"Existence as Style"

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ABSTRACT: This essay, drawn from the book *Styles: A Critique of Our Forms of Life*, proposes a "stylistics of existence." The essay sketches out how the question of style appears across diverse philosophical and literary texts. It identifies three reigning logics of style—distinction, modal logic, and individuation—before arguing that any discussion of style must entail an interrogation of values. Within this context, it suggests, literature has an important role to play insofar as it can foster an open inquiry into style, conceived as the site of ethical and political struggles over how to live.

un'idea di stile: uno stilo! Piantata nel cuore
An idea of style—a stylus!—planted in my heart.
—Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Bestia da stile (Beast of Style)*[1]

THE HUMAN BEING: a "beast of style." Neither beast of burden nor best in show (an expert in role-playing, stage-setting, or dissimulating), but rather, a beast of style: an expert in ways of being—bound to its ways of being, but also freed by them, manipulated by them, even lost…

I believe that a life is inseparable from its forms: from its modalities, structures, gestures, manners, ways…all of which are already *ideas*. That from an ethical perspective, every being is a way of being. And that the world we share and out of which we make meaning is not only divided into individuals, classes or groups, but also into "styles," so many phrasings of life. That in some ways, furthermore, this is the only means by which we are affected or captured by the world, animated as it is by forms that attract or repel, those we can inhabit or those we cannot.

This essay is an excerpt from *Styles: Critique de nos formes de vie* (*Styles: A Critique of Our Forms of Life*), published by Gallimard in 2016, translated by Victoria Baena. It has been edited for brevity throughout.

[1] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teatro* (Milan: Garzanti, 1988), 632.

In other words: *qualified* forms. And not simply forms, but forms that matter, which are invested with values and reasons to hold—to hold on to—as well as combat.

This notion of forms of life has served as the foundation for many of our contemporary expectations, our claims, and most of all our choices. For a "form of life" is something we decide on—perhaps the only thing we do all agree to decide on. Our debates are always debates over forms of life, and along with them, entire ideas about life that are defended, or welcomed, or indicted. Struggles over who we are take place on the very surface of sensible life, on the surface of the "how": how we live, how we act, how we go about living. . . . A form of life is only experienced in the form of a commitment, wherever any existence, whether personal or collective, puts its idea on the line—not the idea it has of itself, but rather the idea it *is*.[2] Recent histories of terror and hope have once again urgently heightened the stakes of wishing to defend one's form of life, without a fuss, just by living it—but also of managing to doubt it, even while demanding it from all others.[3]

This emboldens me, then, to extend the field of forms well beyond the sphere of the arts, and to propose a critical examination of a veritable "stylistics of existence."[4] A stylistics of existence requires a dispassionate interest in *everything* involved in life's formal variations on itself. Styles, manners, ways: today, nonetheless, these words have become overly simplistic and widely fetishized. They are marketing keywords, aggressive and complacent at once, haunting, even polluting public discourse—flattening analysis as they intimidate and exclude, as they stroke individuals' narcissism to sell "lifestyles" alongside products, or as they invite each of us to treat ourselves as a work of art, to "distinguish ourselves" by building on our presumed singularity. (What relentless dandyism—so increasingly voracious and violent even in a society of equals, or rather hypothetical equals…) But a stylistics of existence is no aestheticization of living, no ornament to the kind of self-presentation that comes wrapped in a bow. No, a stylistics of existence is broader than that, and in particular far more uncertain; it does not necessarily deal with dazzling, triumphant lives, nor with highly prized looks, nor elegant bodies. Its wager is that all lives commit to forms, to all kinds of forms; that their meaning cannot be judged in advance; and that it is therefore necessary to pay close attention to them, without knowing from the outset what they entail nor what they will come to mean. A stylistics of existence, in other words, takes responsibility for the fundamentally open, inquiring, and always ongoing question of *how* to live. The inquiry does not end with the articulation of the word "style" (or "rhythm," or "way of living,"

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2 This is a recurring formula for Jean-Christophe Bailly.

3 Thus have Patrick Boucheron and Mathieu Riboulet articulated the political significance of the reactions to the terrorist attacks of January and November 2015: "To wish to defend one's form of life by settling to live it out despite everything, tenaciously and discreetly, to defend it as an ethical truth that is experienced in the very act of being shared, made not into doctrine or ideology, but a truth on what connects us to ourselves, among each other and to the world." Patrick Boucheron and Mathieu Riboulet, *Prendre dates. Paris, 6 janvier–14 janvier 2015* [Taking dates: Paris, January 6–14, 2015] (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2015), 125. I might also cite, almost at random (though it is obviously no coincidence that I am already encountering him on this route), Philippe Lançon in *Libération*: "We form a chain, soldered by grief and suffering, to be sure, but also by the mode of life and thinking that these murderers want to destroy despite us." Philippe Lançon, "Les tueurs sont revenus, eux ou d'autres, vivants ou morts" [The killers, or others, have returned, alive or dead], *Libération,* November 23, 2015.

4 The expression is Michel Foucault's; it comes to substitute, though rarely, for what he calls much more often "aesthetics of existence." See, e.g., Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings* 1977-1984, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 47–53. I will have the opportunity to articulate what my attempt owes to this approach, though also how it tries to diverge from it, especially on axiological terms.

or "manner of being"); rather, it has only begun. And it is urgent to embark on such an inquiry, for these are among the most present—but also most ambivalent—terms of our common culture.

Indeed, with such words we say one thing but also the opposite, targeting disparate objects, competing desires . . . to utter them never means uniting around shared convictions (as if we ever agreed on what we are talking about); rather, it means appearing on the scene of a quarrel where nothing has yet been decided upon—not even the questions we wish to ask, or the realities to which we decide to be truly attentive. As a result, we will have to reopen expressions like "forms of life," "lifestyle," and "way of life," restoring their uncertainty and internal conflict, as they are wrested from their status as slogans. At stake will be a scattered array of values and ideas about life, about which of its forms deserve to be held on to and heeded.

The question thus immediately splits off into two: first, into the "how" of our lives—what are their contours, how are they arranged, what are they like? But secondly: how to examine that "how," how to talk about it, do justice to it, judge it? It's not only (though even this is saying much) about insisting that there are always forms to life, but also about reflecting on everything at stake in those terms and in this domain: recognizing the possibilities or highly contrary ideas of life that can be introduced by forms; considering the fact that this question will always open up a site of contention and commitment; and fostering the social processes that will be able to make us increasingly conscious of the same.[5] Such issues, therefore, deserve a vast lexicon, patient thinking that can leave open the possibility of being surprised, alongside an active awareness of the real conflicts entailed by the very fact of what one decides to pay attention to on the level of the sensible.

This essay scrutinizes such multiplicity: the stakes, diffuse as they are, of this "how." I am a literary critic, but literature, here, will not be my object of study; rather it will be my ally, even guide, in interrogating the meaning of one form of life or another (literature is very good at this—this is its purview, and its virtue). From the start I want to put literature into dialogue with those social sciences—sociology, anthropology—that explore the realms of the *ways-of, manners-of,* the bearings and gestures in which we engage every day. For I am convinced that the task of qualifying these forms, of describing them well and treating them fairly—treating them with respect, but also with anger, when there's something in them we wish to change—is a responsibility that literature and the social sciences (both, in that sense, "sciences of style") share.

Let's begin, then, by pushing the gates of style wide open and letting in some fresh air, some whiff of the unexpected, to our relation to forms, returning some of the uncertainty and even internal conflict to notions we have forfeited today. Let's attempt to reach beyond (or below) those narrow pursuits that make up the stock-in-trade of style—fashion and taste, each of which might contribute to, without exhausting, the social and ethical breadth of the phenomena involved. Out, then, with the fetishization of style. Even if brandished as a slogan, the word, in its very inadequacy, might simply launch a critical reflection on the meaning of the forms taken by life, for the domain of style, I am convinced, confirms par excellence that law of Nietzsche's: There is no perception, no *aesthesis,* that is not suffused with values.[6]

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5 See Cyril Lemieux, "Ambition de la sociologie" [Ambitions of Sociology], *Archives de la philosophie* 76 (2013): 591–608.

6 See Paul Audi, *L'Affaire Nietzsche* [The Nietzsche Affair] (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2013), 17.

In order to expand from the outset the spectrum of values enlisted by and assignable to the realm of style, I launch this inquiry with an example where what is decided upon is something quite apart from the construction of elegance or the pursuit of status: the example of Pier Paolo Pasolini. To be honest, this is not just any example, for Pasolini was the initial motivation and ally in my desire to pay tribute to all that is debated in life's formal features. Pasolini, my "Beatrice"—a respectful and raging guide. Pasolini, the civic poet who dared to diagnose a disconcerting brutality in his own present around what most wounded him and what he most cared about: the feeling, at once intimate and openly dangerous, of a vast *crisis of style*, a crisis of gestures, relational modes, in the conduct and powers of the people. (Before, for him, the people had embodied a space of stylistic achievement—that is, exemplary human achievement.)

It was through his inordinate concern over style that Pasolini denounced increasingly constricted popular forms of life in his own time. This concern arose from a particular faculty of his, as a subject who could be wounded by forms and who therefore mustered forms to appear before him. Pasolini was deeply attached to the question of the forms taken by life, of one person's life or another's; he devoted most of his efforts to speaking these forms, to expounding on his sense that popular modes of being were being lost to history, and to revealing the anger that such a loss could provoke for someone who held so powerfully to this aspect of life in common. Was he right? To a certain extent, Pasolini undeniably dreamed up his "people." But his anger (his poetic rage, *rabbia poetica*) and his effort to consider the metamorphoses of the formal aspects of existence encourage me to return anew to the whole question of "styles of life," and to recognize style as a tool—open, flexible, critical, but also profoundly ambivalent—for qualifying the act of living.

