Adorno (against Heidegger) on Style and Literary Form in Philosophy

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Abstract

In this article, moving from the basic assumption that perhaps few thinkers in the twentieth century prioritized the question of philosophy and literary form the way Adorno did (§ 1), I first provide a reconstruction of his commitment with the question concerning the role of style in philosophy, focusing on some of the various presentation forms Adorno experimented and used in his works: essay, aphorism, parataxis (§ 2). Then I introduce a short excursus on another important 20th-century thinker who also prioritized the question of philosophy and literary form, mostly in connection to the relationship between the language of poetry and the language of philosophy: Martin Heidegger (§ 3). At the same time, Heidegger was the target of Adorno's strong criticism, so I use his ontological conception of philosophy and/as poetry as a way to let fully emerge by comparison, *e contrario*, the specificity of Adorno's anti-ontological, negative-dialectical conception of the role and significance of style in philosophizing (§ 4).

Keywords: Theodor W. Adorno, Martin Heidegger, Aesthetics, Style, Philosophy and Literature

> For Johan and Samir: for the music, the philosophical dialogue and the beer.
>
> The essay allows for the consciousness of non-identity (Th. W. Adorno, The Essay as Form).
>
> I am consciousness without identity (Ani di Franco, Alla This).

1.

Many thinkers in the history of Western philosophy have paid close attention to the question of "style" and presentation form. Although it would be difficult to list them all here, limiting oneself to the history of post-Kantian philosophy it is surely possible to mention Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche among those who prioritized the question of philosophy and literary form in a way that far outstrips the way most philosophers paid attention to it. As once noted by Arthur C. Danto, it is hard to "think of a field of writing as fertile as philosophy has been in generating forms of literary expression" (Danto 1986, 136). In fact, the history of Western philosophy has been, among other things,

> a history of dialogues, lecture notes, fragments, poems, examinations, essays, aphorisms, meditations, discourses, hymns, critiques, letters, summae, encyclopedias, testaments, commentaries, investigations, tractatuses, *Vorlesungen*, *Aufbauen*, prolegomena, parerga, *pensées*, sermons, supplements, confessions, sententiae, inquiries, diaries, outlines, sketches, commonplace books, […] and innumerable forms which have no generic identity or which themselves constitute distinct genres: *Holzwege*, Grammatologies, Unscientific Postscripts, Genealogies, Natural Histories, Phenomenologies, and whatever the *World as Will and Idea* may be or the posthumous corpus of Husserl, or the later writings of Derrida, and forgetting the standard sorts of literary forms – e.g., novels, plays, and the like, which philosophers have turned to when gifted those ways. (Danto 1986, 141)

If we focus in a more specific way on the twentieth century, then the name of Adorno surely emerges among the philosophers who paid the greatest attention to dimension of style in philosophizing – although it must be noted that in emphasizing the relevance of the literary form Adorno never arrived to the radical conclusions of certain postmodernist philosophers who, following Jürgen Habermas' famous critique of postmodernism, simply leveled off the genre distinction between philosophy and literature and theorized the idea of a general, undifferentiated Text (Habermas 1985, 185-210)[1]. This, as is well-known, also applies to some extent to Martin Heidegger, namely one of Adorno's greatest "adversaries" in philosophy. At the same time, as I will show, a part of Adorno's critical program against Heidegger was precisely devoted to the

latter's conception of thinking and/as poetry. To this conception Adorno opposed in turn his own concept of the role and significance of the presentation form in philosophizing, which eventually led him in the direction of a particular kind of negative-dialectical thinking.

However, before proceeding with my analysis of the role played by style in Adorno's philosophy, it is important to provide some further information and clarification about my use of this notion in this article. In fact, it might be objected for example that the concept of style could suggest something idiosyncratic in the moment of its becoming established and recognizable, for instance the artist's expressive gesture becoming characteristic, and that something like this was anathema to Adorno, that nothing could be further from his view of philosophical expression. So it might be objected that Adorno, when using the concept of style, actually used it with a different meaning. In *Aesthetic Theory*, for example, he defines this concept as one referring "as much to the inclusive element through which art becomes language – for style is the quintessence of all language in art – as to a constraining element that was somehow compatible with particularization" (Adorno 2004, 205; GS 7, 305). And in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for example, we find the intriguing and thought-provoking observation that "the concept of a genuine style becomes transparent in the culture industry as the aesthetic equivalent of power": "great artists have been mistrustful of style, which at decisive points has guided them less than the logic of the subject matter" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, 103; GS 3, 151-152).

Now, I expect the reader to understand the way that I use the concept of style during the development of my interpretation of Adorno, and also my comparison between him and Heidegger. However, in order to provide a first hint at what "style" is meant to express here, I will simply say that the general concept of style as it is understood here includes different kinds of presentation form, different kinds of rhetorical devices and stylistic strategies, and still other textual dimensions. From this point of view, "style" functions as a general concept that summarizes and includes *all* the different

aspects concerning the literary form of a philosophical text, *all* the various ways in which Adorno used to present his ideas. Apparently it was this meaning of style that a scholar like Gillian Rose had in mind in her impressive and, to some extent, still unsurpassed analysis of Adorno's "search for style", inasmuch as she included in this concept several particular aspects like different kinds of presentation form (aphorism, essay, parataxis, etc.), different kinds of rhetorical devices and stylistic strategies (chiasmus, impersonal and passive constructions, provocative formulations, hyperbole, auxesis, ironic inversion, etc.), and still other textual dimensions (See Rose 1978). From this point of view, it is not necessary to clearly distinguish style from, say, other terms of the discussion like poetry, imagination, rhetoric, presentation, form, etc., because style, as it is understood here, rather includes all these aspects. Interestingly enough, some recent works on this topic and other analogous subjects connected to it make explicit use of the concept of style in inquiring into the dimension of literary form in philosophy with reference to both Adorno and Heidegger (See Robinson 2018 and Weidler 2019)[2] – which I assume as a sign and a confirm of the enduring relevance and actuality of this topic for both thinkers and for philosophy in general. Whereas, in doing so, it is also important to remind that, for Adorno, what I refer to here as "style" is, as seen from the text, mostly a matter of writing (fragmented, with the use of parataxis or in an essayistic and aphoristic manner), while for Heidegger it is rather mostly (although not only, of course) a matter of word-construction and use of ethimologies: that which, as I will explain in the next sections, must not be simply understood as a purely stylistic or literary difference between them but is rather connected to their different philosophical approaches in general (negative dialetics; fundamental ontology and history of Being).

