# Introduction

> An aesthetics of form is only possible as an act of breaking through aesthetics as the totality of that which stands under the spell of form. Whether art is even possible any more depends on this. The concept of form denotes the abrupt antithesis of art to empirical life, in which art's right to exist became uncertain. Art has as much chance as form, and no more.
>
> —ÄT 213/AT 141

## Form

The resurgence of interest in form and formalism within literary criticism over the last two decades has brought with it a rethinking of the concept of literary form, and of the broader intellectual and social implications of formalism. This rethinking manifests itself in a distinct shift in the way in which the category of form has been deployed, the argumentative purposes to which it has been put, the kinds of question it has been used to address. This shift has two principal components. First, literary form has increasingly come to be thought in conjunction with rather than in opposition to social, historical, and political concerns. And second, critics have begun to turn to form in literature in order better to theorize and to intervene into the social, the historical, and the political. In this respect the renewed concern with form represents a counter-strategy to the New Historicist attempt to combat what its proponents viewed as the 'empty formalism' of the New Criticism 'by pulling historical considerations to the center stage of literary analysis'.[1] Form has come to be thought not in opposition to history but as itself historical—and, indeed, in some versions as a key to historical thinking.



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In her 1997 *Formal Charges* Susan Wolfson develops a schema according to which form is inseparable from social and political concerns. She takes issue with Terry Eagleton's claim that literary form involves the recasting of 'historical contradictions into ideologically resolvable form',[2] arguing that literary form is not merely an epiphenomenon of social contradictions that are to be understood as wholly separate from it, but is rather 'always, inescapably implicated in practices that systematically form: tradition, convention'.[3] This explicit relationship of form to processes of forming sees form as a phenomenon that is shaped by historical and social dynamics, and in doing so insists on the possibility of an examination of form that is attentive to its historical and social implications, rather than taking place at the expense of their occlusion, an examination taken forward by Verena Theile and Linda Tredennick in their synthesizing project of 'uniformly reading for form, embracing cultural theory, and actively drawing on New Historicist methodologies'.[4]

Wolfson's book, along with her 2000 special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* published under the rubric of 'Reading for Form', represents the founding moment of what has subsequently come to be known as the New Formalism in literary studies.[5] In her 2007 review essay on this emergent phenomenon, Marjorie Levinson distinguishes between an 'activist' and a 'normative' formalism: the former, which 'makes a continuum with new historicism', sees the return to form as a way of reinvigorating a historical and materialist approach to literature, while the latter, a 'backlash new formalism', seeks to restore through a return to form a strong demarcation between art and history.[6] Both strands thus share the common aim 'to recover for scholarship and teaching in English some version of their traditional address to aesthetic form', and 'to reinstate close reading both at the curricular center of our discipline and as the opening move, preliminary to any kind of critical consideration'.[7] As both Wolfson and Levinson observe, the two strands both respond, in different ways, to the situation that obtained in the wake of what George Levine identifies as 'the radical transformation of literary study' that took place in the 1980s and early 1990s—a situation in which literature is viewed as 'indistinguishable from other forms of language', and in which literary studies displayed 'a virtually total rejection of, even contempt for, "formalism"'.[8] It is a significant achievement of the New Formalism is that it is unproblematic for Carolyn Lesjak, herself critical of both the activist and the normative versions of New Formalism, to acknowledge that formalism need not 'be dispassionate nor eschew the political and the world outside the text'.[9]

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This rethought formalism, then, differs from that which Wolfson rejects in that it does not involve the kind of privileging of form with respect to other concerns and sites of investigation of which she is wary. In particular, the recent developments that trade under the name of formalism are predicated on a reconfiguration of the relationships between form and history, formalism and historicism. Stephen Cohen sites his 'historical formalism' within the context of New Historicism and its legacies, not only charting the unpredictable interaction of literary forms 'with each other and with other cultural discourses', but also seeking 'to explore the variety of these interactions, mutually implicating literature's formal individuation and its historical situation in order to illuminate at once text, form, and history'.[10] For scholars such as Cohen, formalism consists not in an attention to form at the expense of concerns with history and society, but as a means of deepening our understanding of the latter, and of their relationship to form. In this version of formalism form is thus conceived not in opposition to history, but as itself deeply historical: 'the historicity of form emphasizes the particularity of literary discourse, insisting not only that literary texts have historical routes and functions, but that they do so by virtue of their discourse-specific forms and conventions as well as their extratextual or interdiscursive ideological content'.[11] Form here is conceived as enabling historicism to do its work more rigorously: a historicism that is not informed by formalism fails when measured against its own aspirations.

If the new formalism appears to be directed against formalism itself, this is in part because there are two different and in many respects incompatible concepts at stake, both referred to by the term formalism: one the investigation of forms and formal properties, the other the focus on form to the exclusion of almost everything else. This is perhaps clearest in Fredric V. Bogel's observation that 'formalism as a technique of textual analysis—"close reading," as it is often called—has never disappeared but continues to function in a variety of modes and contexts even apart from those we might term formalism'.[12] This new formalism does not consist in a dedication to form as an end in itself, but is rather a means pursued for the sake of investigating what form can tell us: in Anna Kornbluh's terms it is 'a kind of "social close reading" blending deconstructive techniques and the best historicist impulses to explore the intellectual and political force of literary forms'.[13] If the old formalism left itself open to the criticism that its dedication to form came at the expense of a concern with the social and the political, the new frequently describes itself as willing to subordinate its investigation of form to these social and political concerns.