Pasolini, a bit like Hannah Arendt, considered every existence as a promise reaching outwards; he wished to safeguard the possibilities of what Arendt called human "appearance." For him, everything converged on the sense of sacredness in style. This was no desire to aestheticize daily life (much less any wish to sanctify art), but rather a decision about the value of the human on the whirring surface of different forms of life. He tried, then, to render all things visible as "an engine where the holy was about to explode,"[7] and he located this sacredness in faces, bodies, or gestures with a strength reaching outwards, that is, in the formal power and capacity for vibrancy that are a feature of human life. His art of the close-up is exemplary of this belief, as the visible is equated with the vibrancy of certain faces at each moment. It was the vibrancy of the human face, winking in and out, so to speak, like a firefly, that Pasolini saw embodied at its peak by the people, his "people." Such vibrancy would have to be sustained by conditions socially and historically made for life (for forms must be helped to exert their power), and which certain economic and social processes can extinguish very quickly, and very violently. (We might remember that Pasolini dedicated one of his final articles to the disappearance of fireflies from the Italian landscape in the 1970s, and that this extinction of modest glimmers, neither invisible nor blinding, was for him the mark of a "cultural apocalypse," with critical differences in popular life having been crushed by a "bourgeois revolution.") His splendid travel notes, especially from India or southern Italy, collect this glow and speak of its effect on him. He wished to be vigilant to this, to watch out for it, to deploy it—in his own art, obviously (his Friulian poetry, his Roman novels, and the great films of desire collected in the *Trilogy of Life*)—but also through his enduring talent of being simply *affected* by it.

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7 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Les Dernières Paroles d'un impie. Entretiens avec Jean Duflot* [The Last Words of an Unbeliever: Interviewers with Jean Duflot] (Paris: Belfond, 1981), 121.

Nevertheless, Pasolini turned away from his initial achievement; he had long felt that the customs of the people might in some sense rescue the present from the global degradation of its forms (a degradation due, briefly put, to the spread of capitalism as the dominant form of life): "The surroundings of Rome *appear* to me, in fact, just as one might speak of an apparition, a dream, a stylistic dream."[8] (And then, in the mouth of Sergio Citti: in this wretched *borgata romana* [urban periphery of Rome], "everything is style, even the air").[9] But in 1975, he abruptly abjured all of his works that had rendered popular bodies a refuge for this living vibrancy, a shelter for his "stylistic dream." His attention was increasingly besieged by the sense of a gigantic seizure of forms. He felt that consumer values had fully swallowed up, even overturned, the reserve stock of the sacred that might otherwise be represented by popular life. It was as if the people had turned against their own "power of style." This is what dominates the political texts of his final years: the sense of an anthropological revolution, the "first real right-wing revolution," which had transformed not only the world but also what humans "existentially are," in determining "their ways of being."[10] (Henri Lefebvre was saying much the same thing, though in a less apocalyptic fashion, in his *Critique of Everyday Life*, as he called for a reappropriation of the everyday, its promises, its festivals, its style.) Pasolini, for his part, formulates this with violence, grief, and madness; in the 1970s, his violence was directed entirely toward that sense of destruction of a life force he saw enacted in the very forms of living. He describes modernity as absolutely uninhabitable, doubles down in his hate, and excludes himself from all possible solidarities. This is what accounts for the solitude of his thinking, which shocked everyone and suited no one: something like the price that modernity pays for grace.

This disgust for the present can be considered as a simple incapacity to inhabit new forms of experience (and thus to shoulder History as such), which would lead us down another pathway entirely, into anti-modernism, negative dialectics, and reaction. But it might also turn into a revealing power. For at heart Pasolini returns the injury to sender: Essentially, to my mind, it was by evaluating *forms of life* that he compelled them to appear. Here, the one who causes a scandal, who exposes himself, is primarily whoever steps into the ring to force life's modalities to expose themselves, by challenging them to prove themselves. This insistence on a stylistic summons distances Pasolini from the reactionary laments that he might otherwise seem to represent, for they involve much more than that: a genuine anthropology of modes of being, an attempt at a politics of style.

Indeed, with Pasolini, his gradual enclosure in a kind of disdain or paradoxical dandyism is less important than his consistent vigilance to forms, his continued attention to the whole spectrum of gestures and customs—those that attract him as much as those that wound him, but which he properly grasps as powerful or impotent, forcing them to show themselves and requiring us to look at them. Even in his hate, his love for style (style as love) can be sensed. His fulminations are thus not only a refusal of his contemporary world, but rather a way of remaining attentive at all costs and of rendering others constantly attentive to forms as well as to forces: forces of orienting life that must be protected, rekindled, but also denounced, one by one.

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8 Ibid., 66.

9 Sergio Citti, "Tout est style" [All is style], trans. A. Bergala and S. Bevacqua, in "Pasolini cineaste," special issue, *Les Cahiers du cinéma,* (1981): 65.

10 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Écrits corsairs* [Corsair writings], trans. Philippe Guilhon (Paris: Flammarion, 1976), 41.

Pasolini was captivated by all realms of expressivity: behaviors, objects, relations to objects (what he called the "discourse of things"), fashion, advertising, schooling, television, bodily habitus, sexual life, the capacity or incapacity for landscapes and homes to accommodate life's opportunities. He not only made these the object of a semiotics or sociology of external signs of classification (after the fashion of Roland Barthes' initial *Mythologies,* or Pierre Bourdieu's graphs in *Distinction*); he also proved attentive to the resources of otherness and joy, or, on the contrary, to the forces of these resources' dissolution and destruction, which necessarily exist in gestures, in one's relationship to language, bodies, practices, and ways of acting . . .

For instance, drawing attention (like Bourdieu, another angry man, would later do) to what is broadcast on television, he wrote, "The importance of what television teaches is enormous, because it does nothing else but offer a series of 'examples' of being and behavior," in a "language of things" that "does not admit of rejoinders, alternatives, resistance."[11] The children of the bourgeoisie, he concludes, find themselves "cruelly punished for their way of life."[12] And rooting out the contemporary rhetoric which teaches the young Gennariello (that teenager to whom he speaks in his strange pedagogical treaty, the *Lutheran Letters*) not to be radiant, but rather to snuff himself out like those fireflies: "But you, Gennariello, are radiant!"[13]

This passion for the forms that animate life depends on a formidable stance (so great is the need) on the very idea of style: "Style is the direct consequence of my sense of reality as appearance of the divine."[14] Or else: "In the matter of style, there is religiosity. I still recognize the religiosity of style in the fact that there I can't cheat."[15] The religiosity of style—really? But is the idea so exorbitant, so anachronistic, so un-incorporable? Perhaps not. Pasolini called this his "aesthetic sin." But I find in it a more significant social, communal stance: the awareness that every life is consubstantial with its "how," which is also its power; and the conviction that attending to forms of living indicates that a life has once again become capable. The central point is this passion for manners of being, conceived as powers or, indeed, lost as powers. The question then becomes: how might each person manage, or be placed in a position to manage, the stylistic, gestural, rhythmic impulses that pertain to their humanity?

Something within us should know to be perturbed by just such a worry. For the question of style, once we have decided not to see it exclusively as the key to luxury (in other words, the stock-in-trade of advertising with its own powers of capture), entails the *relentless conquest of value playing out again and again in each form.* In this, the opposite of "style" is neither banality nor commonness but rather indifference. This is also the lesson of literature, in its immanence: that each singularity matters, since it can be a pathway into one potential of life.

The human being as a "beast of style," then. Or rather: a beast of styles, since in targeting gestures, hopes, configurations, connections, these values are almost always in conflict with each other. Above all, subjects themselves (individual but also collective) are to be understood as sites of conflict. *Bestia da stile*—"Beast of Style"—is the title of one of Pasolini's last tragedies. This title lends a name to the power with which I will be concerned in what follows, which consists of *wishing to see* what Barthes, in those same years, would call the "subtle forms of living," a disposition for

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11 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Lutheran Letters,* trans. Stuart Hood (New York: Carcanet Press, 1987), 30.

12 Ibid., 16.

13 Ibid., 45.

14 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *L'Inédit de New York* [New York unseen], trans. Anne Bourguignon (Paris: Arléa, 2008), 66.

15 Ibid., 65.

grasping that grain of style within every life, a rage for judging, accusing, loving or repairing lives in their forms, in the ways they prove capable. "Style" is by no means the final word; it is at once a torment and a resource for the living, which only opens up the infinite variation of the "how": how to do, how to be, how to live together, *as* what? According to what kinds of formal commitments?

In that sense I would like to use this reflection on style as a tool for grasping and qualifying whatever might be understood as forms of life. In a way, what I am attempting with style is what Paul Ricoeur and others have proposed doing for narrative: extracting an anthropological, moral, political concept from a literary notion—even to the point of reaching a dead end or risking the flattening of an idea. This would mean that the notion has to remain, to a certain extent, consistent.

And yet it is an endlessly repeated commonplace that we do not know what style is. Quarrels over its definition are infinite, as indeed they must be, given that they involve our decisions over values. But what is meant by style is far from undefinable. It would be more precise to say that each style, a certain style, is difficult to describe (and often is not described, even or especially when the word "style" is brandished like a banner), precisely because it requires work to perceive it, to acknowledge it and to render it explicit. That is, it involves attention to the singular, to the meaning that arises each time anew. Nevertheless, the challenge that the call to manage these singularities poses for interpretation is no obstacle. Rather, this is what is meant by the very question of style: The point of deciding is to bend one's effort and will toward the decision, to take the measure of what it implies, and to commit to it. One can thus, provisionally, define what concerns or regards the question of style.

