

⁵⁰ Celan’s working title for the poem was “Fleur,” “flower” in French, Eric’s mother tongue. See Felstiner 105.

⁵¹ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Selected Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998) 154.

that “originates like the flower,” what de Man calls “an authentic word that fulfils its highest function in naming being as a presence.” In this, it posits a challenge to teleocratic theories that present style as an expression of previously existing concepts because it urges us to “begin by forgetting all we have previously known” (*IS* 3). Celan’s poem, like Hölderlin’s line, thus speaks of a desire to become literal by banishing metaphor. And yet, ultimately, poetry can only be an enactment of a desire which must remain unfulfilled if poetry is to be readable, open to the countersignature of the other.

Style in Celan’s poem, but also style thought through Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida, is not simply a choice among several possibilities of expressing specific concepts. Instead, style arises in the eventhood of the poem, its performative and interruptive encounter with reading, there on the ever-shifting boundary between the absolutely singular and the endlessly repeatable. One is reminded of Celan’s 1958 speech at Bremen: “For a poem is not timeless. Certainly it lays claim to infinity, it seeks to reach through time—through it, not above and beyond time” (*Celan* 396). “Flower” is not simply a metaphorical exploration of the cycle of life but also a commemoration or inscription of an important date in which the word “Flower” brings a world into being. The word does not erase itself in a transfer of signification from word to concept but, like a stone or “a blindman’s word,” is opaque, resistant, and impervious. Indeed, the contemporary lyric for Celan is what Lacoue-Labarthe calls “poésie de circonstance” (“occasional poetry” in the narrow sense of poetry written for an occasion).⁵² Celan’s “Flower” is one such occasional poem that commemorates a date in which, through language, a world is named into Being out of nothing; “One more word like this, and the hammers / will be swinging free.”

What the word “Flower” seems to be referring to, then, is not just an anterior reality that is being represented in poetry—the word when Celan’s son uttered his first word, a word that creates a world—but also the very possibility of naming the world into existence. The poem, rather than being—as Charles Bernstein describes Celan’s poetry—“anti-representational,” re-presents the very possibility of re-presentation, understood less as a presentation of an already existent world at a further remove than as a creation of the world through words.⁵³ Peter Szondi has written of Celan’s poetry that his “text no longer stands in the service of a predetermined reality, but is rather

⁵² Lacoue-Labarthe 141.

⁵³ Charles Bernstein, “Celan’s Folds and Veils,” *Textual Practice* 18.2 (2004): 200–201 (201).

projecting itself, constituting itself as reality.”⁵⁴ It is in this sense that one may understand Lacoue-Labarthe’s claim that, for Celan, “the poetic art consists of perceiving, not representing,” a statement that reminds us of the assumption that “representing, at least according to some of the ‘ancient rumours,’ can only be said of the already-present.”⁵⁵ It is this performative eventhood that cognitive stylistics erases through its teleocratic conception of style as representation of already existing concepts and schemata.

“Flower”—a citation, a name, a title—at one and the same time, represents and brings into being the world-building of language that is the very heart of the poetic. The word, then, names the act of creation through language that it performs as a creative act. What cognitive metaphor theory fails to do, in its movement from the individual metaphors of the poem to general mental schemata, is tarry with the poem. And if style, thinking with Gadamer, is something that intensifies our tarrying with the poem as an aspect of *poiesis*, it is the coming into being of the poetic as poetic that we miss in failing to consider the singularity of style. Cognitive stylistics understands poetry as standing “outside time” and thus quickly departs from the individual—or what Derrida would call the occasional—incision within time that singular style may make.

Celan’s poem, however, is delicately poised on a style of undecidability with its different, anachronic temporality, its openness to the aleatory and the Derridian countersignature. In the first stanza, we are made to tarry with the words of the poem as they return, repeatedly, thus interrupting linear progression. We read of “The stone. / The stone [...] / as the stone.” The only verb in this stanza is “followed” (“folgte”) indicating, simultaneously, temporal succession and a submissive response to an order, a compulsion to follow. What “folgte” *means* here remains undecidable and so does the next verse, “Your eye, as blind as the stone,” in which the caesura between “eye” and “as blind” introduces an opposition between sight and blindness that runs throughout the poem and remains unresolved till the end. Indeed, the poem seems to enact this undecidability continuously. “Flower,” a word often associated with beauty and decoration, is unexpectedly described, after yet another caesura (“—”), as “a blindman’s word.” The poem ends in suspension, at that moment before “One more word [...] and the hammers will be swinging free.” Echoing Blanchot and Derrida, one may say that style creates the reader to which it is addressed while depending on reading to come into being. Style is thus not simply a peculiar, individual expression of concepts or

⁵⁴ Szondi 31.