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This new formalism, then, is a formalism understood as technique or investigative procedure, which explicitly rejects the self-imposed limits of the introspective old formalism—limits which were themselves never applied entirely consistency. The rise of the new formalism is thus in a sense a reversal of W. J. T. Mitchell's observation that formalism 'continues to rear its head, even when most fervently disavowed':[14] the new formalism asserts itself most strongly when it denies or seeks to transcend the limits of the old. In many respects what has emerged is a version, expressed in different terms, of Geoffrey Hartman's skepticism as to whether the mind can ever 'get beyond formalism without going through the study of forms'.[15] What is new about the new formalism is in many respects less its attempt to revive an attention to form as a set of analytical procedures than the readiness with which it characterizes itself as a formalism.

Perhaps the most ambitious and extensively formulated account of a formalism that is oriented toward society, and toward the rôle of literature in both understanding and attempting to reshape society for the better, is Caroline Levine's 'strategic formalism', a project developed over the course of a decade, starting with her 2006 programmatic call for a new method in cultural studies, and finding its most complete expression so far in her 2015 *Forms*.[16] Indeed, to describe Levine's as a society-oriented formalism runs the risk of understating the distinctiveness of her contribution, since its orientation toward society is by no means merely an as it were incidental attribute of her formalism; form is rather the category through which she retheorizes the relationship between the work of literature and the transformation of society. Acknowledging that she deploys 'the terms "form" and "formalism" in unusually capacious ways', her strategic formalism both acknowledges and draws on 'the very heterogeneity at the heart of form's conceptual history', and seeks to extend 'formalist insights to make the case that social hierarchies and institutions can themselves be understood as *forms*', at which point they lend themselves to investigation by means of formalist analytical techniques.[17] In this sense formalism is a means not only of investigating aspects of literature, culture, and society in a manner that considers their mutual implication, but also of theorizing the relationship between them: treating both literary work and social hierarchy as form allows them to be viewed through the same investigative lens.

If this maneuver seems to conflate under a single investigative concept heterogeneous objects of investigation that are fundamentally different in kind or even incompatible, then this is a risk that Levine is willing to take for the sake of what can be revealed by bringing literary, cultural, and

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social forms together. Indeed, she explicitly praises the benefits of 'formalist abstraction', arguing that it is precisely '*because* they have been formalized, disciplined into recognizable, repeatable oppositions' that invidious social hierarchies, can be identified, generalized, and criticized.[18] In this respect the subsequent development of her formalism seeks to account for her claim that it is 'time to think about culture in terms of its forms'.[19] At the heart of her conviction that form represents a new way of 'connecting large and small, social flows and artistic objects' is a commitment to a conception of form that is sufficiently adaptable and scalable that it enables the urgent reconfiguration of the relationship between the literary and the social.[20]

*Forms* represents Levine's most thoroughly formulated attempt both to make and to account for such connections. She focuses on four particular kinds of form (the whole, rhythm, hierarchy, and network of the book's subtitle), and theorizes them as at once plural (such that they are both distinct from and able to contain one another), overlapping and intersecting, portable across both space and time, and historically and politically situated.[21] In doing so she not only charts the interactions between literary and cultural forms across changing social and political situations, but also offers an account of a way in which a conception of literary and cultural forms might enable both a more sophisticated theorization of and an emancipatory intervention into particular social forms. In order to do so she breaks with the conception of poetic meter as something akin to 'imprisonment and containment', arguing instead that we should 'consider meter as another of these social rhythms, not an epiphenomenal effect of social realities, but capable itself of exerting or transmitting power'.[22]

I agree with Levine that something goes missing when we conceive of what we think of as poetic and literary form—the sonorous, material, non- (or not only) linguistic, and non- (again, or not only) signifying elements of literature—as incidental or merely epiphenomenal of social reality, and that this form (and these forms) have themselves the capacity to exert and transmit power. As a result I also share her conviction that theorizing form has the potential to identify means of intervening into the social world. Where my project differs from hers is in my focus on the question of why it is that we think of all these apparently heterogeneous things as form, and on the implications of doing so, in particular for our understanding of the relationships between what we think of as literary, cultural, social, and economic forms. That is, I do not start from the presupposition that form is the best way to make connections between social flows and artistic objects, or that poetic meter is necessarily best thought

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of as 'another of these social rhythms'—that the aesthetic, or the formal, are subsets of the social. Rather, I seek to attend to form with an eye not only to exploring the analytical potential offered by the concept, but also to considering what it can efface as well as what it can illuminate. I do so by means of close analysis, explication, and critique of one of the most sustained and resonant engagements with form: the writings on literature and art of Theodor W. Adorno.