Style is, first, a matter of appearance, of the phenomenal. It assumes a concern for the sensible, the visible, the perceptible—the "how"—and a concern for these phenomena (ways of being and appearing, gestures, settings, behaviors, rhythms, images; the torments but also the trivial futilities of material life…) not as aspects appended to human existence or our social drama, but as one of the levels at which they are described, debated, even won.

Style is no mere set of qualities, but rather a set of identifiable, excessive, saturated qualities, which (like saints in Christian iconography) point a finger at themselves. For style does not simply concern appearance; it implies the identification of dominant, adjectival schemes that attract attention, conjure up details, and open up a whole life of differences. Some features contrast with others; certain properties are placed in relief; some are accentuated, others not. This is one of the major issues for the question of style: it creates a force field, puts appearances into relief, constructs divergent, punctuated dynamics, "values" (and here we are)—a "this-rather-than-that." And thus, potentially, violences too. (This was one aspect of the stylus, digging its signature into the wax tablet like a wound: style, true "spur" of the sensible, as Jacques Derrida has referred to Nietzsche's styles—the dagger of an idea "buried in the heart," as Pasolini too proclaimed.)[16] In these punctuated, salient movements, a style imposes itself as an act of differentiation, or rather a "differentiation in the act," and it is this dynamic of punctuated value that attracts attention, that incites attraction or repulsion, that affects, seizes, compels.

Such accents are characteristic; they allow for the recognition and identification of a form among its many occurrences (in the practice of art history, this is the very question of *attribution*).

16 Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles,* trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

In that sense, style always is an "individuated" affair. Individuated: that is, a form with edges drawn around it. And not necessarily around a person; it is important not to collapse the formal and essential question of "individuation" from the start onto the psychic category of the person and the triumph of the "self." Style can be at once more and less than a person; it can traverse a subject; it can be what takes a subject far beyond herself.

If style implies such recognition, it is because it is repeated or, rather, generalized. It is maintained in movement and by movement—as each word of a phrase succeeds another, or as a shadow follows each stride, by which it confirms even itself. ("*Vera incessu patuit dea*": Virgil's goddess could be *sensed* by her step, by the way she moved.) It is this power of persistence in and through movement that enables a style to be identified, and to be identified as style: a form that emerges from a background, individualized and persisting, for it never stops re-emerging out of the formless. Style thus does not rest solely on a sum of features, but rather on the way form proceeds within the sensible, existing in and by transformation. This convergence effect also leads to the question of *meaning* in style. If a style must always be interpreted, it is because a form always risks a meaning, implies a certain idea, articulates a certain thought—or, as Francis Ponge might say, takes a stand:[17] a certain orientation of the very fact of existence, an idea of form that has taken on form, a type of being and a regime of experience, something *possible*. It is precisely such a solidarity between form and idea that the question of style binds together: each way of presenting oneself also opens the door to endowing and sharing the sensible, valued and recognized as such.

This aperture into the "idea," finally, is how the singular exceeds itself: it enables repetition (which allows a being to coincide with itself in time), and thus can also be taken up by someone else, spanning from appropriation to misappropriation or pastiche. In other words, it can circulate or be abstracted, shared, generalized. If stylistic phenomena are repeated, they are also repetitive, apt for appropriation or expropriation. "Style always returns to a singular form and as such is a mark of individuality. But this mark of individuality is always on the way to being generalized."[18] A style is not a thing, or a person, but the characteristic manner of that thing: its singular way of setting forth, and which exceeds it. It is the individual (the "someone") that can be open to being shared, common, and thus also expropriated. Form, reiterated and persistent, becomes in this sense a *mode*—a way of being that can be transposed from one occurrence to another, from one object to another, inapt, endlessly appropriable and never entirely appropriated. For a time, a slightly dated vision of the individual, of "one's own being" or one's "own life," warmed itself at the hearth of the word "style" in an absolutist sense (Bergson, Gide, Péguy . . .)[19] but this could not be sustained for too long—"one wants too much to be someone," as Henri Michaux writes.[20] For in style the singular is always in motion, always exceeding itself. Moving and exceeding itself to what end? Toward a value in life, a possibility of meaning able to be carried from person to person, from genre to genre, persisting beyond whoever ventured it, changing direction—at times also

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17 See Francis Ponge, *Le parti pris des choses* [Taking a Stand on Things] (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).

18 See Laurent Jenny, "Le Style" [Style], "Méthodes et problèmes" [Methods and problems] (lecture, University of Geneva, Geneva, 2011), https://www.unige.ch/lettres/framo/enseignements/methodes/.

19 Thus Péguy—whose entire critique of the modern becomes submerged in an equivalence between *being someone* and *having a style*, writes: "It was an operation, a matter of life, existence, being, because it was the matter of your own life, your own existence, your own being. . . . If you're not someone, you'll never have any style. You won't even be able to ride around on some style of bicycle, because this is also a style." Thus Péguy, "Un poète l'a dit" [A poet said it], *Oeuvres completes,* vol. 2. (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 1975), 821–22.

20 Henri Michaux, *A Certain Plume,* trans. Richard Sieburth (New York: New York Books, 2018), 189.

caricaturing itself, becoming stuck. In this the individual constitutes a useable, mobile, mediated power, no longer enclosed in the prison of the unique but rather becoming potential, restoring its variation, which others might shoulder, endow, augment, or distort. And it is this stylistic rush of the real that can also lead to its appropriation.

Words of style intrude precisely at the moment when the recognition of a chance, thought, or dispatch is rendered explicit within a given form. Appearance, then, does not suffice for there to be style; there must also be recognition, a taking of responsibility. "Recognition," here, must be granted a rich and plural meaning: recognizing something or someone by a style, recognizing a style in someone (critiquing them in their style, as well), will mean treating them as a source of values. At the core of debates on the notion of style, the attractions or antipathies borne by it, is the supposed orientation of such values (grace, novelty, otherness, prestige, the common, the impersonal?): starting from the idea of the human that is entailed by one or another conception of style, one or another way of describing it, or rather distrusting it.

To see style is thus also to recognize in a singular (but not personal) configuration a worthwhile form—one worth holding, holding on to, one worth our concern, though also our indictment. To see a style, to see in style, is to say: I was struck, I was touched, I was affected by this taking-on-form that is a leap beyond indifference. It is not necessarily a form to which *I* adhere—it might even be one I do not want and that I mean to combat—but it is a form I conceive as being possible in life, as a way of thinking, a force: yes, life can also be "like this," it can have this aspect. It can entail a generalizable idea of living, and it is precisely because this singularity leads to generalization (or expropriation) that it can be called "style." Style is the improper life of singularities.

To think of someone as subject of a style, to recall them in this way, is not exactly like recalling the protagonist of a story. One is not only the subject of a life history but also the subject of forms of life, anonymous and divisible, which unite and divide us from each other quite differently than the events and crossroads of our biographies. This is no longer a question of memory, of time that passes and will not return; it is about listening to the thinking diffused by all lives, delivered by life in its very forms,[21] and it is the promise of such thinking prolonged.

A STYLISTIC MOMENT IN CULTURE

Questions of style can thus serve as tools for qualifying life, and we should take our time in asking which parts of life we really can better see (and say) with the help of style. But if it is possible to make style into such a broad tool, this is not only a methodological choice. Vocabularies and questions of style have already been imposed in many spheres at different historical moments, in order to think about, describe, and evaluate life (or to quarrel with others about how to do so). A brief survey will clarify how these stylistic lexicons and inquiries have unfolded across the arts as well as philosophy, social sciences, and the life sciences, beginning roughly speaking with the period following the French Revolution. From Balzac or Nietzsche to Kafka and Perec, from Simmel to Mauss, Bourdieu, and Agamben, life has indeed been conceived, not solely but significantly, as a commitment to forms. At a certain point a particular interest arose in forms

21 The proposal can be found in Giorgio Agamben: "Only if thought is able to find the political element that has been hidden away in the secrecy of singular existence … will politics be able to escape from its muteness and individual biography from its idiocy." Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies,* trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), xxi.

that can be donned, acquired, established, and lost by subjects in the game of modern sociality, as well as forms they are condemned to take on.

In his *Treatise on Elegant Living* (1830), for instance, Honoré de Balzac ventures a lofty division of the social world, entirely based on a consideration of "manners" (which he conceives of as forces of distinction and difference). He links this division to a new postrevolutionary society, one which collectively demands each person's autonomy, with the expectation that each "exhausts his genius in finding distinctions." He writes: "Modern customs have created three classes of being: the man who works/the man who thinks/the man who does nothing. Hence three rather complete formulas of existence to express all ways of life . . . : the busy life/the artist's life/the elegant life."[22] Classes of being, formulas of existence, ways of life: this is a new vocabulary. Decades later, Nietzsche would endorse the most explicit version of that declaration, writing, in *The Gay Science* (1882): "To give style to one's character—that is a great and rare art!"[23] Here we have the definition of an art of existence, the ascetic, heroic requirement of equating one's life to a work of art, whose fortune we can trace throughout modern culture (even if here Nietzsche is asserting its very rareness, its impossibility, in a way). This principle will return in Foucault's late writings, so often celebrated and cited: "One would have to write a history of technologies of the self and aesthetics of existence in the modern world. Earlier I mentioned the 'artist's' life, which was so important in the nineteenth century. But we could also imagine the Revolution not simply as a political project, but as a style, a mode of existence with its own aesthetic, its asceticism, the particular forms of relation to one's self and to others. . . . I feel it is also possible to write the history of existence as art and as style."[24] Between the Balzacian "artist's life" and the Foucauldian "aesthetics of existence" (not to mention all forms of dandyism), we have not covered much distance: each evinces the enduring hope of a life that could gain a form as dense, autonomous, sovereign, or brilliant as a work of art.