⁵⁵ Lacoue-Labarthe 151.

meaning but a performative creation of an event through its openness to the reader's countersignature. The temporality of style is not teleocratic, reflecting a previously existing phenomenon, but anachronic, expressing that which it brings into being. Or, to use Levinasian terms, style is an aspect of the poem's *saying*, its eventhood of addressing, rather than a reflection of the *said* or its propositional content.

Celan's Meridian speech is worth quoting at this point because it brings to our consideration a conception of poetry as always in motion, an address to the future rather than a fixed object with a style to be systematically dissected:

And then what would the images be?
Something perceived and to be perceived only now and only here, once, again,
and once again. And so a poem would be the place where all tropes and
metaphors will be carried ad absurdum. (*Celan* 411)

Gadamer is right when, paraphrasing this passage, he argues that "it can never be a question of the topos 'stone', but rather always only a particular stone in a particular poem" (*WHO* 181). As Gadamer puts it in an interview, subsuming a poem "under a class concept," erasing the proper for the common, means that "the poem itself is not understood at all." As such, Gadamer invokes a counter-movement to that proposed by cognitive metaphor theory, as he claims that "the secret to the capacity for judgment" is "that one makes something general concrete with respect to the given situation" rather than extrapolating the general from the singular (*GE* 70).

However, as Celan suggests here with his move from "only here" to "once, again, and once again," and as Derrida puts it, one must be aware of "the resistance that *once* may offer to thought" (*SQ* 1). On the one hand, poetry for Celan is "the stone in the air" of "Flower." "But the poem," Celan reminds us, "does speak! It remains mindful of its dates, but—it speaks." At one and the same time, poetry is the inscription of the singular, impervious "stone" and that "which I followed," the fruit of an encounter, the openness to the aleatory. While, as Celan says in the Meridian speech, the poem makes the "unheard-of-pretension of being absolute," it is also a conversational gesture: "the poem wants to reach an Other [...]. It seeks it out, speaks toward it" (*Celan* 409).

As Szondi points out, the image of the stone, a "hard, lustreless, impenetrable bod[y]," occupies "an important position within Paul Celan's 'imaginary universe'"⁵⁶; it keeps returning in both his poems and prose as it does a number of times in "Flower." In "Conversation in the Mountains" ("Gespräch im Gebirg"), which recalls the similarly

⁵⁶ Szondi 30.

named 1913 essay by Martin Buber (*Gespärch in den Bergen*), one of the Jewish interlocutors describes stone: “The stone speaks but does not talk, and yet, what it says is “D’ you hear?” (*Celan* 399). The stone, like poetry, does not talk; it is not completely exposed to the other. And yet, it speaks and its speech is a call to the other. The Buber-inspired I-Thou philosophy that resonates here is also visible in Celan’s Bremen speech in which he defines “a poem [...] as a manifestation of language and thus essentially dialogue” (*Celan* 396).⁵⁷ Celan uses the metaphor of a “message in a bottle” that is “sent out in the—not always greatly hopeful—belief that somewhere and sometime it could be washed up on land, on heartland perhaps.” For Celan, poems are always “underway” towards “an addressable Thou, toward an addressable reality” (*Celan* 396). Rather than being static objects for the reader’s contemplation, a perfect integration of style and subject matter or a teleocratic expression of the poet’s individuality, they are open to chance, the countersignature of the other, which, as Lacoue-Labarthe suggests, may be both “beings” and “things.”⁵⁸ It is in this sense that, as Hamacher puts it in the context of the verse from “Radis, Matrix”—“As one speaks to stone, as / you, / to me from the abyss”—the relation between “one” and the “stone” is an “image of impossible dialogue” that is always already “suspended” by the address to a “you.”⁵⁹

The contraction of the poem within itself and the poem coming to life as a movement towards the other are simultaneous opposites making the poem both singular and available for reading—but not for *absolute* conceptualisation as in the reduction of style to an expression or extension of universally shareable schemata. As Derrida reiterates through his thinking of iterability, the absolutely singular is always already split and doubled at the origin. In these terms, style is both a centripetal force that makes a poem unique and a centrifugal movement that directs that uniqueness towards the outside. A singular reading of style would be suspended between/on both of these moments of singularisation, enacting them simultaneously.