As a further exemplification meant to explain and make clearer and more explicit the meaning and significance of the concept of style in the present context, let me briefly remind the reader for example of Derrida's treatment of this notion in his short but influential book *Spurs*: *Nietzsche's Styles*. Here, in fact, Derrida establishes a critical comparison or a contrast

between a kind of thinking centred on truth and identity, on the one side, and a kind of thinking centred on style and *différance*, on the other side. And then he compares style to "a *spur* of sorts (*éperon*)" like "the prow [...] of a sailing vessel, its *rostrum*", but also like "that rocky point, also called an *éperon*, on which the waves break at the harbor's entrance" (Derrida 1979, 39). On this basis, Derrida argues that the style "uses its spur (*éperon*) as a means of protection against the terrifying, blinding, mortal threat (of that) which presents itself, which obstinately thrusts itself into view", like "the presence, the content, the thing itself, meaning, truth" (Derrida 1979, 39). For Derrida, "if there is no style" in one's attempt to deconstruct and overcome traditional metaphysics, i.e. if a reversal "is not accompanied by [...] a strategy of writing", then it ultimately remains "the same thing, nothing more than a clamorous declaration of the antithesis" (Derrida 1979, 95) rather than a real deconstruction. Understanding the importance of "the question of style [...] as a question of writing", as "the spurring-operation (*opération-éperonnante*)" that is "more powerful than any content, thesis or meaning", ultimately leads Derrida to set free reading and interpreting texts (and, more in general, thinking as such) "from the horizon of the meaning or truth of being" (Derrida 1979, 107), and perhaps from the horizon of any determinate knowledge or truth. This, however, is evidently *not* the case of Adorno's philosophy, in which the concept of truth (although never defined in a one-sided way or explicitly clarified, and according to some scholars even understood in different ways[3]) still plays a central role and is a distinctive feature of the possibility itself of philosophizing in a *strong* way (see Adorno 1997, vol. 2, 77), thus in opposition to any kind of postmodernist *weak* thought. However, by analogy, and given the existence of some similarities at least to some extent between their philosophical projects[4], the Adorno/Derrida comparison on this specific topic can be useful to clarify my use of "style" here. In fact, if for Derrida, in order to achieve a real *deconstruction* of the metaphysics of presence, what is mostly required is precisely the moment of style in philosophizing, so for Adorno, in order to achieve a real *dismantling* (Adorno 1990, 56; GS 6, 43) of traditional, systematic, metaphysical thinking

grounded on the primacy of identity, what is required is also the moment of style, of mimesis, of expression and presentation, of particular "strategies of writing" and "configurational forms" (see Nicholsen 1991).

2.

The question of style in philosophizing always played an important role in Adorno's philosophy, from the beginning to the end. In his first writings of the early 1930s, for example, he expresses the demand for a new kind of dialectics based on an "exact fantasy" as the "*organon* […] of philosophical interpretation" (Adorno 2000, 37; GS 1, 342), and on the rescue of the "*aesthetic* dignity of words" (Adorno 2007, 38; GS 1, 370). And the same issue was later to be developed in his major works, in which dialectics is conceived for example as "a critical rescue of the rhetorical element" (Adorno 1990, 56; GS 6, 66). For Adorno, since "all approved traditional philosophy from Plato down to the semanticists has been allergic to expression" (Adorno 1990, 55; GS 6, 65), the latter found shelter in language and rhetoric, i.e. in the presentation, which "is not an external matter of indifference to [philosophy] but immanent to its idea", its "integral, nonconceptually mimetic moment of expression [being] objectified only by presentation in language" (Adorno 1990, 18; GS 6, 29).

As has been noted, "it is impossible to understand Adorno's ideas without understanding the ways in which he presents them, that is, his style, and without understanding the reasons for his preoccupation with style" (Rose 1978, 11). In fact, his particular dialectical approach led him to reject any sharp disjunction between *what* is expressed and *how* it is expressed, i.e. between *form* and *content*, and so to claim that the form of presentation is not something external to the matter itself but rather essentially belongs to it. As he explained in the 1930s:

> The distinction between form and content in philosophical language is not a disjunction in an eternity without history. […] It is based on the view that concepts and, with them, words are abbreviations of a multiplicity of characteristics whose unity is constituted solely by consciousness. […] Words [however] are never merely signs of what is

thought under them, but rather history erupts into words, establishing their truth-character. The share of history in the word unfailingly determines the choice of every word because history and truth meet in the word. (Adorno 2007, 35-36; GS 1, 366-367)

In *The Essay as Form* Adorno strongly criticizes those thinkers who, like the so-called Neo-positivists, neglect the importance of the relationship between the presentation form and the presented contents. Indeed, showing indifference to the formal dimension of a philosophical text may lead to the use of both stereotyped forms and dogmatized contents. According to a positivist procedure,

the content, once fixed on the model of the protocol sentence, is supposed to be neutral with respect to its presentation, which is supposed to be conventional and not determined by the subject. […] In its allergy to forms as mere accidental attributes, the spirit of science and scholarship comes to resemble that of rigid dogmatism. Positivism's irresponsibly sloppy language fancies that it documents responsibility in its object, and reflection on intellectual matters becomes the privilege of the mindless. (Adorno 1991, 5; GS 11, 11-12)

In *Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel*, the form/content relationship is reinterpreted in connection to the question concerning the role of expression in philosophizing. Here Adorno writes: "Just as there is a tension between expression and construction in works of art, so in Hegel there is a tension between the expressive and the argumentative elements. All philosophy that does not make do with an unreflective imitation of the scientific ideal is of course familiar with this tension in a less extreme form" (Adorno 1993, 137; GS 5, 367). With regard to Adorno's peculiar way of writing it has been noticed that he "wrote in a variety of styles, some more, some less abstruse", and that he is "notorious for his esoteric style" (Rose 1978, 12). In her already mentioned analysis of Adorno's "search for style", Gillian Rose has taken into examination some of the many sophisticated stylistic strategies adopted by him. Among them, one might recall the use of "impersonal and passive constructions", as well as other "stylistic strategies [...] directed at the experience of the reader" and described by Adorno "as 'shock', 'exaggeration', 'fantasy' or 'provocative formulations'", and still "hyperbole and auxesis" and above all "ironic inversion" (Rose 1978, 12-13 and 16-17). It is also typical of