But this vocabulary of form, of modes or means, can also be found in Émile Durkheim or Marcel Mauss, though there with a quite different scope and focus—distant from any dandyism, any quest to establish one's own individual life, any hope of aesthetic sovereignty. In 1894, Durkheim asks: What are "social facts"? They are "manners of acting, thinking and feeling" that are "identifiable through the power of external coercion which it exerts or is capable of exerting upon individuals."[25] Durkheim would define his budding social science as an inquiry into all "ways of acting" and "ways of being."[26] Better still: the way of being of such ways of acting and being (which should, we should remember, be treated "as things"); or else, into the genesis of these ways—which sees in "ways of being" all those "ways of acting that have been consolidated"; or finally: into the ways in which such ways should be addressed.[27] Mauss, in "Techniques of the Body" (1934), would direct this "mannerism" of the living being elsewhere (as he also recognized

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22 Honoré de Balzac, *Traité de la vie élégante*, suivi de *Théorie de la démarche* [Treatise on Elegant Living, followed by Theory of Walking] (Paris: Arléa, 1998), 11.

23 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 290.

24 Michel Foucault, "A propos de la généalogie de l'éthique: un aperçu du travail en cours" [On the genealogy of ethics: A glimpse of ongoing work] (1984), *Dits et écrits* vol. 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

25 Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, ed. Steven Lukes, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 2013), 21; 25.

26 Durkheim, *Rules*, 15–16.

27 Durkheim, *Rules*, 7–8; 16.

its authority even in the social): toward a hunger for the intrinsic plurality of modes of life and forms of practice. Mauss writes: "There are grounds for studying . . . especially those fundamental fashions that can be called the modes of life, the *model, tonus,* the 'matter,' 'the manners,' the 'way.'"[28]

"Way," "mode," "manner"—for Georges Canguilhem these words will describe the very fact of life: the fact that, in sickness and in health, life only comes to us *in a certain form,* the fact that life is a permanent renewal of its forms. He writes, "the morbid state is always a certain mode of living. . . . Diseases are new ways of life. Without the diseases which incessantly renew the area to be explored, physiology would mark time on well-trod ground. . . . Life is in fact a normative activity. . . . Normative, in the fullest sense of the word, is that which establishes norms. "[29] How far we have come from aestheticized existence! (And yet Foucault will inherit from Canguilhem precisely this reconceptualizing of norms, which is worth reflecting on further—reflecting on what Foucault is compelled to take up with his formula "aesthetics of existence," such a seductive phrase, even if it can be so quickly transformed into a slogan). With Canguilhem the vocabulary of "ways" (*allures*) describes the very dynamics of life, though without hierarchical significance or deviation between them. These dynamics become an environment for the institution of forms. Here there is not (or not only) "life," there are only its *ways*—ways in which life goes on or ebbs away, ways we take up in order to live, ways to make life go on, ways we are made to live out our selves.

Beyond human life, these dynamics are something like what the naturalist Jakob von Uexküll would discern in a species: a certain mode of inhabiting the real, which confidently slices the surface of the sensible, creating points of emphasis and relief; or what in turn the poet Jean-Christophe Bailly describes when he turns his attention to animals, one after another, and to "what can appropriately be called their styles—that is, the way in which each adheres to its being and slips that adhesion into the world like a thought: a dispatch, an idea of form that has taken on form and a memory that haunts it."[30] An "idea of form" indeed, like a thought slipped into the real. For Bailly this idea of form, in other words, this phrasing of existence as "style," can name countries, landscapes, object systems, or relational modes . . . *style, manner, form, mode* (and then: *way* [*allure*], *ethos*): here the terms differ little, racing as they do from one realm to another.

Giorgio Agamben can also be read as elaborating a vocabulary and formal questions for comprehending life itself through his consideration of "qualified life," or "forms-of-life"—where "form" signifies precisely qualification, value. Per Agamben, "a life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself. What does this formulation mean? It defines a life—human life—in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply facts but always and above all possibilities of life, always and above all power."[31] Agamben is not only saying that life always presents itself "in a particular way"; he also helps us see that a substantial part of ethics and justice consists precisely in ensuring the possibility of this qualification, in preventing those states of reality in which a life might be dissociated from its

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28 Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," in *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life,* eds. Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhuar (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 59.

29 Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological,* trans. Carolyn R. Fawcett and Robert S. Cohen (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 227; 100; 126.

30 Jean-Christophe Bailly, *The Animal Side,* trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 57.

31 Giorgio Agamben, "Form-of-Life," in *Means Without End: Notes on Politics,* trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 4.

form, that is, its power. To be concerned with lives through their forms is thus to restore power to these lives, to demonstrate the way in which human beings carry themselves as possibilities—in other words, as patterns of thought.

Bourdieu, within a very different world of meaning, established the contemporary sense of style's vocabulary and what it could encompass in terms of social perception. As he put it in *Distinction* (1979): "Life-styles are . . . the systematic products of habitus, which, perceived in their mutual relations through the schemes of the habitus, become sign systems that are socially qualified (as 'distinguished,' 'vulgar,' etc.)."[32] In 1998, as part of a reflection on "masculine domination," he argued that encounters between men and women offer "a privileged opportunity to grasp the logic of the domination exerted in the name of a symbolic principle known and recognized both by the dominant and by the dominated—a language (or a pronunciation), a lifestyle (or a way of thinking, speaking and acting)—and, more generally, a distinctive property, whether emblem or stigma, the symbolically most powerful of which is that perfectly arbitrary and non-predictive bodily property, skin color."[33] "Lifestyle," "way of acting": neither chance, nor resource, but distinctive property (fixing a subject in its place), a mark as powerful as an accent, a tattoo, a color—all of which reveals the violence of the social.

And in opposition to Bourdieu, fully in conflict with Bourdieu's anthropology of reproduction (and nevertheless fully cognizant of the viciousness of inequality), Michel de Certeau proposed in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1990):

> Just as in literature one differentiates 'styles' or ways of writing, one can distinguish "ways of operating"—ways of walking, reading, producing, speaking, etc. These styles of action intervene in a field which regulates them at a first level (for example, at the level of the factory system), but they introduce into it a way of turning it to their advantage that obeys other rules. . . . We are thus confronted once again by the ancient problem: What is an art or "way of making"? [34]

From the Greeks to Durkheim, via Kant, a long tradition has endeavored to specify the complex (rather than simple or "poor") modalities that can summarize these operations. It is, in fact, through the idea of style that de Certeau, in his observation of dominated behaviors, names the moment at which the enforcement of tasks tilts towards ruses, appropriations, "ways of doing," where, through infinitesimal deviations from the code, the secret spark of freedom comes into play—the kind of practical resistance that Richard Hoggart or E.P. Thompson sought out in popular customs, which Jacques Rancière has reimagined within the very organization of the sensible, and which James Scott identified on a large scale in the political inventions of "ungovernable" peoples in the high plains of Asia: the *Zomia* region.

Style is also the name that Claude Lévi-Strauss gave to the unification of a human society and a state of culture (the "customs of a community, taken as a whole, always have a particular style," as he suggested in *Tristes Tropiques*[35]), and it is how André Leroi-Gourhan described the

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32 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1986), 172.

33 Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination,* trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 2

34 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 30.

35 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques,* trans. Doreen Weightman and John Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973, 178.

"collective's own way of adopting and expressing forms, values and rhythms."[36] Marshall Sahlins is currently concerned with forms of "endangered specificities" or certain "modes of existence";[37] Arjun Appadurai reveals the contemporary experiments of "new styles of identity politics" and what they owe to the implementation of powerful mechanisms of imagination and projection;[38] and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro insists that the driving force of anthropology must be anchored in a deeper examination of "styles of thought proper to the collectives" that are being studied.[39] The formula is neither neutral nor merely descriptive. To call indigenous metaphysics "styles of thought" (as with speaking of "new styles of identity politics" and thus lending them a critical significance) is to seek to honor the force of conceptual imagination and creativity inherent in any collective and to promote the effect of that force as it redounds upon us—in other words, to reflect on where we end up if "we" are truly allowed to be struck or displaced by other ways of being human.

All of this should encourage us to extend the domain of style well beyond the question of art, toward an understanding of practices, conducts, ontologies, systems and even forms of organic life—as if, at a given moment, we might begin to consider life through its forms. A country, a community, a behavior, a species, a moment: all singular modes of existence, a kind of stubbornness for being *like this,* like that rage of flowing water in Ponge (ever lower!) which makes gravity into a modality, or even beyond that, a value of life. In all these cases, lives hazard forms which come to life before them, and "style" is that intermediate order between singularities and the ideas they introduce.

