AESTHETICS OF FORM REVISITED

ÉRIC ALLIEZ
ART & LANGUAGE
ARMEN AVANESSIAN
LUIS CAMNITZER
SEBASTIAN EGENHOFER
DOROTHÉA VON HANTELmann
BRIAN HOLMES
PAMELA M. LEE
 STEWART MARTIN
CHRISTOPH MENKE
PETER OSBORNE
JOHN RAJCHMAN
JULIANE REBENTISCH
LUKE SKREBOWSKI
'Aurai-je encore besoin des formes?'

This self-reflexive statement, made by Matisse in 1942, is only one example, albeit a telling one, of the struggle with the question of form in art and art theory that would intensify over the course of the twentieth century. While the entire time period of modernity can be seen as occupied with the problematics of form, there has nevertheless been a steady critical distanciation from such concerns over the last few decades. Looking at recent developments in thinking about form, we can determine a particular schema: on the one hand central topoi such as dissolution, opening and break demonstrate the residue of a revolutionary formal rhetoric; on the other hand a negatively inflected understanding of form has been projected as a synonym for paralysed social, political and artistic circumstances. For numerous reasons, we should object to such overly hasty disavowals of form and instead attempt to examine the seemingly old-fashioned concept of ‘form’ once again in view of contemporary aesthetic reflections.

A first requirement is to object to the conception of form as ‘paralysed’, a notion which we can clearly see belied in concepts such as Documenta XII’s ‘migration of form’ (wherein the particular formal meaning of individual artworks was deprioritized in favour of new formal configurations created at a curatorial level). Every theorization of art that takes an interest in the temporal mode of how an artwork is experienced anticipates a dynamic disposition of the artwork particular to even the most strictly formal pieces. Even if only through the experiential dimension instigated by them, singular artworks are therefore always also dynamic. This means that an understanding of form and work can only be achieved by means of the aspects of the making dynamic or temporalization of form entwined with artworks. An all too easily forgotten insight from the philosophical tradition is thus confirmed: in the aesthetic understanding of form, the two aspects of singularity and dynamics do not run contrary to each other, but rather are
intertwined. Only in the historically differing interplay between these two poles can we follow the attempts at breaking the boundaries of form, which, in conclusion, I will discuss as a politics of form.

A second reason for the necessity to come to terms with form once again can be found in view of the breakdown of the boundaries between the various arts that has intensified over the last few decades. Here an understanding of form, like almost nothing else, makes it possible to consolidate objects of investigation that otherwise would be very difficult to treat together. Form can be used to discuss artistic theory and practice, not only that of pictorial art, but also that of abstract and so-called conceptual art. The discussion of form manages to bring together the two constitute fields of knowledge of the discipline of aesthetics: theories of the production of the various arts on the one hand, and theories of their perception and reception on the other.

These initial comments are meant to explain why the problem of form has remained so virulent throughout the entire twentieth century – this can be seen in particular in the numerous attempts at forcing a redefinition of form but also in attempts to abolish it outright. Time and again it has proven to be the case that even emphatic dismissals of whatever particular understanding of form were immediately followed by an emphatic call for formal processes. In The Century Alain Badiou characterizes the whole twentieth century as marked by its utopian optimism in this regard: ‘Formalization is basically the great unifying power behind all the century’s undertakings – from mathematics (formal logics) to politics... by way of art.” What interests me here, however, are less the various formalization projects of modernity than the search for the creation of form – that is, the formation and formatting of artworks and genres as well as their reception. If a certain characteristic of form, first recognized in the late eighteenth century, lies in its particular processuality, then this concerns two things: first,
concrete artistic practices and procedures; second, definitional arrangements and regulative classifications antecedent to these practices. Even artworks that appear formless and chaotic are always based on formal precepts, as weak as they may be.