Adorno the use of provocative observations that assume the form of seemingly self-contradictory (or at least quite paradoxical) statements. Some examples can be: "[artworks] have truth content and they do not have it"; "art has truth as the semblance of the illusionless (*Schein des Scheinlosen*)"; "artworks have the absolute and they do not have it. […] Their own life preys on death"; "aesthetic experience is […] possibility promised by its impossibility" (Adorno 2004, 128, 132, 133 and 135-136; GS 7, 194, 199, 201 and 204-205)[5]. In addition to this, it must be also emphasized the significance of his constant and close attention for some seemingly marginal or less important aspects of the text composition, such as the choice of titles (Adorno 1992, 3-11; GS 11, 325-334), the use of punctuation marks and foreign words (Adorno 1991, 91-97 and 174-184; GS 11, 106-113 and 216-232), the importance of corrections and erasures (Adorno 2005, 85; GS 4, 95), the usefulness of dictation (Adorno 2005, 212; GS 4, 242), and even the pagination and binding of books (Adorno 1992, 20-31; GS 11, 345-357). Finally, Adorno often disregards "the norms of the standard philosophical argument", choosing to put in its place "the mode, half way between argument and trope", of the chiasmus:

Adorno usually inverts the term of the second of two antithesis in order to turn them into a chiasmus, thus: AB BA. Each antithesis is usually a tautology which has importance in itself. The use of chiasmus stresses the transmutation of processes into entities which is the fundamental theme of Adorno's work. He presents this theme in this way in order to avoid turning processes into entities himself. Sometimes he uses chiasmus directly, for example, "the subject is the object, the object is the subject"; or, "history is nature, nature is history". At other times it can be seen to inform the whole structure of a piece. His article on static and dynamic as sociological categories depends overall on the development of the chiasmus "static presupposes dynamic, dynamic results in static" (Rose 1978, 13)[6].

The theoretical ground of Adorno's mistrust against traditional presentation forms in philosophy resides in his basic

mistrust against philosophy's traditional demand for a systematic and total (or, say, "totalitarian") comprehension of the real. In particular, one of the reasons why he dismisses the canonical form of the philosophical treatise is that "the idea of a masterpiece […] reflects the idea of creation and totality" (Adorno 1991, 17; GS 11, 26). For Adorno, "[a] presentation characterized by continuity would contradict an antagonistic subject matter", since it would assume "that totality is given, and with it the identity of subject and object", and thus lead to act "as though one were in possession of the whole" (Adorno 1991, 16 and 11; GS 11, 24 and 18). As a consequence, a philosophy like Adorno's, grounded on the unshakable conviction that "[t]he whole is the false (*Das Ganze ist das Unwahre*)" (Adorno 2005, 50; GS 4, 55)[7], requires alternative forms of presentation that may contradict, already on a stylistic level, "the illusion of a simple and fundamentally logical world, an illusion well suited to the defense of the status quo" (Adorno 1991, 15; GS 11, 23). As Adorno argues in referring to Hegel, the latter's style "goes against customary philosophical understanding, yet in his weaknesses he paves the way for a different kind of understanding" (Adorno 1993, 122-123; GS 5, 354). The same thing obviously applies to Adorno's own concept of philosophizing and hence to his style as well: even Adorno's more systematic or treatise-like works appear as anti-systematic, i.e. they aim at de-structuring the systematic building from within, and in fact "Adorno describes his programme […] as an anti-system, and his texts may be equally well described as anti-texts" (Rose 1978, 12).

Not surprisingly, most Adorno's works are written in alternative presentation forms. The most important among these forms are aphorisms, essays and the so-called "paratactical composition". As to the first one, every Adorno reader certainly knows *Minima moralia*, a collection of 153 "ingenious aphorisms" and "vivid scenes taken from […] apparently unassuming or remote subjects" that "fascinated […] even Thomas Mann" (Müller-Doohm 2005, 344). As testified by a letter dated October 31, 1945, "in which he told his parents about these aphorisms", in taking the decision to adopt such a fragmentary form Adorno was mostly inspired by

"a renewed reading of Nietzsche" (Müller-Doohm 2005, 304). The basic reason why he adopted this kind of presentation form consists in the fact that

> the attempt to present aspects of our shared philosophy from the standpoint of subjective experience, necessitates that the parts do not altogether satisfy the demands of the philosophy of the which they are nevertheless a part. The disconnected and non-binding character of the form, the renunciation of explicit theoretical cohesion, are meant as one expression of this. […] If today the subject is vanishing, aphorisms take upon themselves the duty "to consider the evanescent itself as essential". (Adorno 2005, 16 and 18; GS 4, 15 and 17)

Hence, it comes as no surprise if "the striking aphorism" has been defined as "the most appropriate form of presentation" for Adorno's philosophy: namely, the only form that was "capable of expressing in language his secret ideal of knowledge" (Habermas 1994, 225). That which, however, does not allow to level off in a postmodernist fashion the genre distinction between philosophy and fiction, and to classify *Minima moralia* as a literary work (Habermas 1994, 206-207). As noted by Martin Jay, *Minima moralia*'s "fragmented, aphoristic style was no accident: to Adorno negation and the truth it precariously preserved could be expressed only in tentative, incomplete ways. Here Critical Theory's fundamental distrust of systematizing was carried to its extreme. The location of philosophical insight was no longer to be found in abstract, coherent, architectonic systems, as in Hegel's day, but rather in subjective, private reflection" (Jay 1996, 277).