That there may be a conception of life at stake in questions of style is therefore a historical fact. We can identify a period and reunite various debates and perspectives around a vast "stylistic moment" of thought and practice, which evolved over the course of the nineteenth century and has continued up to the present, even to the point of saturating our public space, its vocabulary and its boundaries. This moment brings together quite different cultures, intellectual conventions as well as ordinary ones. It can be dated to when "style" came to be substituted for rhetoric in the evaluation of texts, as in the notion of the artist's vocation and the stakes of art. (This shift becomes explicit in Gustave Flaubert, who equated style to literature and to life itself). Words having to do with style then fully penetrated ideas about the individual, the social, the political, and the living being, where they were imposed as cornerstone, as hope, as a site of judgement and conflict in culture. A "moment," that is, a spirited consciousness of the problem, came together around such style-words in endeavoring to describe life itself. Writers, who are readier than others to scrutinize forms, have often anticipated intellectuals' efforts to discern the presence of style in life as such. We shall be guided by the way in which Balzac, Baudelaire, Proust, Agee, Naipaul, and Pasolini brought a stylistic bearing to social reality and to the ontology of

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36 André Leroi-Gourhan, cited by Alexandra Bidet, "Le corps, le rythme et l'esthétique sociale chez André Leroi-Gourhan" [The body, rhythm, social aesthetics in André Leroi-Gourhan], *Techniques et cultures* 48–49 (2007): 15–38.

37 Adam Smith, "Endangered Specificities: An Interview with Marshall Sahlins," Journal of Social Archaeology, 2.2 (2002): 283–97; Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 418.

38 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 145.

39 Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics,* trans. Peter Skafish (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 42.

modern life itself—along the way shattering the confines of individualism and weakening, each in turn, the figure of the dandy with which this is too often associated.

REFLECTIONS ON STYLE AND CONFLICTS OF VALUES

Gestures, rhythms, habits, habitats, inhabitants, words, customs, costumes, practices of the body, practices of time, divided appearances and images dispatched—such are the highly disparate contents of a stylistics extended to our very existence. It is initially the multiplicity of these phenomena that proves so striking, seductive and intriguing: ways of living, ways of life from beginning to end. But there is so little in common between the cardinal's purple and the dexterity of artisanal craft; between a class attribute, the ethical sheen of a face, and the decorations in which a whole city is draped. In truth, it cannot be decided a priori what is entailed by the question of forms as such: which idea of life, which kind of world, do these forms comprise or inhibit? Such is the mark of the semantic and axiological openness of all sensory experience, that is, the work of values that shapes any practice of forms.

And yet, few thinkers hesitate to adjudicate on the implications of the forms that life takes. For some, they immediately embody a need for visibility and recognition; for others, a breeding ground for human inventiveness. For some, they are the site of restrained liberties taken in the face of constraint; for others, the very opposite, chasms of alienation. I am struck by the vigor with which each person postulates an anthropology, an ethics, a politics in their own singular way of looking at forms of life and considering how to talk about them. I am struck by how clearly, here, perception is imbued with judgment; struck too by the silence that accompanies this obviousness, no matter how certain the decisions one takes. Indeed, there are as many ways to consider gestures, rhythms, ways of inhabiting a space, a profession, a body, as there are ideas of life. In fact, these decisions on style—and this is what matters to me—constitute fields of struggle (for thinking as much as for practice). They open up a conflict over the meaning of forms, over what can be staged and said about life in its forms, over what one should expect from life or what one wishes to struggle for.

Indeed, what I primarily see in this series of examples or names is not only that words of style are omnipresent, but rather that what they assert is widely dispersed; more than meanings in the plural, we see a competition between the values that are invested in different visions of what forms of life entail. With Nietzsche or even Foucault, style names an ideal of ethical accomplishment and individual aesthetics, caught in a long tradition of dandyism, offered to share. With Bourdieu, this dynamic can be turned inside out like a glove: style is the very name for social violence, naturalized until it becomes disseminated into sensible experience itself. Conversely, for de Certeau, Sahlins, or Scott, it's the means of grasping the ways in which one can elude classification and thwart the forces of domination. For Canguilhem, Mauss, and Uexküll, it's the adoption of a modal gaze on life itself, in its intrinsic variety, fundamentally non-distinctive and non-classifiable: life as a space of differences that are introduced without end. For Agamben, making all life equivalent to ways of living amounts to the threshold for an ethic yet to be accomplished, an ethic not of identities but of "improper manners . . ." In each of these cases, the words of style are good or bad words for what one wishes to be attentive to, beyond which one will be found to inhabit a pure struggle over values.

Such polemics are no obstacle (an impasse that would discredit the question of style and prevent it from reaching the status of a concept); they seem to me to be the essential aspect of the

very question of style, as a site for deciding on which forms are worthwhile, worth supporting or combating. The vocabulary of style is a vocabulary of value—one of the least-noted vocabularies in the scholarship. It indicates not that one is speaking simply of forms, but of forms that matter, forms that subjects can hold and hold on to, as can those who observe them. The affairs of style are no peaceful domain of knowledge on which we would have to agree, but rather a terrain in which decisions about life necessarily oppose each other, as do decisions about how thinking also pertains to life.

For me, indeed, these are decisions about life itself, about what is entailed by a life in its forms, as each contends with another: in the way one chooses to regard the "how" of existence and the aspects of the social; in the way they are studied and described. What I mean is not only that the practice of style is a field of struggle, a field among social actors who rank and classify each other (as Bourdieu has thoroughly revealed); but so too are academic descriptions of life, in our specialized ways of seeing them, depicting them and classifying their forms. When social scientists speak of "style," "manners," "ways of doing," we have already taken a side, according to the meaning that we are ready, or not, to assign to such forms of life. At stake is always a theory of practice: There are as many theories of forms as logics of practice and thus evaluations of life (of the life that matters); in other words, ideas about attention, about what one strives to make others attentive, concerned, and alert to.

Indeed, with every idea of what style is (the very fact of style), an ethics or politics begins, or ends: an idea of the subject, an idea of community, an idea of the way in which subjects manage or don't manage to tilt beyond themselves, in the images and gestures of which they become capable. More life, less life, more otherness, less otherness, more beauty, less beauty, more sharing, less sharing, more future, less future—"style" corresponds to that moment, necessary but perilous, at which a form of life is to be judged. All the better to grasp its stakes.

The question of style ensures this movement from the "how" into value, this transition from an attention to modes of being to decisions over how to conserve some and how to hold others to account. This is why the word cannot be used without emphasis, quotation marks, tension or ulterior motive. And if such solidarity between the question of style and the commitment of values should be clarified, it is because the relevant values obviously differ enormously. Every decision is a commitment to life, to our lives in common, and these diverge tremendously. This is why style-words, bludgeon-words, mana-words, which serve more often to shut down an analysis than to open it up, have managed to invade such incommensurate reflections as the general theory of anthropogenesis in Leroi-Gourhan; the philosophy of the will to power in Nietzsche; the critique of domination in Bourdieu; the very practice of violence in the marketplace; and the description of popular practices with their subtle forces of emancipation in de Certeau… here, everyone must take a side. "What is the image of style which troubles me, what is the one I desire?" Barthes asks.[40] For my part, I am troubled, for instance, by the vision of style postulated by most slogans that claim to offer us beautiful forms to be shared, and which in fact are propped up by aesthetic reflections that refuse to adopt a critical gaze on such phenomena; I am attracted, in turn, by visions that take care to protect humanity's gestures, all the way up to the rage and poetic utopianism of Pasolini or James Agee.

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40 Roland Barthes, "Style and Its Image," in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 90.

I say "words" of style in the plural, since doubts only arise when one is not limited to a single term. One might nevertheless hope for such terms to be distributed in an orderly fashion among the various available ones (*style, manner, mode, way*). In certain contemporary approaches, "style," "manner," "rhythm," and "ethos" serve as competing standards for petite critical communities, each struggling for supremacy. But neither these words' history nor their usage present a unity of meaning that would enable them to be played against each other in any durable way. Despite their dominant meaning effects, these terms are too interchangeable for the payoff to *really* be lexical. With such words one enters a common arena, and with them a single problem arises: that of the ontological, ethical, social stakes of the "how." These lines of fracture rarely concern vocabulary (which often gets scrambled when it moves back and forth[41]) but instead, more often, the values in play (values that actually cut across each of these words, rather than being separated off cleanly from each other—one can "act in a certain manner," but also "be mannered," or "have manners"; "adopt an air," but also "put on airs," or "have no airs"). Reading just a few pages of Michaux, it is clear how he uses all these terms in turn, without distributing them neatly, and with a certain taste for the least conceptual among them: "ways" (ways of sleeping, ways of waking, "my left-handed ways," "the ways and style" of the subject of a dream, or rather of "the man of the night in me"). I am therefore not overly concerned about ensuring the triumph of the word "style" over other terms. (I do not believe that truths reside in words, but rather in sentences.) The word constitutes my entry point into a question that surpasses and overruns it at once: a concern for forms of life, which imposes itself so widely today even while sustaining highly disparate values and struggles.

Because the idea of style, then, ensures this movement from the "how" into value, and because the values to which each of us clings diverge so intensely, the question of style is not and must not be frozen within one meaning alone. Introduce it into any discussion: "Style" brings out convictions, launches a battle over principles and over a desire for forms, a battle over what we wish to see, and even more often over what we prefer not to look at too closely. In theoretical conflicts someone is always trying to seize it from someone else; still others hate it and, to protect themselves from the ambivalence of our life in forms (of our life that is debated, endlessly debated, in forms), attempt to substitute others. Instead, it is all the more necessary to gauge these orientations immanent to the sensible, to recognize these conflicts of commitment, and not to be afraid to take sides.