The relevance of Heidegger here is clear. Paraphrasing Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Bowie writes how, if we try to penetrate the stone (an aspect of the earthly side of the work) “by breaking up the cliff, then it never shows an inside, something revealed, in its pieces.” As Bowie puts it, “all attempts to dissolve the stone into its calculable attributes via the understanding merely lead to its destruction as a stone and to the realisation of the hiddenness of the earth.”⁶⁰ The earth and the world,

⁵⁷ See James K. Lyon, “Paul Celan and Martin Buber: Poetry as Dialogue,” *PMLA* 86.1 (1971): 110–120.

⁵⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe 131.

⁵⁹ Hamacher 240.

⁶⁰ Bowie, *From Romanticism* 177.

the naming aspect of language—its hiddenness—and its ability to convey meaning are inextricable. Celan's "Flower," in the lyric, "Flower" ("Blume"), names an individual naming of (a) "Flower" as well as functioning as a representation for the notion of growth through naming.

Thus, it is simplistic to speak of Celan's *hermetic* style, a tag he vehemently refused. Rather, his poetry is language—also a style—that speaks "through silence," interruption and anachronic temporalities. Adorno describes Celan's poems as "anargonic" poems that "imitate a language beneath the helpless language of human beings, indeed beneath all organic language: It is that of the dead speaking of stones and stars" (*AT* 322). The poems speak, as such, of the impossibility of speaking. As Celan puts it, poetry, and especially the contemporary lyric, "shows a strong bent toward falling silence." However, it does so while "it holds on [...] so as to exist" (*Celan* 409). Citing Celan's poem, "Speech-Grille," one may say that poetry is the grate in a door that separates and yet allows communication between the one and the other and style arises within this encounter. Metaphorically, one could say that cognitive metaphor theory, by conceptualising style as a transparent conveyor of concepts, erases or ignores the bars on the door and would only listen to the poem speak without listening to its concomitant silence, its caesuras, and gaps of meaning. Celan's lyrics resist cognitive readings in that they are "alone," "singular" and, paradoxically, expressive of this "solitude."

Style as a singular incision of language is inextricable from the open singularity of the poetic. Celan speaks of the dual directions that a poem takes in terms of an "actualized language" that is "set free under the sign of radical individuation, which at the same time stays mindful of the limits drawn by language, the possibilities opened by language." Poetry is the speech of

someone who does not forget that he speaks from the angle of inclination of his very being, his creatureliness. Then a poem would be—even more clearly than before—the language-become-form of a single person and, following its inmost nature, presentness and presence. (*Celan* 409)

This does not mean that one should think of poetry as that which expresses an *absolutely* singular style. After all, that which is singular can only be thought of as singular if it is always already countersigned. Rather, as Lacoue-Labarthe interprets Celan's pronouncement, what Celan is talking about is an obligation to speak through

but also undo language at the same time through an individual, singular style. Poetry is “the interruption of language, the suspension of language, the caesura”:⁶¹

Such is, in sum, the “solitude” of the poem, and what obliges it, with as rigorous an obligation as the obligation to speak, not to ‘invent’ a singular language or build an idiolect from start to finish, but to undo language (semantically and syntactically), disarticulate and rarefy it, cut it up according to a prosody which is neither that of spoken language nor that of earlier poetry, to condense it until one comes to the hard centre, the muted resistance where one recognizes a voice which is singular, that is, separated from language, as is a tone or a style.⁶²

A singular style resists absolute transference or transportation, paradoxically, as Lacoue-Labarthe notes, because it exists only in the name of an “encounter,” or, to use Derridian or Blanchotian terminology, in the name of the to-come, the future, and the aleatory. There can only be obscurity in the event of countersignature and not if it is left in its solitude. Thus, stylistic density is not simply an aspect of the language of poem—as a formalist theory of style as deviation may suggest—but an aspect of the eventhood of the poem. The encounter, the countersignature, makes possible the poem’s “solitude,” its resistance. It is in this sense that “obscurity is [...] a mark of attention—even respect.”⁶³ The poem thus demands and performs a Blanchotian “*pas de sens*,” a step and stop of conceptualisation, which seduces the reader while keeping him at bay in a distant proximity. An ethical reading of style would listen, tarry, hear but not try to extract a confession in the form of themes or definite meaning that style would presumably represent.

Reading style ethically, then, is not a matter of interiorisation and appropriation: style as the proper representation of ideology, of the unique, or of conceptuality. While reading is a necessary element in the economy of the work, non-teleocratic reading leaves the text perpetually open. Reading responsibly or responsively is not a way to obtain knowledge or recover unconscious ideology from the text but a way of “attending” the text in its singularity. This is what Derrida would call the “effacement of the date or of the proper name” but also, it can be argued, of style, the singular incision within language (*SQ* 49). Cognitive stylistics does not hear the silence, which is also an aspect of a singular style. How, for instance, to account for the gaps, the interruptions, the caesuras that, despite not being metaphorical and not being representational, carry so much sense in a poem, such as in Celan’s exemplary poem,

⁶¹ Lacoue-Labarthe 136.