Beside aphorisms, also the essay form played an important role in Adorno's production, as testified by the simple fact that among the twenty volumes of his collected works at least eleven are collections of essays[8]. For Adorno the essay provokes resistance because it does not dress itself up with "what is clothed in the dignity of the universal and the enduring – and today perhaps the originary", and because "it evokes intellectual freedom" that "[s]ince the failure of an Enlightenment that has been lukewarm since Leibniz, even under present-day conditions of formal freedom, […] has never quite developed" (Adorno 1991, 3-4; GS 11, 9-10). From this point of view, the essay somehow transgresses "the orthodoxy of thought", its "innermost formal law [being] heresy" (Adorno

1991, 23; GS 11, 33). Finally, apropos of the "paratactical composition", I would like to point out that it represents at least to some extent an original invention of Adorno: an invention of decisive importance for him, as testified by his decision to adopt it for his last, great and unfinished work, namely the *Aesthetic Theory* posthumously published in 1970. Of course, defining parataxis as Adorno's "original invention" may appear problematic, so I would like to point out that this is only meant to differentiate the higher level of originality of parataxis from that of other presentation forms. That the expression "original invention" must not be overemphasized is already testified by the fact that Adorno applied the term "parataxis" to Hölderlin: more precisely, to his careful and in-depth analysis of the latter's poetry presented in his 1963 essay *Parataxis* (see Adorno 1992, 109-149; GS 11, 447-491)[9]. Furthermore, Adorno's concept of parataxis seems to evoke to some extent the notion of "constellation", which is in part derived from Benjamin. One of the best explanations of this concept can be found in *Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel*, where we read:

> The specificity of philosophy as a configuration of moments is qualitatively different from a lack of ambiguity in every particular moment, even within the configuration, because the configuration itself is more, and other, than the quintessence of its moments. Constellation is not system. Everything does not become resolved, everything does not come out even; rather, one moment sheds light on the other, and the figures that the individual moments form together are specific signs and a legible script. (Adorno 1993, 109; GS 5, 342)

Adorno's basic conception of a negative, non-conciliatory and non-systematic kind of dialectics thus led him to experiment ways of thinking and writing based on parataxis rather than hypotaxis, i.e. on coordinating rather than subordinating the elements of the speech. An explanation of what he would later mean by "paratactical composition", or even composition as a "spider's web", can be already found in *Minima moralia*:

> Dialectical thinking […] means that an argument should take on the pungency of a thesis and a thesis contain within itself the fullness of its reasoning. All bridging concepts, all links and logical auxiliary operations that are not a part of the matter itself, all secondary

> developments not saturated with the experience of the object, should be discarded. In a philosophical text all the propositions ought to be equally close to the centre. (Adorno 2005, 71; GS 4, 79)

Anyway, the development and the adoption of the "paratactical composition" was not easy. "The planning of a volume on aesthetics to appear in Suhrkamp goes back to 1960. Publication was envisaged for 1964" (Müller-Doohm 2005, 610 n.). The Editors' Afterword to the book shows that Adorno started to dictate a first draft of the *Aesthetic Theory* on May 4, 1961, while the last version left to us is dated June 16, 1969. Meanwhile he had repeatedly changed the book's structure and style, shifting from a first draft articulated in short paragraphs to a second one that he turned to write on October 25, 1966: "The division into paragraphs gave way to one by chapters. […] Dictation continued throughout 1967", and according to a diary note the "'rough dictation of *Aesthetic Theory* was finished' on December 25, 1967" (Adorno 2004, 461; GS 7, 539). But even this version bears little resemblance to the one which was later to be published, since it turned out that, unlike with other books from Adorno, "this time the second draft was itself only a provisional version" (Adorno 2004, 461; GS 7, 540). Adorno shifted from the subdivision in chapters to a continuous text, whose inner articulation was only granted by white spaces in the page, and in summer 1968 he said that the book was almost ready in draft form. Nonetheless, Adorno was still unsatisfied and "months later he was still saying, in a letter to Marcuse" dated January 24, 1969, that he was "desperately burying [himself] in [his] aesthetics book" and "had never tried to write a book in which 'the arrangement of the material presented such difficulties'" (Müller-Doohm 2005, 470). A few other passages from Adorno's epistolary bear trace of the unforeseen problems that he had to face for "the organization of the text and above all […] the relation of the presentation to what is presented" (Adorno 2004, 462; GS 7, 541). Here, indeed, he says that "the difficulties in the presentation of *Aesthetic theory*" actually consist in the fact "that a book's almost ineluctable movement from antecedent to consequent proved so incompatible with the content that for this reason any organization in the traditional sense […] proved impracticable.

[…] It is interesting", Adorno explains, "that in working there obtrudes from the content various implications for the form that I long expected but that now indeed astonish me" (Adorno 2004, 462; GS 7, 541)[10].

In order to explain and indeed make immediately explicit the unprecedented level of stylistic experimentation in Adorno's philosophical prose Rheinard Brandt has provided a particular but very convincing experiment (Brandt 1984, 133-134). In fact, Brandt quotes a long passage from *Aesthetic Theory* in two versions, namely in its original form and (to express the concept with a musicological terminology) in inverse order, i.e. with all sentences reversed from their original direction (while in music it is obviously the intervals that get reversed). The result is surprising, if not shocking. Due to Adorno's very rigorous stylistic strategy that led him to write the book "in equally weighted, paratactical parts that are arranged around a midpoint that they express through their constellation", and due to the lack of the usual "movement from antecedent to consequent" (Adorno 2004, 462; GS 7, 541) in the argumentation, both versions are fully understandable. The reader cannot actually distinguish which one is Adorno's original version and which one is the reversed version "created", or better "assembled", by Brandt. This hermeneutical experiment prove useful to exemplify in a very concrete way the fundamental idea at the basis of Adorno's concept of a paratactical presentation form that, in a more abstract and theoretical fashion, he explained this way in a letter: "from [the] theorem that there is no philosophical first principle" it also results as a consequence (both at the level of contents and form of philosophizing) that "one cannot build an argumentative structure that follows the usual progressive succession of steps, but rather that one must assemble the whole out of a series of partial complexes that are, so to speak, of equal weight and concentrically arranged all on the same level; their constellation, not their succession, must yield the idea" (Adorno 2004, 462; GS 7, 541). And Brandt's textual analysis and observations on *Aesthetic Theory*'s paratactical style, in turn, can be paired from this point of view to Axel

Honneth's appropriate comment to the Introduction to *Negative Dialectics*, a propos of which he observes:

> Das rund fünfzig Seiten lange Kapitel kennt keine Herleitung einer These, nicht deren schrittweise Exposition und Begründung, sondern präsentiert sich als ein kunstvoll gewirktes Netz aus einigen wenigen, ständig variierten Gedankenmotiven. Nicht genug damit, daß hier jede aufsteigende Linie einer Argumentation zu fehlen scheint, wird auch graphisch der Strom des Textes kaum unterbrochen; nur an insgesamt drei Stellen sind zwischen den stets sehr umfangreichen Abschnitten größere Abstände gelassen, so daß ein gewisser Neuanfang suggeriert wird. Schon dem äußeren Erscheinungsbild nach ähnelt die "Einleitung" daher weniger einem wissenschaftlichem Text als einem Stück moderner Prosa; die Sätze wiederholen ständig nur dieselben paar Grundgedanken, variieren sie um immer neue Nuancen, ohne eine These zu begründen oder ein Argument voranzutreiben. (Honneth 2006, 11)

3.