To recognize that the "formal" part of life constitutes one of the arenas where the infinite battle over forms is fought is to ask much from the observer; it is to ask much from, for instance, sociology, ethnology, or from scholarly analyses of the forms of the everyday or of social interactions. It's to ask them, in fact, to radically pluralize their values. For this is not exactly a war on behalf of "value," as if there were only one (whether it's called *greatness, recognition* or *social excellence*—and here, to cite only the most important names, neither Max Weber, nor Erving Goffman, nor Bourdieu devote sufficient attention to forms and to the distribution of meaning, despite the breadth of their analyses of life's quotidian details and the subtle situations of contact. For them "value" remains too univocal; the "social of the social," if I may put it that way, is

41 The word "style" is a dead end for definitions, as well as being an exemplary aporetic entry in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*: exemplary for being so scattered and incomplete (it refers to the article on "maniera," two-thirds of which is devoted to the question of style), for its contradictions, which neither etymology nor history can manage to put into order, but also for its promise, for all that can be accommodated by it and what, evidently, one has the desire to fit into it. Barbara Cassin, *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, trans. Steven Rendell et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 1069.

for them too equivalent from the start to the values of greatness alone). It's not about a war on behalf of value, then, but rather a much more open and diffuse dispute among values, among all our reasons for being and doing, all our motives for living, in their unruly and rebellious plurality, and in their difficulty.

LOGICS OF PRACTICE

Let us resolutely repeat: merely saying the word "styles" doesn't mean much without a foray into critical thinking on the competing values entailed by the practices, but also the theory, of style, along with the very desire to be drawn into it. And we can only account for this permanent articulation between style and value by grasping the morphological stance (the "idea of form," decidedly) that grounds one or another theory of style. Put differently: the relations fostered by "style" in one conception or another, with individuality, with the social, with time, with becoming, etc. These connections result from the kind of configuration (the idea of form) at which the thought aims. Which stance to take, then, for each stylistics of essence? How to understand the very notion of style, viewpoints for the "how," for each idea of life? My method will consist in clarifying these, demonstrating their importance at a given moment of history or at the heart of a given intellectual undertaking, but I will also be objecting to some and proposing others in turn, in order to identify in them a cornerstone of modern culture and the very feeling of the contemporary.

In theory, the commitments immanent to forms of living are infinite; this is what Canguilhem refers to, in his own context, when he speaks of the "normative force" of life itself (a life as a given creator of norms). Foucault will also return to this, as will contemporary pragmatic sociology, with its attention to the axiological creativity inherent in behaviors and practices. The positions in and for style are, as I will insist, almost always complex, tense, and contradictory, precisely because something of the diverse nature of our reasons for acting is at risk in (and through) this thread of style.

The values enlisted by forms are infinite, but the morphological commitments, that is, the decisions on what a form is, on what one is ready to accept as a form (to consider as gesture, as ethos…), persist, repeat, and modulate, thus offering themselves up for analysis. This became apparent to me in pursuing these questions: that we by no means occupy the same anthropological or ethical terrain in what we are willing to identify as a "form." I will gather these morphological commitments under their main axes, which I propose to identify as so many logics of style—so many *styles of style*. To me these seem to take shape alongside the modern theories and practices of existence: style as modality; style as distinction; style as individuation. Such a division is not united by any homogeneous criteria, but should enable widespread, persistent, and shareable commitments to emerge.

To conceive of style as *modality,* a modal variation of life on itself, guides us toward that particular kind of attention and description that consists of recognizing in every *being* the commitment to a mode of being, in every *doing* the commitment to a way of doing. This should lead us to consider life itself as a dynamic of introducing a multitude of forms, or rather of modes and tones (*model* and *tonus,* as Marcel Mauss would say), in which the real is fundamentally grasped as an array of modes of being, the social as an array of possible gestures, and the living being as an array of possible ways. It's the very multiplicity of these modes that constitutes, here, a value as such—a nonrelative, noncomparative, nontaxonomic value, a value equivalent to the inventiveness of life itself. The challenge here is to not regard such little expressions (*modes of, ways of,*

manners of) as inert formulas or simple grammatical pegs, but rather as an acquiescence to the knowledge and even protection of a fundamental power of variance, the force of possibility inherent in life itself. There is not only a syntax, but an ontology, anthropology and ethos underlying the use of these expressions. From Mauss to Ponge, from Rancière to Latour and from ethnology to the life sciences and environmental sciences, I will try to uphold this conviction: that being can be divided into modes of being, and life into powers of form. This modal division of the sensible is a portal, hinges swinging open wide, into a stylistic attention to life itself.

The logic of *distinction,* which in real terms dominates the social sciences, is a certain interpretation of the manner in which such modal variations take on meaning (variations in gestures, ways, ethos). In distinction, these differences become meaningful through opposition (and not only through relation). A stylistic fact signifies through the network of oppositions that it exposes among other stylistic facts, through the classifications that result, and above all through the violence that this tends to enact in the social world, which involves a whole anthropology of forms—a vision of forms as marks of status, of the social as a stage of visibility, of fellow creatures as an audience, and of life as exhibition. Gestures, behaviors, and appearances acquire a very particular meaning here, in a topology of social roles as stigmata or "signaled signals." Distinction thus captures a certain "type of forms," as it enlists an entire hermeneutics. In sociology, it constitutes the master signifier of critical thinking, thanks to Bourdieu's enduring case against naturalized forms of domination (the case against violence as it is implied *even* in ways of being). Nevertheless, as we'll see, it is through a distinctive way of thinking—even a distinctive bias—that hypercritical positions have joined forces, in our moment, with uncritical slogans of style, the hatred of style with its fetishization, the vigorous accusations inherited from Bourdieu with the hackiest injunctions to self-management. For the logic of distinction does not recognize itself as a position on forms, and thus tends to sequester any reflection on style.

To the logic of distinction, finally, aesthetics, ontology, and anthropology have long opposed elements of a logic of *individuation,* which still awaits its theoretical assimilation. The logic of distinction and the logic of individuation exclude each other (such that they can also be considered competing interpretations of the same phenomena). Their opposition stems not so much from the relevant scale (groups *versus* individuals) but rather from the morphological approach involved, that is, the "type of form" entailed. According to the logic of distinction, style consists above all in deviation, in a price accorded to difference and a price to pay for difference. According to modal logic, it consists of the recognition of a variation intrinsic to life, and in a fundamental attention to its plurality. According to the logic of individuation, on the other hand, it concerns the meaning of a formation unified around singular contours, bearers of disruption and alteration, affecting the real as such. Here the value of difference is not oppositional but rather integrative, and a singularity is considered as singularity, for the "value of form" that it ventures in the real—the intensity it sets up, the theory it articulates, the formation established by it.

Individuation, as a morphological category, must be strongly dissociated from the notion of personhood: here, an "individual" isn't a person but rather the name given to any singularity, which can consist at once in "more than someone" and "less than someone." One could say, for instance, that Canguilhem has an individuated conception of illness (since he sees each physiological state as "a way of life," outside any taxonomic temptation), and that Sahlins or Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has an individuated approach to culture (since they aim to describe not how cultures can be distinguished from each other, but rather how each culture relates to itself,

particularly in its own exclusions, thus dealing "less with identities than with singularities"). In terms of subjecthood, this grasp of style as individuation also boils down to an attention to the dynamics of disidentification that has so preoccupied contemporary philosophy: those "improper manners" that traverse subjects (singular subjects, but "whatever singularities," cut through by forms of life that animate more than define them). Gestures, rhythms, manners of being, here, are not proper identifiers but rather constitute so many ways of tilting towards something other than a "self." The question of "individuation," then, encourages less a practice of the "self" than a practice of the world, and an interrogation of what kind of "self," deep down, can really be reached by the disruptive force of singularities, if it's true that "faces and landscapes" are not set before me like inert paintings, but rather offer me "the help sometimes and the menace sometimes of being a man which they infuse into my life."[42]

As we can see, these logics of style are divided as much by the ideas about form and value that they sustain—that is, by the way they attempt to describe life, particularly by the meaning they give to difference, to the very fact of differing, or to what one virtuoso of literary attention has called "the extreme human susceptibility to differentiation," since human beings seem "in thrall to differentiation and gifted for it."[43] These logics are not opposed according to discipline (poets, sociologists, biologists can all encounter each other here), but rather according to their interpretation about what these formal affairs entail for an idea of the human and for a representation of life.

These logics do not all share the same status, either; they are not all situated at the same level of analysis. Each displaces, restricts, or contests the prior one, each time offering a particular gaze on the social world, on forms of subjectivity, a relationship to time, to others and to the common, and in all of this, the stakes of a stylistic understanding of life.

But considered for long enough, a stylistic approach most often reveals itself to be tense, hesitant, struggling between multiple values and ideas: inventing, venturing, playing out its uncertainties precisely through the thread of style. Balzac's *Theory of Movement* is a good example of this: It follows his *Treatise on Elegant Living* and is born from the same hyper-distinctive, classificatory, and powerfully normative condition for what elegant movement should look like. And yet it's also occupied by the many singularities scattered across the surface of the modern city and modern life; in this it is at once, contradictorily, a logic both of distinction and individuation; it demands a haughty, aloof style, but also makes room for the stylistic vibration of any life. I readily admit that, in this sense, Balzac introduced his own moral and political contradictions into the problem of lifestyle(s), as well as, for instance, his quarrel with democratic principles.

It will be up to us to scrutinize such seesaw effects, to grasp just what is being debated and decided in the way each person might consider forms of life, and to measure how often the nucleus of a theory of practice or life is played out in the adventure that leads it from one idea of form to another. When Leroi-Gourhan identifies the human with the introduction of singular rhythms, he adopts an individuating perspective, but when he opts for a global discourse on cultures, he adopts a modal approach, which he shares with many others. When Tetsuro Watsuji describes Japan as having a contrastive and conquering style, he adopts a perspective that is both

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42 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible,* ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 35.