In evaluating the analytical and socio-political potential of form my approach thus aspires to formulate a critique not only of the social conditions into which form might enable an intervention, but also of the category of form and both the range and the limitation of the resources it offers. I am concerned, that is, not only with the social and political agency of form, as well as its intellectual implications, but also with how the way in which the concept of form is constituted relates to, encapsulates and expresses different philosophical and social problems. In examining, elucidating, and evaluating Adorno's deployment of form in his writings on literature, I thus attend not only to the agency of form both within a single work and within the frameworks with which we approach its analysis, but also to the questions of what characterizes form as such, how form is formed, why we think of it as form—of why it is that we think of such things as wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, networks as forms, and of the implications of doing so. In doing so I offer not only a particular theory of form, but a theory of form of a particular kind. This study aspires to be a poetics of form in the dual sense not only that it analyzes the contribution of form to a poetics, but that it also seeks to account for the particular conceptual work it carries out—for how the concept of form functions within the analysis of literary art and artworks.

In doing so I address—and seek to rectify—a situation that has been identified on multiple occasions since the recent renewal of interest in form. Reflecting on the new formalism in 2007, Levinson observed that 'despite the proliferation in these essays of synonyms for form (e.g., genre, style, reading, literature, significant literature, the aesthetic, coherence, autonomy), none of the essays puts redefinition front and center'.[23] A year earlier Simon Jarvis had noted that the philosophy of literary form 'is still in its infancy—so much so that it is even unclear whether "form" is the right word for what is to be discussed'.[24] This extended infancy, out of which we have not yet developed—possibly one of the longest on record, depending on exactly which moment is identified as that of its birth[25]—consists in the fact that for all the renewed interest in poetic and literary form, there exist only

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the earliest signs of a tendency to reflect on precisely what constitutes the formal aspects of a literary work, and why these should be termed form rather than anything else.

It is striking that even those works that recognize the need for this kind of reflection on concerns of definition and terminology frequently avoid doing just that. Levine's deliberately capacious expansion of the category of form to incorporate phenomena from literature, culture, and society is a methodological presupposition rather than a consequence of conceptual reflection. Angela Leighton begins her 2007 study of the implications and legacy of the term form with the three-word question 'What is form?', but while she offers several persuasive accounts of the significance or agency of what she identifies as form within particular poems, there is no reflection on whether and why it is appropriate to consider these phenomena under the rubric of form, or on the implications of doing so. This is perhaps best illustrated by her tantalizingly aporetic conclusion that form 'is the sense of nothing', a persuasive contention that form exists within a particular kind of subjective experience of or in response to a poem, but one which leaves unaddressed the question as to whether and to what extent it is appropriate to identify particular aspects of poems as form or formal.[26]

Verena Theile's prologue to her and Linda Tredennick's *New Formalisms and Literary Theory* conceives itself as a response to Levinson's diagnosis that 'new formalism is better described as a movement rather than a theory or a method', a response which seeks 'to provide the kind of theorizing that [Levinson] claims New Formalism is lacking'.[27] Theile sees the kind of theorizing, redefining work that Levinson observes is missing from the new formalism as precisely 'what we attempt to do here', and offers a further determination of that aspiration:

> Reading form as ideologically charged, as anything but 'innocent,' *New Formalisms and Literary Theory* suggests that a text's formal features, its aesthetics, in close conjunction with cultural context, convey a politically and historically significant literary experience that is both intentional and affective.[28]

This gloss reveals that rather than being the promised retheorization, *New Formalisms and Literary Theory* in fact proceeds on the basis of the assumption that we know, unproblematically, as if self-evidently, what a text's formal features are, and that they are identifiable with its aesthetics—and, for that matter, that we know what a text is. Nor does it consider the implications

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of bringing together these features under this particular concept (or indeed under any single concept), or imagine any potential disadvantages of doing so, such as expressed in Ewan James Jones's acknowledgment that conceiving of the evident components of verse technique as formal 'brings with it some of the obvious objections that arrive with "organic unity", and deflects attention from the manner in which such expressive features are constituted'.[29] It is precisely with questions such as these that this book is concerned. By critically examining Adorno's wide-ranging and fecund writings on form in literature, it asks whether so many manifoldly different phenomena can be brought together under a coherent concept of form, and evaluates the investigative potential of doing so.

## Adorno

The recent revival of interest in form within literary and cultural studies is in many respects a testament to the legacy of Adorno's writings on art and literature, but their influence is neither self-evidently apparent nor straightforward. Levinson has drawn attention to the somewhat uneasy influence of Adorno on the new formalism, observing that 'Adorno is the prototype' for the 'reinvigorated formalism', the emergence of which is charted by Ellen Rooney (an essay in which Adorno's name is not mentioned).[30] And yet there has not been a fully developed account of Adorno's own deployment of the concept of form, or of his writings on literature, or of the implications for the study of literature of his interrogation of the concepts of aesthetics: as Jarvis observes, the engagement with Adorno in Anglophone writings on poetry 'has too often been limited to a short radio talk he once gave about lyric poetry'.[31] W. J. T. Mitchell attributes to Adorno 'a kind of formalism in the autonomous work of art as a salutary negation of the empirical reality it wants to contest': this formalism has little to do with Adorno's writings on literary or poetic form, and is instead derived from his account of the committed work of art.[32] Similarly, Robert Kaufman's account of 'negatively capable dialectics' is less an account of what an engagement with Adorno could offer to the rethinking of poetics, and more an exploration of some of the relationships and compatibilities between poetics as practiced by Helen Vendler and the 'foundational aspects of the Marxian critical aesthetics most frequently identified with Adorno'.[33] In the diverse essays that constitute the new formalism, Adorno seems to serve as a figure who enables a certain kind of formalism or aestheticism to be bolstered with sufficient Marxist