At this point I would like to introduce a short excursus on another thinker who prioritized the "stylistic" moment in philosophizing no less than Adorno did, but moving from very different presuppositions and arriving to very different results: namely, Martin Heidegger. By no means this short excursus aims to present a complete portray of Heidegger's commitment with the question of style in thinking or his own commentary on language inventions, hyphenation, use of prefixes, etc. Indeed, a satisfactory and complete account of Heidegger with regard to style would need to take into consideration, among other things, the so-called *Ereignis* manuscripts published in the context of his *Gesamtausgabe*, and of course old and new scholarship on the questions of style and language in Heidegger (see, for instance, White 1979; Halliburton 1981; De Alessi 1991; Foti 1992; Baur et al. 2013; Iorio 2017). This section on Heidegger must be rather understood as an excursus meant to help to clarify by contrast, or so to speak *e contrario*, Adorno's own conception of the role of style and presentation form in philosophy, as I will show especially in the final section.

Now, the Adorno/Heidegger controversial relationship has been examined from various points of view. For example, since the late 1970s many remarkable scholars have addressed

this topic in a way that attempted to bring out a certain agreement between Heidegger and Adorno on, say, disenchantment vis-à-vis the world and thereby a certain critique of techno-scientific modernity (see Mörchen 1980; Schröter 1988; Busche 1997), the critique of epistemology and of "instrumental rationality" or "calculative thinking" (see O'Connor 1998; Garbrecht 2002; Wenning 2002; Erjavec 2003; MacDonald and Ziarek 2008), and the rediscovery of the value, significance and even truth of our experience with art (see Cortella et al. 2005; Alker 2007; Navigante 2011; Römer 2012). In this part of my article, however, this topic will be addressed from a perspective that has not been taken into great consideration yet, namely from the perspective of the different ways in which they paid attention to the dimension of style in philosophizing and the consequences that this particular aspect had on their philosophies in general.

Although an interest in art, and in particular in poetry and literature, was clearly present already in Heidegger's early lectures courses (see Marafioti 2008, 11-68), it was only in his works following "the Turning (*Kehre*)" that this feature became fully evident. In fact, since in *Being and Time* "thinking failed in the adequate saying of [the] turning and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics" (Heidegger 1998, 250), starting from the 1930s Heidegger began to view poetical language as a precious resource for the development of a new kind of post-metaphysical thought[11]. Of course, when dealing with Heidegger it is necessary to distinguish between poetry (*Poesie*), which particularly applies "to verse in contrast to prose", and Poetry (*Dichtung*), which "has a wider meaning" and applies "to all creative writing, […] not only verse", or even stands for "all art in [its] essence" (Inwood 2000, 168). Anyway, as observed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, it was "a genuine release for Heidegger – a type of freeing his tongue – when he found himself free to pursue new ways of thinking as an interpreter of Hölderlin": Hölderlin, and poetry in general, "had freed a tongue for Heidegger's thinking" (Gadamer 1994, 22 and 190).

In *Being and Time* the task of developing an ontological and "existential" understanding of the human being (or better, the *Dasein*), moving from the pre-ontological and "existentiell"

self-understanding that the *Dasein* is always thrown into, had led Heidegger to force in an unprecedented way the limits of language, so to speak. The reason for this "violence" against common and also traditional philosophical language was precisely due to the idea that, in order to dismantle and overcome the usual but "inauthentic (*uneigentlich*)" self-interpretation of the *Dasein* that finds its expression in a usual and inauthentic language, it was necessary to develop some strategies to neutralize the latter and, from a phenomenological point of view, put it into brackets. The fact that Heidegger regarded as a veritable necessity the coinage of an alternative terminology, despite the obvious and unavoidable risks of artificiality and hence obscurity that this operation might have led to, is clearly testified by the final paragraph of §7 of *Being and Time*, where he hints at "the awkwardness and 'inelegance' of expression in the following analyses", and explains that "[s]ince our powers are essentially inferior" than those of Greek philosophers, and also "since the area of being to be disclosed ontologically is far more difficult than that presented to the Greeks", then "the complexity of our concept-formation (*Begriffsbildung*) and the severity of our expression (*Ausdruck*) will increase" (Heidegger 1996, 34).

However, after a few years Heidegger argued that the one of the main causes of the incompleteness of *Being and Time* precisely resided in a sort of terminological inadequacy, namely in the lack of a suitable language for such an innovative philosophical enterprise as that planned with his existential analytic and his reinterpretation of the question of Being. And it is precisely this question that one must take into account, should one want to understand the real reasons underlying his subsequent turn to poetic language. In fact, on various occasions Heidegger admitted that "the transformation of that saying which gives thought to the essence of being is subject to other demands than exchanging an old terminology for a new one" (Heidegger 1998, 306). Or also that meditating on the essence of language – that, "as Saying (*Sage*), is the mode of Appropriation" – requires "a transformation of language", which however "we can neither compel nor invent" and surely "does not result from the procurement of newly formed words

and phrases" (Heidegger 1982, 135). The basic presupposition here is clearly that "in thinking being comes to language. Language is the house of being (now conceived as "the Event", *das Ereignis*): "In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words", namely philosophers and poets, "are the guardians of this home" (Heidegger 1998, 239). On this basis, Heidegger also appeals for a "liberation of language from grammar into a more original essential framework [that] is reserved for thought and poetic creation" (Heidegger 1998, 240).