43 Pierre Pachet, *Un à un. De l'individualisme en littérature (Michaux, Naipaul, Rushdie)* [One by one: On individualism in literature (Michaux, Naipaul, Rushdie)] (Paris: Seuil [La Couleur des idées], 1993), 37.

distinctive and deterministic, but by forging the notion of *fûdo* (mediation or the incorporation of practices into environment), he opens the door to a more individuating geography, which can also be found today, for example, as central to the thinking of someone like Augustin Berque. When de Certeau studies the "formality of practices," he reaches toward a modal sociology, but by stubbornly seeking out emancipatory reserves, he engages in a politics of singularity. When Ponge conceives of the world of things as a set of "genres of existence," he shines a light on the modalism of the real, but by detecting the "bias," that is, precisely the ethical commitment of each person to these modes, he recognizes so many nonhuman individuals. The moral ambivalence of the aesthetics of existence in Nietzsche (or current philosophies of identity performance and the institution of self-as-artist, which might claim to carry on his legacy but which so rarely rock the social order) does perhaps keep to a merry-go-round of distinction and individuation. The path of Michaux, in turn, can be understood as an increasingly assertive passage from the value of singularity to that of impropriety—Michaux had long illuminated the struggles of individuation and style wars that propel human beings, but also quickly made room for the disintegration of the subject in favor of "improper manners" that crisscross, exceed, and even deny them (we might recall his final note of advice: "Go far enough into yourself that your style can't follow.")[44] These categories would be another invitation to reflect, for instance, on the various possible ways of inheriting the structuralist endeavor: whether by rediscovering its project of grammar and generation, that is, adopting a thought of distinction; or whether, as today it seems more tempting to do, by inheriting the modal appetite—the attention to detail, the passion for difference—that had inspired it.

With the division of these logics of style, one could sketch out a history of a stylistics of existence—not because these three models have followed one another ceaselessly over the course of the last two centuries, but rather because they indicate temporal stopping points or moments (even if they do not all share the same scope, nor the same unity). The logic of distinction sketches out an all-encompassing and even overpowering historical arc, a sort of interminable history of dandyism, ensured by the sympathy between the Balzacian moment (a discovery of the new politicization of the sensible in a democratic regime) and the ferocious upholding of distinction in the most contemporary fetishizations of style—also a dominant logic, which, as I would like to show, nevertheless fails to encompass the entire "how" of life, and rather tends to make us inattentive to other promises for form. Modal logic, which tries to direct its gaze toward less visible phenomena and less aestheticizing forms, has been embodied in the successive thrusts of phenomenology within ethnology, the sciences, or poetry—from Mauss to Üxküll, Merleau-Ponty, and Ponge, for whom human beings were a host of modes of being, and who tried to understand that formal pluralization of beings, their "mannerism." The logic of individuation emerged later in the twentieth century, following a line that can be traced from Michaux's rhythmic battles to the "whatever singularities" that occupy moral and political philosophy today, or the cultural configurations transformed into so many "retro-anthropologies."

But above all, it seems to me that the interplay among these three models clarifies certain tensions specific to our own present. It is no mere coincidence that the notion of style is so highly charged today, at once so often mobilized and so poorly mastered, indicating by turns the best or worst of words (nor is it any accident if the idea of "form of life" is on everyone's tongue). For life itself now seems to us committed from the outset to this domain, increasingly intensified,

44 Henri Michaux, *Tent Posts,* trans. Lynn Hoggard (Copenhagen: Green Integer, 1997).

dramatized, stripped bare. *As if to be a subject, today, was first and foremost to be this arena of conflict and anxious interrogation over the forms that are required for life.* Perhaps the unruly encounter among these different ideas of style (which are thus, inexorably, ideas about life and about what one decides to pay attention to) makes up the very feeling of the contemporary, which is marked as much by a thirst for visibility (a concern for posturing and self-creation) as by a consciousness of the plurality of "ways of being human," and by a genuine search for dis-appropriation—even "leaving the grooves of the human," as Ponge would say.[45] An echo might be found, for instance, in the fact that an ecological consciousness, though ever more present, has not for the moment changed much in our unbridled practices of consumption, particularly conspicuous consumption. To return to our categories, a *modal* concern and a desire of *distinction* come into conflict, central to our modes of being, in the sphere of our modes of being. There is obviously no question of deploring a modernity where values are in disarray (of regretting a time when the forms of a life were more simply decreed); it is rather about attempting to become more intensely conscious of such questions, promoting the social structures that play a part in this development—education, to begin with—with the hope that everyone might be able to reappropriate their own life in forms; that we won't mislead ourselves too much over what we mean by "donning a style," according to the injunction so loudly proffered on our cities' billboards; that we might *also* prove capable of conceiving otherwise the formal aspect of life and the aesthetic stakes of the social; and that in all of this we might really pay attention to our language.

The problem is certainly not only about the construction of the individual. As an example: A few months ago, the Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, had considered getting rid of most aid for aboriginal villages (modestly named *remote communities*), reasoning that the national community could not financially support what he dared to call the "lifestyle choices" of the people who inhabit these villages. Abbott remarked: "What we can't do is endlessly subsidize lifestyle choices if those lifestyle choices are not conducive to the kind of full participation in Australian society that everyone should have."[46] *This isn't a lifestyle, it is a way of life,* responded the author of a newspaper column, with a salutary simplicity, underlining how the very question of forms of life had become so coarsely disfigured.[47] "Lifestyle": since the 1950s, the word has not rid itself of its consumerist overtones. It's recognized that this kind of style can be changed like changing a shirt, with no political stakes involved. Such an individualist and hyper-liberal formulation in terms of "choice" prevents any consideration of history—the history of one community subjecting another. This is not so distant from what Arjun Appadurai has called "ideocide," that new form of violence in the era of globalization, the wish to destroy the ways of life of a people or region or land (with the unprecedented forms of terror that this engenders), as if these factors could not be held accountable to ethical considerations.[48] It is important to be careful with the words and categories that have authorized such negligence (as they have also decreed that the form of life that matters is defined by the ability to pay taxes). This wasn't a question of *lifestyle* or "choice": it was about taking the measure, or not, of a history of colonial violence, with its degradations and appropriations of the very design of forms of common life. In other words, the mere capacity for a group to imagine lives other than their own, to consider not only the opportunity

45 See Francis Ponge, "Tentative orale," in *Le Grand recueil* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 254.

46 Patrick Stokes, *The Drum (Australian Broadcasting Corporation)*, cited in *Le Monde,* March 11, 2015.

47 Ibid.

48 Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

for a group of human beings to fit into the dominant forms of modern consumer life, but also to pursue another realm of existence entirely—one that has the force of difference, which refuses to adhere. The aboriginal mode of life has in any case already been ransacked, its very continuity damaged, that is, the force of continuity that makes up a form of life. No longer can it be protected or praised; instead we must ask what it becomes as it persists beyond itself, and what this requires in terms of political initiative, the power of imagination and hospitality for a society as a whole (these questions are of course also ours). For the kind of consideration of which a community proves capable ends up defining it—defining its edges, its contours, what it holds on to, what enables it to take hold. We Europeans are also left with much to imagine, in terms of welcoming.

QUALIFYING LIFE, JUDGING ITS FORMS, CALLING FOR OTHERS

In what follows, then, I would like to speak for our current moment. And yet I will often speak alongside Baudelaire, Kafka, and Ponge, since for them depicting the forms of life of their own age offers a lesson for me, as well as a sense of the vast stakes of this "formal" aspect. I will be continually sustaining my reflections with literary readings, not only because literature offers cases, situations, or particulars. Rather, I am convinced that one of literature's virtues is that, by definition, it supports the certitude that life unfolds in its forms. Attending to distinct stylistic commitments is at once its object and its practice—its object, since texts identify, restore, or imagine forms of living, and transform the distinct customs that serve as the foundation for human worlds on their own terms; its practice, since these same texts throw this stylistic dynamic back onto us through their descriptive project. In fact, in writing and in its reception there is a morality in the act of the formal aspect of life, and in the problem (resource and requirement) posed by life in its forms.

Recognizing all that is entailed by life's formal properties does require a particular kind of attention, even vigilance. It is not enough to utter the word "style" in order to do so; no, it is necessary to really consider forms of living, to wish to see them, to refrain from classifying them too quickly, and to accept being surprised, to dissemble lines of equivalence, to acquiesce to the patient task of interpretation in order to unearth distinct human commitments . . . Yet literature (particularly modern literature) seems to me to be the principal site where such attention to the stylistic character of life itself has been sharpened: its attention to the plurality of styles of being, to the fact that there are indeed styles, ways of inhabiting form and of imbuing them with meaning. Literature takes on the task of rendering values explicit, including in its contradictions and uncertainties, since literary texts, in their variety and even in their singularity, constitute the site par excellence where the meaning of the "how" is pondered, without ever being fixed. In it such meaning is rarely judged in advance (one does not know in advance if a gesture should be interpreted as a carrier of distinction, as a space of subjectivation, as the frame for a posture, or the trace of a skill . . .). Literature is where we open up a stage for meaning, and where we go to find it. The ethical power of Michaux's work, for instance, rests on his attention (pushed quite far, with patience and dissatisfaction) to the description and redescription of a formal, gestural, rhythmic singularity ("my gauche style," "my piecemeal style," "my sleepy ways"), and his effort consists precisely in working through the grammar of characterization. (I would add that there is of course literature in the human sciences, precisely when they make writing an instrument of truth, when through writing they wish to be truer—not more elegant or subjective, but more conscious of the plurality of meanings established in practices themselves.)