⁶² Lacoue-Labarthe 142.

⁶³ Lacoue-Labarthe 143.

“Flower”? How to listen to what is left unsaid in the poem, which may be as crucial as that which is said in marking the singularity of style?

CONCLUSION

“To conclude” is to end, gather, and close an argument (etymologically: *com*-[together] and *claudare* [shut]). However, the conclusion to this dissertation must also—briefly and with no pretensions of exhaustiveness and finality—speak about openness, the future and the aleatory. Indeed, the understanding of style that has emerged from this study, which began by expressing the inadequacy of ready-made definitions for style, is of something that, in escaping absolute conceptualisation, is always open to readability, the future, contingency, and the aleatory. Reading style mainly through Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida, but also Levinas, Heidegger, Celan, and others, allows us to think of style as a performative *event* that problematises the teleocratic dimension of traditional style studies.

Teleocratic theories of style may present style as the consequence of an anterior cause, be it the writer’s personality, the readers’ cognitive competence, meanings to be expressed, or ideology. Or they may think of style as a tool to be employed instrumentally, in the name of social intervention or of formal strategies of deviation. Along these lines, style is subject to the dynamics of *arche*. It is implicated in discourses of origins, roots and power, and it is implicated in linear temporalities. In certain kinds of philosophical discourse, which may dream of absolute translatability beyond contingencies and singularities, style is not only marginalised but presented as an exteriority that may be disposed of in the supposedly more serious matter of reaching for representational truth.

Lying on the margins of philosophy and literature, Derrida and Blanchot—but also Gadamer—problematises delusions of styleless purity. They show the ineluctability of style and how, rather than styleless writing, what may be attainable is a lack of stylishness understood as an evaluative criterion. Their non-teleocratic understanding of style is an(-)archic and anachronic. It escapes absolute determination by what precedes it or by a definite future *telos*, sustaining itself, instead, on a paradoxical and aporetic temporality. It arises in performance, as an aspect of the event—thought differently by Gadamer, Blanchot, and Derrida, but always in terms of singularisation.

For Gadamer, poetic truth arises in one’s encounter with the work through tarrying with style. Style occurs as a moment of obfuscation and opening that intensifies our experience of the work and it contributes to the work being a form of *saying* that elevates the content to presence. Through Gadamer, one thinks of style as implicated in

a dynamic fusion of horizons that arises, every time differently, through an encounter with an otherness that may shake and change us. It is thus not a matter of devising methods or theories for studying style that would legislate for every case in the future but of allowing the possibility of our encounter with style “continually becoming a new event” (*TM* 499).

The concern with the inventive possibilities of style as a performative event are also central to Blanchot’s thinking. Style, for Blanchot, marks an encounter with the impossible and the outside in ways that cannot be programmed a priori and that cannot be fully conceptualised. The temporality of style is not linear but paradoxical and anachronic. Style creates its reader and its writer while depending on their existence to come into being. Style, as in the fragmentary, allows thought to announce itself as an irruption of “the other as other” (*IC* 43). Through Blanchot, one thinks of style as “a scandal of thought” (*IC* 299), as something that announces an anarchic break with the law and a destruction of order, thus allowing for incalculable and unforeseeable events, an openness to an encounter that is always still to come.

Thinking style as a performative event is also part of Derrida’s contribution to the subject. Similarly to Blanchot and Gadamer, Derrida problematises the thinking of style simply in terms of the proper (style as one’s property or as proper representation) and shows how, in its relation to the law, style arises as a counter-institution that, on the one hand, gestures at the singularity of the signature and, on the other, is marked by its openness to the aleatory and the future. Style, *in* Derrida and *for* Derrida (the two prepositions naming what is inextricable: argument and practice) is marked by the contingent, the surprising, and the performative that escapes summarisation and absolute translatability. Style is thus thought in terms of singular encounters marked by interruption, caesura, and movements of language that disrupt the facile duality of the signifier/signified dyad.

What this non-teleocratic thinking of style leads to is a non-teleocratic way of reading style. In thinking of an *ethical* response to style, it thus becomes impossible to ignore the style of one’s response to the singularity of the other. However, this is not a call for an inward turning, a self-reflexive movement that would allow absolute control over one’s style, but an openness to the foreignness of the truth of the work (Gadamer), the outside (Blanchot), and the countersignature (Derrida).

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