For Heidegger "the true experience with language can only be a thinking experience, all the more so because the lofty poetry of all great poetic work always vibrates within a realm of thinking", and "thinking in turn goes its ways in the neighborhood of poetry. [...] Poetry and thought, each needs the other in its neighborhood, each in its fashion, when it comes to ultimates" (Heidegger 1982, 69-70). But this does not mean that for Heidegger thinking and poetizing are exactly the same. In fact, he is very careful in emphasizing both the common elements and the differences between them. So, for example, he famously writes that "[t]he thinker thinks toward what is un-homelike, what is not like home, and for him this is not a transitional phase; rather, this is his being *at home*. The poet's questioning, on the other hand, is a commemorative questioning that puts the homelike itself into poetry" (Heidegger 2000a, 151). Or also that "[w]hat is stated poetically, and what is stated in thought are never identical (*das Gleiche*); but there are times when they are the same (*das Selbe*) [...]. This can occur when poesy is lofty, and thinking profound" (Heidegger 1968, 20).

In general, for Heidegger poetic style has its own rigor, and he sometimes considers it as even more rigorous than argumentative style. According to him, philosophers and poets, "[t]he saying of the thinker (*das Sagen des Denkers*) and the naming of the poet (*das Nennen des Dichters*) [...] 'dwell near one another on mountains most separate' (*nahe wohnen auf getrenntesten Bergen*)". That is, "poetizing and thinking are most purely alike in their care of the word", and "they are at the same time farthest separated in their essence. The thinker

says being (*Der Denker sagt das Sein*). The poet names the holy (*Der Dichter nennt das Heilige*)" (Heidegger 1998, 237). So, for him,

> The thinking is […] poeticizing – though not in the sense of poesy or song. The thinking of being is the primordial form of poeticizing in which, before everything else, language first becomes language, enters, that is to say, its essence. Thinking says what the truth of being dictates (*Das Denken sagt das Diktat der Wahrheit des Seins*). Thinking is the ur-poetry which precedes all poesy (*Das Denken ist die Urdichtung, die aller Poesie voraufgeht*). […] All poeticizing, in both this broader and narrower sense of the poetic is, at bottom, thinking (*Alles Dichten in diesem weiteren und im engeren Sinne des Poetischen ist in seinem Grunde ein Denken*). (Heidegger 2002, 247)

Heidegger thus emphasizes the possibility or even the need of a new kind of "dialogue" between philosophy and poetry, in order to develop original stylistic means that may be able to adequately give expression to an original, indeed (supposedly) unprecedented way of thinking, the *Ereignis-Denken*. It is also worth mentioning that Heidegger, when dealing with the question of the beginning and the end of Western philosophy, often points out the double nature, both philosophical and poetical, of such fundamental figures as Parmenides and Heraclitus, whose "thinking is still poetic (*noch dichterisch*)" ("and here this means philosophical", he adds) (Heidegger 2000b, 154), and especially as Nietzsche, "the last thinker of Western philosophy", "the 'poet' of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*" (Heidegger 1990, 95). And the importance of poetry for the development of Heidegger's philosophy is finally testified by his own poetical production, which throughout the years proceeded together with his philosophical production and was recently collected in a specific volume of the *Gesamtausgabe* (see Heidegger 2007).

4.

At this point let me return to Adorno, the philosopher that the present article is focused on. On the basis of the observations presented in the previous sections, one would perhaps expect to discover hidden but substantial affinities between Adorno and Heidegger: two thinkers of the same epoch, with a quite similar philosophical and cultural

background, with analogous interests in literature and art, both strongly focused on the truth of art, and most of all with an analogous attention to the question of philosophy, style and literary form. Instead, precisely this question turns out to be one of the main aspects of Adorno's attempt "to implement a programme of 'smashing Heidegger' that Benjamin had conceived as early as 1930" (Müller-Doohm 2015, 431)[12]. Some critiques to Heidegger can already be found in Adorno's early writings: for example, his 1931 lecture *The Actuality of Philosophy* developed some critical arguments against Scheler's and Heidegger's ontological turn in phenomenology (Adorno 2000, 26-29; GS 1, 327-331), and in writing his 1933 book on Kierkegaard Adorno "was convinced that, in criticizing Kierkegaard, he was also aiming an annihilating blow at Heidegger" (Müller-Doohm 2005, 128). Anyway, Adorno began to write down the mature version of his critique of Heidegger during the 1950s and 1960s: some time after his return to Germany (1949/50) following his exile in the U.S.A., while in company of some guests in the house of a friend of Heidegger, he publicly announced his will to philosophically "annihilate" the latter (Mörchen 1981, 13).

The question of the presentation form plays an important role in Adorno's critique of Heidegger. And observing and analyzing Adorno's interest (and sometimes indeed obsession, as we have seen in the case of his writing and rewriting *Aesthetic Theory*) in the role of style in philosophizing through the lens of his critiques of Heidegger can be of great help to understand *ex negativo*, so to speak, his conception and use of language. In short, Adorno's idea seems to be that the concept of philosophy and/as *Dichtung* is functional to Heidegger's project of a *Destruktion* of traditional ontology, and then of a *Überwindung* or *Verwindung* of Western metaphysics as such. A project that, in turn, is aimed at eventually developing a new kind of post-metaphysical but not at all anti-ontological thinking, rather hyper-ontological: more ontological than ontology, as it were[13]. In Adorno, vice-versa, the search for style leads to an unceasing experimentation of different ways of writing that favors the development of a new kind of dialectics that is aimed at being post-metaphysical and radically anti-

ontological. Namely, it is aimed at setting philosophy free from what Adorno, precisely in criticizing Heidegger, calls "the ontological need". What has been said until now on dialectics vs. ontology, so to speak, is exemplified on a stylistic level by the use of parataxis as a means that perfectly embodies the aim of negative dialectics "to break the compulsion to achieve identity" and thus to emancipate philosophy from the violent nature of "the all-subjugating identity principle" (Adorno 1990, 157 and 320; GS 6, 159 and 314). A principle, the latter, that for Adorno is consubstantial to *all* ontology and metaphysics, including Heidegger's thought (Adorno 1997, vol. 2, 80-81).