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credentials to inoculate it against historicist objections or to subordinate it to a politically inflected historicism. As Levinson recognizes, there is a whiff of revisionism about this: she observes how Adorno 'surfaces over and over again in these essays as the lost leader of new historicism linked with variously Louis Althusser, Pierre Macherey, Fredric Jameson, and T. J. Clark and as the bridge to a *new* (activist) formalism'.[34]

The significance—or at least, the potential significance—of Adorno's writings to the understanding of literary and aesthetic form has been evident for some time. Discussing form in her introduction to Adorno's thought, Gillian Rose draws attention to the ambiguity of the 'notion of form', a result of its ability to refer, on the one hand, 'to musical genres' (such that 'the analysis of form would examine their relation to kinds of societies and their relation to social life, such as liturgical and secular music, or opera and chamber music'), and, on the other hand, 'to the internal organisation of music, to melody, harmony, and even the tonic system itself'.[35] Moreover, as she acknowledges, these two apparently incompatible 'notions of form are not always distinct'.[36] Fredric Jameson's 1971 study of form within primarily German-language Hegelian Marxism recognizes the importance of Adorno within this tradition. However, what Jameson presents as an account of Adorno's contribution to what he terms 'the specifically Marxist form of literary analysis' is in fact not primarily a discussion of literature, let alone of literary form: indeed, the nature of Jameson's concern with form becomes clear within the opening pages of the first chapter on Adorno, in which he argues that the 'sociology of culture is [. . .] first and foremost [. . .] a *form*'.[37] In the few concrete analyses of manifestations of aesthetic form Jameson is concerned with musical rather than literary form, and discusses neither the suitability of applying a concept of musical form in discussions of literature, nor the details of this concept of musical form itself.

However, Adorno's deployment of the concept of form in relation to music has been examined considerably more thoroughly. Form is a central and recurring theme of Max Paddison's 1993 study of Adorno's aesthetics of music, itself a reworked version of his earlier doctoral thesis on the concepts of musical form and material.[38] Paddison discusses musical form primarily through its opposition to material, focusing in his 'material theory of form' on 'form at the level of the pre-formed musical material, and form at the level of the individual musical work'.[39] In doing so he insists on the wider social implications of musical form: for example, in his analysis of the concept of 'social function' he notes that Adorno 'tends to stress the *origins* of genres and forms like the symphony and sonata in the *divertisse-*

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*ments*, serenades and operatic overtures of the *style galant*', and offers an account of Adorno's argument that 'it was through its *form* that art opposed coercion, not through direct intervention'.[40] Paddison's use of form to refer at once to generic and stylistic attributes of music on the one hand, and to Adorno's insistence on the artwork's radical distinction from what is not on the other, begins to reflect the plurality of the uses to which Adorno puts the term. Major concerns of mine in this book are to account for the relationship between these distinct and often apparently contradictory senses of form and to draw attention to and theorize ways in which they underlie some of the tensions (whether explicit or unspoken) with respect to form and formalism within many recent discussions.

Paddison's study was among the first written in English—and remains among the most detailed—to attend to the specifics of Adorno's writings on artworks. At the same time, the extent to which engagement with the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* might require some of Adorno's earlier writings on music to be rethought has not been fully investigated. Indeed, Gerald L. Bruns has observed something like the opposite tendency in his criticism of what he has termed the 'common practice among Adorno scholars to fold *Aesthetic Theory* back into his earlier writings on modern music'.[41] This is perhaps symptomatic of a broader neglect of the implications of his interrogation and critique of the concepts of aesthetics (and, albeit to a lesser extent, of those of metaphysics) within certain strands of the English-language reception of his thought: these include the presentation of his writings on art and artworks as a consequence or even application of his social and political thought in those works in which he is presented primarily as a critical social theorist, and the marginalization of *Aesthetic Theory* in some of the works in which he is situated within the traditions of German idealism and its Hegelian–Marxist legacy.[42]

Adorno's writings on literature have been subjected to considerably less attention than his aesthetics of music. This is in part because his contribution to an aesthetics of literature consists for the most part in a collection of often enigmatic sketches, fragments, and essays, in part because of the ways in which his work stubbornly refuses to comply with the division of intellectual labor within academic departments that are concerned with the interpretation and analysis of literature. This is a tendency to which I therefore seek to provide something of a corrective in this book, and in doing so to address ways in which the consideration of literary artworks further complicates some of the theories that underlie Adorno's aesthetics of music—these complications frequently arise in consideration of the conjunction between art and language

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within the work of literature, including with respect to the distinction between literary and nonliterary uses of language, and the way in which the linguistic work of art further complicates Adorno's theory of the resemblance to language of artworks, and of music in particular. Adorno's œuvre sits uneasily between literary criticism and literary theory. Despite Jarvis's convincing case that 'Adorno is more aptly described as a philosophical literary critic than as a literary theorist', certain concepts or phrases from a relatively small range of his essays and radio talks have frequently been pressed into service of the analysis of literary texts.[43] Similarly, Robert Kaufman has warned of the danger of coopting Adorno on behalf of what he terms the 'critique of aesthetic ideology', which 'has at times seemed to make itself synonymous with Marxian or Marxian-inflected criticism in general', a critique which 'has assumed an identity between the *aesthetic* [. . .] and the process of *ideological deformation* of the material, the real, the sociopolitical'.[44] In contrast to this tendency, in this book I attend to the different ways in which Adorno uses form to analyze and theorize literary works, and to formulate their wider intellectual and socio-political implications.