The discussion of the processuality of form, of course, also hints at the legal sense of the word ‘process’. For, on the one hand, one goes to court with form, one engages in due process. On the other hand, such criticism is done in order to understand the meaning and content of form as a process. That is also why new and different formal experiments, positioned in contrast to earlier ideas of form, often coincide with conceptual endeavours to find different terms for form (from Friedrich Schlegel’s ‘Antiform’ to Bataille’s ‘informe’ more than a century later). Always already, as we might say, (modern) aesthetics is on the way to the formal term most appropriate to it – and this is also where the attempt to get away from form always lies. Although objections to a traditional, metaphysical understanding of form are ceaselessly advanced, the question of how exactly this traditional understanding should in fact be defined is never properly explained.

Historically, the term ‘form’ has been conceived in relation to a multitude of other terms such as ‘matter’, ‘material’, ‘meaning’ or ‘aim’. Form can always only be understood from the following twofold difference: in diachronic difference to these antipoles (matter, material etc., subject to their historically varying definitional fortunes); and in synchronous difference to alternative understandings of form that compete with each other. A precise understanding of the historically diverse and disjoint concepts of form, however, cannot be content with just any insight into its terminological antipoles (content, meaning etc.). We must also keep in mind the way that the relations of form and its various others are marked in very different ways: as relations of opposition; as an oscillation between dynamically related poles; as various
aspects within an autopoietic systemic context. The ways in which modern conceptions distinguish themselves from early theories of form can finally more easily be understood by recourse to the specific logic by means of which aesthetic modernism combines form with its preferred opposite. This logic was expressed in an exemplary manner in Erwin Panofsky’s ontological and methodological definition of the artwork as a ‘lively interaction ... between volume and form’ and an ‘argument between space and time’. Given the fact that concepts of form were increasingly conceived in terms of an oscillating movement full of tension, one can better understand the historical fortunes of individual ‘form and x’ constellations (namely which contrasting partners allied with form rather than others). Since the beginning of the nineteenth century a general detachment from the form/content opposition in favour of a form/material dialectic can be observed. What becomes clear in this process, in Hegel’s words from The Science of Logic, is a dialectical relation of interaction: ‘Hence matter must be informed, and form must materialize itself.’

Perhaps the most telling formulation of this new insight can be found in a self-critical reflection by Novalis. In his 1795 examination of Kant and Fichte, Novalis developed an idea of ordo inversus, noting (rhetorically addressing himself): ‘That was a false concept, when you made form into antithesis, matter into thesis.’ Certainly, the hylemorphic tradition following Aristotle had already considered matter and form as mutually determinant. But it was not until the Renaissance that questions began to arise about an active (artistic) formation. Such an active form is also at stake in the twofold way in which Panofsky, yet another ‘anti-formalist among the formalists’ (Yilmaz Dziewo), speaks of the above-mentioned lively interaction: as the search for form as a generative principle, as well as the search for the material conditions from which form originates. Only on this formal aesthetic basis is it possible to avoid the abstract
opposition between formalism and materialism, which also implies reflecting upon the material substrates of formal procedures, as well as the material dispositions and consequences of forms in the various arts.

In Hegel we find definitions of ‘essence’ that anticipate what Luhmann would later call the paradox of form: “That the form determines the essence means, therefore, that in its distinguishing form sublates this very distinguishing and is the self-identity that essence is as the subsistence of the determinations.” The re-entry of form into itself proves not only to be the case in the artistically different ‘generic forms’ (e.g. seriality, fictionality). As we will see, the epistemological paradox of form’s re-entry into itself also implies the tangible capacity to connect different academic disciplines or fields of study, via form. For example, in sociology: according to Dirk Baecker such a logical schema, as developed by George Spencer Brown in Laws of Form (1969), released the term ‘form’ once and for all ‘from its difference to material, substance, and content, which it has in the Aristotelian, scholastic, and aesthetic tradition’. Even if we consider Baecker’s judgement too schematic, we can still retain the understanding of form’s self-relationality and self-reflexivity from his account, as a prerequisite for its usefulness in understanding social phenomena. Another example can be found in recent biological reflections that also attempt to rescue, in this sense, a ‘pure term of form’ from the ‘short-hand use of the term in the hylemorphic schema’. Most significant, though, and this is my topic here, is form’s signal importance to the discipline of aesthetics.