Already in the 1930s Adorno observed that "[a]ll deceiving ontology is especially to be exposed by means of a critique of language" (Adorno 2007, 39; GS 1, 371**)**, and critically hinted at Heidegger's tendency to simply "invent" neologisms instead than focusing on the real problem of the "configuration of the words" (Adorno 2007, 37; GS 1, 368)[14]. This critique was later to be developed and brought to a further level in his mature writings, also connected to the question of philosophy and/as poetry. So, in *The Essay as Form*, with a clear (although not explicit) reference to Heidegger he writes: "Wherever philosophy imagines that by borrowing from literature it can abolish objectified thought and its history – what is commonly termed the antithesis of subject and object – and even hopes that Being itself will speak, in a *poésie* concocted of Parmenides and Jungnickel, it starts to turn into a washed-out cultural babble. […] Under the spell of such developments, language comes, where it still dares to stir in scholarship and science, to resemble the handicrafts" (Adorno 1991, 6-7; GS 11, 13-14), i.e. it only approximates pseudo-art. Adorno argues that "although art and science became separate in the course of history, the opposition between them should not be hypostatized", but then adds that the "separation of science and scholarship from art is irreversible", and hence their "lines of demarcation cannot be set aside through good will and comprehensive planning" (Adorno 1991, 6-7 and 9; GS 11, 13-14 and 16**)**. As a result, a kind of poetic thinking like Heidegger's (clearly evoked in the quotation by using the word *Seyn* written with an *y* instead than *i*, in a typical Heideggerian fashion[15])

refuses to honor the obligations of conceptual thought, to which, however, it had subscribed when it used concepts in its propositions and judgments. At the same time, its aesthetic element consists merely of watered-down, secondhand reminiscences of Hölderlin or Expressionism, or perhaps *Jugendstil*, because no thought can entrust itself as absolutely and blindly to language as the notion of a primordial utterance would lead us to believe. […] Language's ambitious transcendence of meaning ends up in a meaninglessness which can be easily seized upon by a positivism to which one feels superior. (Adorno 1991, 6-7; GS 11, 13-14)

As he also explains in *Negative Dialectics*:

Philosophy is neither a science nor the "cogitative poetry" to which positivists would degrade it in a stupid oxymoron. It is a form transmitted to those which differ from it as well as distinguished from them. Its suspended state is nothing but the expression of its inexpressibility. In this respect it is a true sister of music. […] Heidegger has innervated this and literally transformed that specific trait of philosophy – perhaps because it is on the point of extinction – into a specialty, an objectivity of quasi-superior rank: a philosophy that knows it is judging neither facts nor concepts the way other things are judged, a philosophy that is not even sure what it is dealing with, would seek a positive content just the same, beyond facts, concepts, and judgments. […] By treating the inexpressible side of philosophy as his immediate theme, Heidegger dams up philosophy all the way back to a revocation of consciousness. […] What Heidegger attributes to the poverty of our time is the poverty of a thought that fancies itself beyond time. (Adorno 1990, 109-110; GS 6, 115-116)

Adorno sharply criticizes all those philosophers who, from his point of view, abandon a rigorous way of philosophizing in favor of a sort of pseudo-poetry, as he seems to interpret Heidegger's ideal of *dichtendes Denken* and/as *denkende Dicthung*. For Adorno, "every time someone tried to understand the works of philosophers as if they were poems (*als Dichtungen*), their intrinsic truth content (*Wahrheitsgehalt*) was missed" (GS 2, 9), i.e. misunderstood and misconceived. So he explicitly criticizes, among other things, Heidegger's "poeticization" (or, on other occasions, "philologization") of philosophy (Adorno 1997, vol. 1, 70 and 169). In his 1962-63 lectures Adorno even compares Heidegger's attempts to develop a new philosophical-poetic style to merely bad poetry and kitsch literature that, as such, easily fall prey of the mechanisms of the culture industry (Adorno 1997, vol. 1, 154-155 and 158).

According to him, "it would be better just to liquidate philosophy once and for all and to dissolve it into particular disciplines than to come to its aid with a poetic ideal which means nothing more than a poor ornamental cover for faulty thinking" (Adorno 2000, 30; GS 1, 332). This kind of criticism also emerges in *The Jargon of Authenticity*, where he explicitly refers to Heidegger's "little volume of gnomic thoughts entitled *Out of the Experience of Thinking*", and says that its form "keeps to the middle ground between poetry and pre-Socratic fragment". However, "the sibylline character of the pre-Socratic fragments really results, at least in many of them, from the accident of a discontinuous tradition, and not from secretiveness", while Heidegger instead

> brings back the threadbare ideology of pure materials, from the realm of handicrafts to that of the mind – as if words were pure, and, as it were, roughened material. But textiles of that sort are mediated, today, through their calculated opposition to mass production; and in just that way Heidegger wants, synthetically, to create a primal sense for pure words. […] [T]he triviality of the simple is not, as Heidegger would like it to be, attributable to the value-blindness of thought that has lost being. Such triviality comes from thinking that is supposedly in tune with being and reveals itself as something supremely noble. Such triviality is the sign of that classifying thought, even in the simplest word, from which Heidegger pretends that he has escaped: namely, abstraction. (Adorno 1973, 50-51; GS 6, 446-448 and 451)

Of course, despite the plausibility of some elements in Adorno's criticism, it might be wondered whether this strong and relentless criticism fully applies to Heidegger's thought in its entirety, and there are actually good reasons to be skeptical about this. For example, one could take into consideration Heidegger's own remarks that thinking as *Ereignis-Denken* is not ontology and rather keeps continuously challenging the identity principle; and one could also take into account some recent scholarship that has moved beyond Adorno's claims with regard to Heidegger. Anyway, the aims of this article are more limited, being focused on Adorno and, as I said, somehow using Heidegger to let emerge *e contrario* Adorno's conception. Hence what matters for the specific purposes of this article is not an evaluation of the tenable or untenable character of Adorno's critique of Heidegger's in general, but rather some strictly

theoretical implications of this critique, such as the idea that a conception of *Denken* and/as *Dichten* is functional for him to an "ontological, all too ontological" philosophical project which, in turn, is particularly suited to convey a pseudo-poetic mythology of Being (see Adorno 1990, 118; GS 6, 124). Whereas Adorno's equal importance on the stylistic dimension of philosophizing is aimed vice-versa at favoring, also by the adoption of certain rhetorical devices and presentation forms, the development of a negative-dialectical way of philosophizing that is at odds with ontology as such, since the latter, "in all its embattled trends [...] is apologetical" (Adorno 1990, 61; GS 6, 69) for him – which also means uncritical and, in a sense, untrue.