The only monograph in English dedicated to Adorno's writings on literature is Ulrich Plass's 2006 study of the *Notes to Literature*, which seeks to examine some of the philosophical consequences of these writings, particularly in terms of the relationship between language and history. As I have observed elsewhere, Plass's study applies to Adorno's writings on literature conclusions drawn from his (earlier) writings on language without fully attending to the ways in which the investigation of literature might require that these conclusions be reconsidered, relying at times on a crude distinction between literary and colloquial language, and leaves unexplored the relationship between the *Notes to Literature* and a broader Adornian aesthetics of literature, such as in the conflation of the Kantian aesthetic judgment with Adorno's apparently broader categories of aesthetic or artistic experience.[45] There has been rather more attention paid to Adorno's literary aesthetics within individual essays. Chief among these are those collected in the 2006 collection *Adorno and Literature*, an attempt to take seriously Adorno's 'insistence on the possibility of making *value* judgements of literary works', judgments which are however themselves hostile both to what Cunningham and Mapp resonantly term the 'formalism' of traditional aesthetics and to the 'idea of an invariant or limitlessly applicable method through which literary works might be read'.[46]

This book seeks not only to pursue this tendency, but also to examine and reflect on the conceptual frameworks according to which such judgments

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can be made. In doing so I seek to take seriously Adorno's insistence that aesthetics 'is not applied philosophy, but philosophical in itself' (ÄT 140/AT 91), and to make a case for the mutual implication of philosophical reflection and literary criticism, by means of the investigation of the terms and concepts with which we make such judgments about literature. My aim in doing so is not so much to develop an application of an Adornian aesthetics for the study of literature as to investigate this mutual implication by means of the interrogation of the deployment of the concepts of artistic, literary, and poetic form. I thus seek not only to site Adorno's writings on literature within the context of his aesthetics, but also to explore their consequences for his philosophy as a whole, and for our understanding of the relationship between literature and the wider world in which it is made and experienced. I am concerned, that is, both with the ways in which Adorno's writings on literature require a rethinking of other parts of his œuvre, and with the question of what the examination of the concepts with which we analyze literature might tell us about life more broadly.

## Poetics

This chimes with the concerns of a growing body of work with the modes of knowledge production within the study of literature, with its broader intellectual and social consequences and implications. In some cases this work has involved methodological reflection on the methods or concepts involved in the study of literature; in some (not necessarily other) it has involved a focus on the relationship between literature and philosophy. In discussing Martin Heidegger's contribution to a potential reconfiguration of the ways in which we think about and with poetry, David Nowell Smith has made a persuasive case that what appears as Heidegger's dismissal of the traditions of aesthetics and poetics in fact turns out to be 'the catalyst for a far more developed thinking of precisely those phenomena with which "aesthetics" is concerned: form, but also the categories of beauty, artistic technique, the relation between artwork and equipment, the experience of an artwork, among others'.[47] This thinking toward which Nowell Smith points is 'a thinking of language and poetry beyond the limits of poetics', limits which 'belong to the very "essence" of poetics as a mode of questioning'; he finds within Heidegger's writings on poetry an impetus to 'rethink the basic questions of poetics' from the perspective that 'poetry's salient feature is its treatment of its language as medium, and as a medium that can open

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up a singular space for an encounter with beings, and thereby shape the ways in which we experience and comprehend the world'.[48]

For Nowell Smith, Heidegger's well-known dismissal of the concepts of aesthetics—among them form, beauty, metaphor—as 'metaphysical' is in fact a way of rethinking the phenomena in question, at and beyond the limits of the concepts that name them.[49] My point of departure in this study is not the dismissal of a concept, but rather the tensions that underlie the complexity of its deployment. I nonetheless share with Nowell Smith an orientation toward the potential for its reconfiguration that may lie within these tensions, and toward its implications for the ways in which we think about and with and through poetry. I thus attempt to examine the implications of the way in which Adorno reflects on, deploys, and alludes to one particular concept of aesthetics and poetics in his discussions of literature in particular, and of art and artworks in general—that of form. It is worth acknowledging that Adorno does not subject, either in *Aesthetic Theory* or his diverse writings on works of art, the concepts of aesthetics to anything like the same degree of explicit interrogation and critique as he does the concepts of metaphysics in *Negative Dialectics*. But as becomes increasingly clear through this study, this is at least in part because of the complexity in the content and structure of these concepts, a complexity which Adorno sees in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which, he argues, 'is revolutionary insofar as it, without going beyond the boundary of the older aesthetics of effect, at the same time restricts it by means of immanent critique' (ÄT 22/AT 10).