Philosophy, of course, is unwavering in naming this concern with forms of life, the feeling that there is life in forms. "Forms of life," "way of living," "way of being," "styles of life" are crucial formulas for modern philosophy, from Ludwig Wittgenstein to Stanley Cavell. In this sense, Wittgenstein's great gesture was in how, through the idea of *Lebensform* (form of life), he specifically appealed to the ordinary, as well as to its vulnerability, recognized by many today as the very blueprint for the ethical.[49] In most cases, these notions (articulating full-blown moral and political programs) come back to a fundamental interest in what Agamben has called *qualified* life, which becomes meaningful in its primary opposition to *bare* life (the mere fact of being alive). Qualified life is a form of life, way of living, "such or such" a life: a life whose meaning is immanent to the "how", a life whose meaning is entirely contained in and through its style, a life whose form is power, whose manner is being. I do not know if Agamben is entirely correct to trace this distinction between qualified life and bare life all the way back to the ancient couplet *bios/zoe*; such a distribution of meanings has been questioned.[50] But it is the division that matters; clearly, if there is "bare life" as terror and as project, there are no bare lives, there are only life-forms, arrangements of life, desirable or destructive, historic, complex, embracing physiological constitutions, environments, modes of perception, practices, self-interventions, retreats, modes of association, laws, or institutions . . . In this pairing must be recognized a linchpin in the way we relate to life. For this dividing line situates our ethical battle: what is to be protected is not exactly such or such a form of life, but rather the need to never allow life's formal aspect to be forfeited, and the importance of "dis-enclosing" the domain of the "how" (a "how" that doesn't always—for this would be another forfeiture—have to do with affairs of distinction or beautification).

And yet, the conceptual efforts of philosophers do not often bear on such issues of forms, ways, styles—on what would make of them a certain type of sensible configuration, emerging in a certain way and circulating in a certain way among subjects, and therefore introducing meaning, possible connections, ideas about life, and possibilities of community. Philosophy names and reflects on the idea of a life "in good form," but it is literary practice that *takes charge of* and concerns itself with this idea. What do I mean by literary practice? The act of writing, to be sure, certainly with writers who don't forsake the task of description in their own efforts at style (if being a writer, from the very start, consists, as Rousseau wrote in the preface to his *Confessions,* of "adopting the same position on style as on subject"). But also the decision to be attentive to literature; or rather, to be attentive through literature, treating it as a guide. For literature is not only a discourse that "states" style, but also a practice (though not the only one) that holds style accountable. In this case, literature is not to be distinguished from theoretical enterprises in being concrete or embodied. No: Compared to the human sciences and philosophy, literature is more and better than a stock of examples; it is a struggle against every means, *including scholarly,* of remaining inattentive to the "how." In the project of a stylistics of existence, literature is a motivating force, an opportunity, the potential for a truly attentive life, attentive to the span of values that can be discovered and unfurled anew in any lived experience, however banal, however thickly repetitive. For in the work of description is waged an important battle: a battle between distinct anthropologies, between rival rationalisms, between competing but coexisting

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49 See Sandra Laugier, *Wittgenstein, les sens de l'usage* [Wittgenstein, the meanings of use] (Paris: Vrin, 2009), and the development of this inheritance through the meaning of care: Sandra Laugier, *Politics of the Ordinary: Care, Ethics, and Forms of Life* (Peeters Publishers, 2012).

50 Agamben, "Form-of-Life."

"grammars" of living (reasons for acting)[51]—coexisting quite often within a single action, a single gesture, a single life, a single adventure of living.

Thus this essay unfolds with (rather than about) literature—literature considered as an infinite discourse of the "how," that is, a site for exploring the fact that no life is separable from its forms, that any life is debated in its forms. If it has only a single effect, I would like it to be that we cease being astonished that a literary specialist would dare to embark upon an anthropological reflection writ large; that such a specialist might be asked not only what she means by literature, but what she means to say with literature. I would like us to cease to be shocked by the fact that, as the first subject of his course at the Collège de France, Barthes posed the general question of "how to live together"[52] (yes, "how" and "as" what?). In responding, he embarked on a morphological and poetic reflection on the category of *rhythm,* that is, on the way in which subjects concur or clash in time, within a life lived in common. He was not aestheticizing but rather reflecting on social ways of flowing. It was literary knowledge (and the writer's practice), this emphasis, in a political interrogation, on the rhythms that enter our lives, the rhythmic struggles or, in other words, form-takings in time. For my part, if I work on literature, it is precisely because I wish to understand how something in life (individual, common, social life) keeps to its forms. I believe that working on literature (reading, studying, teaching it) consists of just such a desire. A literary scholar (*littéraire*): someone who wishes to see life directly in forms; and, perhaps, even more, someone who is at risk of being carried away, beset, altered, and even wounded by forms.

The "how" as a site of emerging values, a site of arguing over what matters, a site of commitment over what divides and unites us… This is the ethical and political problem that will be broached here, in its force of appeal and its fundamental uncertainty—a life that is always in the process of being made and being contested, and which is founded on what makes us different. For ways of living do not have any a priori meaning or value; they are the meaning and value that remain always *to be made.* To regard the forms that life undertakes is to be ready to see it all, to see everything that makes of life a continuous and unruly establishment of ideas, which no prior rhetoric could ever truly manage to unite. In understanding gestures, for instance, as the adoption of codes, or as the expressiveness of the body, or as the site of an impersonal craft, one never aims at the same thing, the same life, or the same person. Back to the drawing board, then, for each of these occurrences, for the work of description: in other words, the work of making forms appear together, describing them, and even judging them.

Modernity has often found itself confronted with this uncertainty as to what is borne by forms of life (an uncertainty as to what forms can do, and what ideas of life they sustain). This is doubtless why anger so often motivates discussions of style as it touches on life: the agonies of Baudelaire or Nietzsche; the utopians' global protests; critiques lodged by Marxism at capitalism

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51 Pragmatic sociology has brought our attention to the plurality of "grammars" of action (based in particular on the conviction that "unmotivated" action doesn't exist, and that it's up to the scholar to render these plural reasons visible, and to formulate them in the vocabulary of the "ideal," with the goal of opening space for critique and reform in research). For a recent elucidation of this "grammatical" model, see Cyril Lemieux, *Le Devoir et la Grâce* (Paris: Economica, 2009).

52 Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces,* trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

as a form of life; Adorno's and Debord's lamentations over the damage to "ways of being"; Henri Lefebvre's urge to "recreate a style, resurrect the Festival and gather together culture's scattered fragments for a transfiguration of everyday life";[53] forceful calls by Foucault, de Certeau or Judith Butler for a liberation of "modes of being"; the obstinate refusal of critical sociology to renounce indignation in its descriptions; the efforts of history as a discipline to restore traditional experience to subjects of the past; Pasolini's, Fortini's or Ponge's "poetic rage"; the social combats of Lewis Hine or Walker Evans; uprisings against the desecration of the Earth, species, civilizations and human beings, of "millenarian modes of existing," that is, the very project of ethos; and Badiou's encouragement to rethink the "real" in order to better call for "other ways of living"… If questions of style can easily, even necessarily, provoke anger, if it is necessary to risk declaring the forms that matter (which to protect, which to combat, which to say yes to and when to say no), it is precisely because forms commit to themselves the actual requirement of a life that is worthwhile, a life worth clinging to and worth doing one's part for. Style: that on which we might never agree, and which we nevertheless (and precisely as a result) cannot do without.

A real concern for the forms taken by life, the effort to understand and precisely observe this out of life, is perhaps never unaccompanied by the need to involve other forms, other manners of living, other schemes of existence. For there is no life devoid of the "how," no life that has already responded to the question of the "how." This is why the domain of forms must also and at once involve a critical desire for deciding and for recommitting. A philosopher in the tradition of Adorno, Rahel Jaeggi, has recently formulated an essential question: "Is it possible to criticize forms of life?"[54] Can forms of life be criticized (*critiquer*)? The question arises, and the response, too: Yes, they can; they can because they are. And, we should add, we criticize nothing other than forms of life. Forms of life are precisely what is critiqued, contested, upheld or combatted, what only exists when argued over, over which one must agree or disagree and which can only be tested through our commitments—*vera incessu patuit dea*: the goddess is proven by her step.

To wish to see forms is to regard this project as a domain of action, desire, utopia (even in pieces); a domain of suffering but also of joy. If it is true that politics requires imagination, to wish to see forms is necessarily to call for others, to imagine others. In any case, they do exist, if one looks hard enough, and if one seeks to recognize them wherever they begin. Otherwise the problem of style would be no problem at all. And indeed sometimes it isn't, or is no longer, a problem, when that tenacity for "qualifying" (describing, judging) begins to subside. An "idea of style," for Pasolini, was a dagger buried in the heart—but in his heart, a heart-arena where life had to be fought over.

Indeed, life is fought over in its forms. Yes, it *fights,* it *is fought,* in all senses of the reflexive. Life, in its forms, thrashes about, struggles to free itself, commits in order to decommit, and it is within forms that life itself is fought out, that one argues about and commits to it, and on which life itself is discussed and disputed: for its forms and our gestures alike. A

53 Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 32.

54 Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life,* trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). See also her *Alienation,* trans. Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), and *Kritik von Lebensformen* [Critique of forms of life] (Francfort-sur-le-Main: Suhrkamp, 2013), whose commitments I share.