This emerges in the perhaps clearest way in his observations on the essay form, as he seems to attribute some basic features of his own ideal of negative dialectics to this kind of presentation form. For example, he explains that in the essay "concepts are not derived from a first principle, nor do they fill out to become ultimate principles" (Adorno 1991, 4; GS 11, 10). And also that "the essay, in accordance with its idea, draws the fullest conclusions from the critique of system", "does not aim at a closed deductive or inductive structure", and "incorporates the antisystematic impulse into its own way of proceeding" (Adorno 1991, 9-10 and 12; GS 11, 16-17 and 20). At the same time, the essay (just like negative dialectics, once again) "does not stand in simple opposition to discursive procedure. It is not unlogical; it obeys logical criteria insofar as the totality of its propositions must fit together coherently", but it simply "does not develop its ideas in accordance with discursive logic. [...] It coordinates elements instead of subordinating them". It is "concerned with what is blind in its objects. It wants to use concepts to pry open the aspect of its objects that cannot be accommodated by concepts" (Adorno 1991, 22-23; GS 11, 31-32). Given these basic assumptions, Adorno feels legitimated to define the essay as "the critical form *par excellence*", as a suitable form for the "critique of ideology", as a form that is even "more dialectical than the dialectic is when the latter discourses on itself" (Adorno 1991, 18-19; GS 11, 27-28). Like negative dialectics, the essay

> thinks in fragments, just as reality is fragmentary, and finds its unity in and through the breaks and not by glossing them over […] Its totality, the unity of a form developed immanently, is that of something not total, a totality that does not maintain as form the thesis of the identity of thought and its object that it rejects as content. […] The experience is mediated through the essay's own conceptual organization; the essay proceeds, so to speak, methodically unmethodically. […] The essay becomes true in its progress, which drives it beyond itself, not in a treasure-hunting obsession with foundations. Its concepts receive their light from a *terminus ad quem* hidden from the essay itself, not from any obvious *terminus a quo*, and in this the method itself expresses its utopian intention. (Adorno 1991, 16-17 and 13; GS 11, 25-26 and 21)

For this reason, the essay form can be considered as one of the original solutions (beside aphorisms and parataxis, as has been already explained) conceived by Adorno in order to rethink the question of philosophy, style and literary form in the age in which philosophy, that "once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed". Namely, the age in which philosophy, "[h]aving broken its pledge to be as one with reality or at the point of realization, […] is obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself" (Adorno 1990, 3; GS 6, 15), and thus to reinvent itself: *last but not least* also from a stylistic point of view. A negative-dialectical presentation form and style opens up the possibility of a negative-dialectical way of thinking and thus of a transformation of philosophy, of a *veränderte Philosophie.*

NOTES

[1] Quite paradoxically, the postmodernist tendency to level off the genre distinction between philosophy and literature usually remained at a general level and only seldom paved the way for specific and in-depth analyses of the various styles used in the history of Western thought (D'Angelo 2012, 11). On this topic, see also Ferraris 1986; Gentili 2003; Figal 2014.

[2] On Adorno's "search for style" and, in general, the role of language in his philosophy, see also the recent contributions by Bolaños 2016 and ***D'Acunto 2***017. Among the most recent works on Adorno, Payot 2018 (107-110 and 129-131) emphasizes the influence of music on Adorno's conception of language and, in general, of philosophy and experience.

[3] On the question of truth in Adorno, see for example Früchtl 1989; Schweppenhäuser 2003; Hulatt 2016. On this question, let me also remind the reader of Marino 2019, especially chapter 1 (forthcoming).

[4] As once noted, it would be indeed "particularly ironic to inscribe in an identical field Adorno's uncompromising insistence on non-identity and Derrida's play of difference and *différance*", so "it is not an identity" that one must or even can search for in this field, but rather "the probing of a constellation" (Nägele 1982-83, 59).

[5] I owe these examples to a suggestion from a former student of mine at the University of Bologna, Melissa Antonelli, whom I would like therefore to thank.

[6] Other examples of a chiasmatic kind of construction can be: "Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (GS 3, 16 [Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, XVIII]); or also: "Form is mediated in-itself through content […] and content is mediated by form" (GS 7, 529 [Adorno 2004, 356]).

[7] This is an example of a rhetorical device frequently adopted by him and defined by Gillian Rose as "ironic inversion" (Rose 1978, 16-17). In this particular case, Adorno ironically (and thus critically) inverts the meaning of Hegel's famous principle: "The true is the whole (*Das Wahre ist das Ganze*)".

[8] For a contextualization of Adorno's use of the essay form in the history of this genre, see Schärf 1999.

[9] For the specific purposes of this article it is important to remind the reader that a great part of Adorno's essay *Parataxis* was devoted to a strong critique of Heidegger's alternative interpretation of Hölderlin. As has been noted, language "surely meant something different to Adorno from what it meant to Heidegger. […] He used Hölderlin to defend utopia against Heidegger" (Wiggershaus 1995, 529).

[10] A recent and important source for the reconstruction and interpretation of Adorno's process of work at his late and unfinished masterpiece, namely *Aesthetic Theory*, are his lectures on aesthetics from 1958-59 published in the context of his *Nachgelassene Schriften* (see Adorno 2009), although mostly from the point of view of the contents (as emphasized for example by Matteucci 2012, 100-105 and 132-135, and by Marino and Matteucci 2016, 24-42, with regard to the central concept of natural beauty) than from the point of view of the form and literary style.

[11] On the controversial relationship between Heidegger's concept of "overcoming metaphysics" and the so-called "post-metaphysical thinking" from the 1980s, see Figal 2009, 185-204.

[12] Benjamin's "agenda that included the 'annihilation' of Heidegger" is mentioned, for example, in Eiland and Jennings 2014, 346.

[13] On the ontological vocation of Heidegger's philosophy of art and his conception of the setting-to-work-of-truth in art and poetic language, see Vattimo 2010 (especially chapters 2, 4, 6 and 10).

[14] Also in his 1962-63 lecture course on philosophical terminology Adorno objects to Heidegger that he is simply attempting to create a new "crypto-terminology" (see Adorno 1997, vol. 1, 28 and 40; and Adorno 1997, vol. 2, 32-33).

[15] To be precise, Adorno criticizes here the "preartistic manipulation of materials as devoid of meaning as only the '*Seyn*' (Being) of the philosophy departments can be" (Adorno 1991, 7; GS 11, 14).

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