The critical potential of the *Critique of Judgment* is to an extent visible in Rodolphe Gasché's rethinking of the implications of the Kantian insistence that beauty 'should properly pertain merely to form'.[50] Gasché takes issue with what he terms the 'aestheticist and formalist interpretation of Kantian aesthetics', according to which beautiful form 'consists in the harmonious arrangement of parts into a whole, and has no other end than the pleasure it stirs in the beholder'.[51] He argues that Kant's separation of his conception of beautiful form from anything moral or sensible in fact breaks with the Aristotelian opposition of form to matter, that 'the concept of mere form encountered in the Third Critique [. . .] is anything but a free-floating form'.[52] This form, although it depends on (beautiful) objects, does not belong to the object, but is 'the form only of the organization of the faculties involved in a judgment of taste'.[53] It is not simply that form is no longer to be thought of as consisting in the explicitly harmonious arrangement of parts and whole, but that form, in this understanding, is shifted away from the object (whether the artwork or a natural occurrence),

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and into the subject who makes an aesthetic judgment. Similarly, Günter Figal has drawn attention to some of the ways in which the concepts of Kantian aesthetics frequently express more than they claim to, observing with Adorno that 'the Kantian analysis of the experiential side of aesthetic experience is always already geared toward understanding that which is experienced'.[54] I share with these accounts the conviction that the experience of works of art cannot but involve cognitive reflection and critique.

This, however, is not to argue for the subordination of the sensible to the supersensible. In this respect I share with Miguel de Beistegui a sense of the importance of the sensible in its own right and on its own terms, which he sets out in opposition to the tradition of what he terms the metaphysical aesthetics of mimesis that runs from Plato to Adorno, which remains confined within the space that stretches between the sensible and the supersensible. For de Beistegui, Adorno represents 'a particularly interesting, *limit* case' within this metaphysical tradition, 'insofar as his aesthetic theory throws mimesis into a state of permanent *crisis*, yet one that, in the end, he does not manage to extricate himself from, such is his unquestioned commitment to the very terms, concepts, and metaphysical framework that produced the theory in the first place'.[55] What de Beistegui reads as Adorno's unquestioned commitment to the terms and concepts of the aesthetic tradition I see as their immanent critique: in this respect I share with de Beistegui a concern with the limits of aesthetics—both the limits that Adorno investigates, and the limits of his thinking. I thus seek not only to make explicit the implications of the immanent critique that is at some points explicitly carried out and at other points implied by Adorno's aesthetics, but also to point or even clear the way for work that examines the implications of poetry for the ways in which we live in the world.

At the heart of de Beistegui's rethinking of aesthetics beyond the metaphysics of mimesis is his radically reconfigured understanding of metaphor as the 'image that opens up the time and space of art, the time-space of the hypersensible'.[56] Metaphor, according to this reconfiguration, is not 'reducible to a mere trope', not 'a trope amongst others, or perhaps the trope that encompasses all tropes', but understood rather as 'something altogether different—not a mere rhetorical figure, but a clue to "how things work"'.[57] Rather than being a trope, it is a way of thinking, an operation that consists 'in the ability to recognise something in something else, and see the beauty of an object in a different object'—'the operation that reveals or opens up that space and time, hidden or folded in the space and time of ordinary perception and cognition'.[58] This radically expanded and to an

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extent aporetic deployment of metaphor, which is 'drawn from the works of Proust and Hölderlin', is an indication of the extent to which literature—and the ways in which we understand and think with it—seem to us to hold a kind of hidden key to an as yet unlocked means of understanding the world.[59] As such it seems to reflect a sense that poetry represents a hitherto untapped and not exhaustively investigated resource for the rethinking not only of its own study, or even of aesthetic experience more generally, but also of the ways in which we know our worlds.

An exploration of one such poetic rethinking is Charles Bambach's reconfiguration of justice through an expanded sense of poetic measure: expanded beyond the metrical and understood 'as the "taking" of measure (*Maß-nahme*)', with the Heideggerian twist that it is strictly speaking 'less a "taking" than a *releasing* or a *letting-come* of that which cannot be thought in advance'.[60] This reconfigured justice, based on the affinities between 'the measured pacing of musical and poetic meter, in the medical practice of moderate intervention, in the archer's attunement to the tautness and amplitude of the bow, in the interpreter's reception to the mystery and paradox of the oracle', involves an attunement to that which is unknown and outside the subject, a 'middle-voiced rendering of justice' in which therefore '[b]eing as *dike* lets *adikia* into its order just as, in good middle-voiced reciprocity, *adikia* lets *dike* order it'.[61] The investigation of the resonances of the poetic (but, at the same time, never only or narrowly poetic) concept of measure reveals ways in which poetry not only reminds us of the limits to our conceptual and propositional ways of thinking, but also opens up ways of transcending these limits.

This brings into the foreground the question of how the study of poetry should relate to its object, of what poetics has to learn from poetry. One recent account of the specific contribution of poetry to its own theorization is Forest Pyle's investigation of what he terms a 'radical aestheticism', characterized as 'the experience of a *poiesis* that exerts such a pressure on the claims and workings of the aesthetic that it becomes (or reveals itself to be) a kind of black hole from which no illumination is possible'.[62] This experience is enabled by but not identical with what is variously termed a 'poetic reflection on the workings and effects of the aesthetic' and 'a powerful and sustained poetic reflection on and engagement with aesthetic experience'.[63] Similarly, Vittorio Hösle investigates the phenomenon of self-instantiation within accounts of literary aesthetics and poetics, departing from the observation that instructional handbooks concerned with the writing of poetry can themselves 'be formulated in verses and can thus exemplify that

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which they teach'.[64] For Hösle 'one of the secrets of the success of *Aesthetic Theory*' consists in the fact that it 'itself expresses that understanding of art' that is encapsulated in its writings on poetry, while he argues that although 'the rhetorical-poetical means of *Aesthetic Theory* in no way constitute proof of the consistency of Adorno's undertaking', they nonetheless 'show that Adorno had a sense for the poeticization of poetics'.[65] My investigation of Adorno's poetics is thus concerned both with his investigations of poetry and with the poetics of his own writings, in particular at the points where they themselves begin to resemble poetry.

I have recently drawn attention to the sheer variety of uses to which the term poetics is put, both within and beyond literary studies, and to the range of kinds of work that the term is asked to carry out.[66] This becomes particularly clear when comparing the conceptions of poetics, explicitly formulated or otherwise, with which these and other studies work, which range from the simple, even simplistic, to the diffuse and elusive. For Hösle poetics is unproblematically definable as the subset of aesthetics in general that is concerned with poetry in particular;[67] Nowell Smith charts how the conception of poetics rejected by Heidegger is where the disciplines of the history of literature and aesthetics converge.[68] John Arthos, in contrast, in his account of Gadamer's poetics, uses the term to signal a break from these very disciplinary conventions, clarifying that his 'use of the term poetics rather than aesthetics is meant to mark the distinction between Gadamer's theory of the work of art and the aspects of disciplinary aesthetics from which he wanted to distance himself':[69]

> The great contrast between Gadamer's poetics and disciplinary aesthetics is bound up in the idea of the work as an ontological category—the work's structure is so interwoven with the structures of the lives that engage it, that process, product, history, and identity become parasitic on and inextricable from one another. If we define the work by this capacity for metamorphosis, we have redefined it as its tradition, but tradition as much rupture as continuity, as much repression as enlightenment.[70]

My approach in this book is neither to seek to make or to assert a radical break from the disciplines of aesthetics or poetics, however construed, nor to assume their traditions and concepts as if unquestioned, but rather critically to examine the resources presented by one such concept. In doing so I seek to investigate the different ways in which the intertwining of pro-

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cess, product, history, and identity to which Arthos refers is revealed—and indeed obscured—by the concept of form and those against and in relation to which it is defined: in particular its relations to content, expression, genre, and material. In this respect my aim is to illuminate form from a variety of different angles in order critically to account for the range of its argumentative and analytical power.

I have referred elsewhere to what I term the pliability of the term 'poetics', the fact that it can be deployed without objection (and frequently without comment) for a wide range of (sometimes mutually contradictory) purposes, and that there seems to be something about it that enables people to resort to it in order to refer or point to matters that elude explanation.[71] This is in part because of the ability of the term to combine what I have tentatively identified as the objective and the subjective aspects of poetics, in which the former refers to the implicit principles that underlie the construction of a given body of work, the latter to reflection on the process of investigation of poetry (or to the making explicit of these implicit objective principles).[72] Indeed, Bruns's definition of (objective) poetics as poetry's frequently implicit 'concepts or theories of itself' already contains the beginnings of the link to the subjective experience, reflection on and formulation of these concepts: the experience of poetry frequently contains within itself something that seems to go beyond the bounds of what we think of as experience—the beginnings of a theorization of or reflection on the implications of that experience, or a spur to such a reflection.[73] A theme that recurs throughout this book is the adaptability of form such that it can refer at once to a manifestation of the activity of the artistic subject and to an objective force encountered by that subject as a constraint or limit. In analyzing and theorizing the relationship between subject and object, the relationship of poetics to poetry, I seek to proceed in the light of Werner Hamacher's claim that '[p]oetry is *prima philologia*', 'the most uncompromising philology'—that reading and reflecting on poetry is a stronger or perhaps clearer example of the truth of Hamacher's claim that 'philology must already be practiced by anyone who speaks, anyone who thinks or acts by speaking, and anyone who attempts to bring to light and indeed to interpret his and others' actions, gestures, and pauses'.[74]

Pyle's account of the literary reflection on aesthetic experience and Hösle's investigation of the phenomena of the 'poet who ascends to poetological reflection' and the theorist who is 'a literary example of that which he demands' are thus in a sense more explicit and deliberate investigations of something that is frequently implicit within poetry.[75] In some conceptions

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the link between subjective and objective is made primarily or exclusively through language: Bogel, for example, asserts that 'a properly formalist analysis must engage with that language no matter what it also takes the text to be—must show how it is the text's language that makes it any of those other things'.[76] Meanwhile, the genetically distinct New Formalism, the poetic movement of the 1980s according to which 'the revival of traditional forms' is seen as one possible response to the 'debasement of poetic language' that Dana Goia identifies in much US American poetry of the time, anticipates that its concerns would be taken up by literary studies more generally, where they would lead to an expanded sense of form, as he predicts that debates in literary form would soon begin to 'focus on form in the wider, more elusive sense of poetic structure'.[77]

In other reflections by poets on the implications of their practice, the concern is more explicitly social, as can be seen for example in some of the debates within and around Language writing as to the different ways in which 'choices of grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and narrative reflect ideology'.[78] Indeed the project outlined by Bernstein was in many cases at least as much a poetic as a literary-critical endeavor, insofar as many of the contributors to the discussions were trying not only 'to see the formal dynamics of a poem as communicative exchanges, as socially addressed, and as ideologically explicit', but also to address the question of how practitioners such as Bruce Andrews might go about 'making the form that's truly in question the form of society itself', or in Erica Hunt's work toward an 'oppositional poetics' which would 'form a field of related projects which have moved beyond the speculation of skepticism to a critically active stance against forms of domination'.[79] Common to these undertakings is the conviction that form constitutes a means of thinking poetry and society together, and to investigating and indeed altering the links between them. A significant concern of this book is to theorize this link, and to address the question of what it is about form that lends itself to such endeavors.

In setting out this poetics of form I thus seek to go beyond Rose's claim that 'Adorno sought to develop a sociology of artistic form', a claim which is perhaps an accurate characterization of his earlier writings on the sociology of music, but which does not begin to capture the rethinking, both explicit and implicit, of form within his later works.[80] In doing so I am deliberately working with the elusive and sometimes aporetic character of poetics, at once drawing on and theorizing its pliability and adaptability, and their intertwining with those of form, which of course can refer at the same time both to the unique features of an individual work and to that

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which it has in common with other works. Discussing form as it pertains to an individual work, for example, Derek Attridge argues that 'the notion of singularity is entirely bound up with the notion of form'.[81] Meanwhile, in approaching a villanelle by William Empson, Michael Wood confronts what he terms the 'need at some stage to ask what literary forms know or know of'.[82] Form's adaptability and pliability do not consist solely in the versatility with which form can be deployed to refer to apparently incompatible or mutually exclusive phenomena, although this versatility is an important aspect and indeed condition of the ways in which the term is deployed to make the link between poetry and its worlds.

## Philology

Adorno ends the ninth of his 'Bibliographical Sketches' with what reads like a somewhat dismissive claim: 'Philology conspires with myth: it blocks the exit.' His critique is directed against the philosophical lexica—he gives as examples Rudolf Eisler's of Kant and Hermann Glockner's of Hegel—in which 'the most important formulations often slip through the cracks because they do not fit under any keyword' (NzL 352/Ntl 2: 26). Philological enquiry, however, reveals that this dismissal is not the end of the story. In the Odysseus chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno remarks that the philosophical critique that reveals the identification of epic and myth to be deceptive follows in the footsteps of recent classical philology, which had itself already dismantled the identification (DA 61/DE 35). In the opening paragraph of 'Skoteinos, or How to Read', the third of his studies on Hegel, he asserts that 'there is no Hegel-philology, no adequate textual criticism' (3SH 326/H3S 89). In *Negative Dialectics* he criticizes Heidegger's destruction, which 'falls silent before the philological education that he at the same time neglects and suspends' (ND 118/Ashton 112). In each case there remains the unarticulated possibility of a philological praxis adequate to the task of investigating the truth content of philosophical and literary works.

Such a praxis would of necessity distinguish itself from the two false sorts of philology that Adorno identifies. In *Aesthetic Theory* he writes of the danger of identifying the truth content of a work with the intention of its author: 'The philological procedure that imagines that it grasps the substantive content of the work as something secure by grasping its intention judges itself immanently by tautologically extracting from artworks what had previously been put into them; the secondary literature on Thomas Mann

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is the most repugnant example of this' (ÄT 226/AT 150). Meanwhile, while polemicizing against Heidegger in 'Why Still Philosophy?' he argues that Heidegger's unreflected philology 'cryptically becomes a philosophical authority' (E 463/CM 9). In his exposition of what he terms Nietzsche's philology of the future, James I. Porter distinguishes, in a conceptual schema that bears a striking resemblance to Horkheimer's account of theory, between traditional and critical philology.[83] Traditional philology is 'the agency that helps to sustain the mythical shape of the present, in part by alienating myth as an object of dispassionate study', and as such a form of forgetfulness. To distinguish itself from this—that is, to become critical—philology 'must become a self-reflexive, self-critical, and often paradoxical undertaking'.[84]

Such a critical philology would be characterized by a concern for the philosophical consequences of interpretation, without attempting to substitute for philosophy. It cannot afford to ignore what Peter Szondi terms 'the problematic of philological cognition', indifference to which is the explanation of his lament that philology so often tends toward an 'unreflected science'—that is to say that philology tends to lack hermeneutical reflection on its own procedures, focusing instead purely on its object.[85] The present study aspires to critical philology in three senses. The first consists in the fact that as a study of Adorno's writings on literary form, my investigative procedures are in some respects philological—my engagement with these writings draws on the resources including explication and elucidation, as well as literary analysis and textual criticism. I seek to illuminate some of Adorno's more enigmatic claims by means of attentive close reading and the examination of both their resonance and their frictions with other aspects of his work. In this sense I am concerned with what a certain kind of philological practice can reveal about the truth content of Adorno's work, and it at this point that both my concern and my methodology are closest to those of some of the works trading under the name of the new formalism. The second sense is that I investigate Adorno's writings on aesthetics and literature as an instance or prototype of critical philology—that is to say, not only as a means of analyzing texts but also as a reflection on the cognition embedded within and presupposed by such analysis. And where their shortcomings are revealed I seek to bring them closer to this aspiration. The third relates to the second, in that it seeks to outline the implications of Adorno's thought for a rethinking of some of the ways in which we study. In this respect it proceeds both with and beyond Adorno's work, on the one hand formulating and making explicit the implicit principles that inform his readings of literature, and on the other hand pointing to ways in

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