AESTHETIC AND ART THEORY

Despite the continual crisis of the term ‘form’, which is made evident by a multiplicity of alternative terms such as ‘process’, ‘openness’, ‘network’, or ‘structure’ (all of which are used to undermine an abstract form/content opposition), the term ‘form’ cannot be superseded. The artistic need for form
corresponds with a persistent theoretical desire to understand it. The fact that the term ‘form’ cannot entirely be removed from the arts, along with the fact that it proves to be indispensable aesthetically, lies at least in part in its ability to bring together, time and again, two foundational aspects of aesthetics that lead back to the period in which the discipline was initially constituted. Concrete spatio-temporal forms or artworks are the media in which the perceptual and art theoretical aspects of aesthetic phenomena can be analytically differentiated and synthetically conceived together.

This aesthetic two-sidedness of form came to the fore with Kant’s transcendental turn, and with the empirical interpretation of the forms of intuition in perceptual psychology and physiology that followed in the nineteenth century. The resulting new insights into the ability to modulate and configure perceptual forms were in strong contrast to such semiotic differentiations as Lessing deployed in the attempt to distinguish the space- and time-based arts. Analogously, after Kant, there was also a change in how art objects’ relationship to the world was thought, including how artworks were perceived aesthetically.

However, the division of aesthetics into two lines of tradition – the theory of aisthesis and the theory of art – (often running parallel to one another but with no communication between them) can be traced not only to its original inventor Baumgarten, but also to Kant. In Kant aesthetics can be found in a dual sense: on the one hand, as the idea of forms of intuition in space and time (in the Critique of Pure Reason), and, on the other, as the idea of aesthetic judgements (in the Critique of Judgment), even if such judgements are no longer related to the question of taste. Even if, or precisely because, Kant did not sufficiently clarify these two conceptions (at least so far as art theory is concerned), the question of a possible connection between an epistemological pure form of intuition on the one hand and an aesthetic intuition of form on the other was subsequently to become increasingly prevalent.
We can, therefore, speak of a disjunctive synthesis of these two approaches in the art of modernity and the conceptions of form that go along with it. The idea of form that interests me here is aesthetic, but it is no longer so in the sense of beautiful forms. The extensive and persistent aesthetic relevance of form in modernity is more easily apprehended if form is no longer understood in terms of sensually perceptible categories (contour, outline or shape) as it was in a long Neo-Kantian tradition in phenomenological writings on outline and contour, or in Gestalt psychology. Against the position of a dominant Neo-Kantianism, one can counter-pose Kant’s own early anthropological theses: the relevance of Kant’s pre-critical thoughts on form to art theory becomes evident in his reflections both on questions of space and time and on the theory of taste, according to which ‘not merely the form of the object according to the circumstances of the space in appearance [belongs] to shape [Gestalt], but also the matter, that is, sensation (colour).

According to Sebastian Egenhofer, the following ‘basic parameters of Kantian ontology’ apply to the experiential object in general as well as to artworks in particular: the mathematical synthesis of their ‘spatially current form and presently given sensual qualities (colour, density, temperature, etc.)’ and the dynamic synthesis in time qua snapshot of a ‘general process of material transformation’. What Egenhofer sees as the ‘forming’ of Donald Judd’s minimalist artworks has also been touched upon in Rodolphe Gasché’s discussion of Kant’s reworking of hypotyposis, an antique concept of rhetoric: in the rhetorical tradition ‘hypotyposis’ means a sensual placing-before-the-eyes of the forms of appearance; in Aristotle’s Metaphysics hypotyposis designates ‘that which “forms”, shapes, or moulds essence itself’. If, in view of the ubiquitous dynamicization and break-up of artistic forms, we wish to maintain the concept of a ‘form’ as singular, then we can no longer think of it as object-oriented. One of the philosophical attempts to think
such a non-sensual, abstract concept of formation can be found in Kant.\textsuperscript{17} His reflections on a \textit{mere form} of singular aesthetic events cannot be reduced to a theory of sensual (perceptible) beautiful forms, but instead focuses on the circumstances of how things are presented. Kant’s \textit{mere form} refers to a form-giving capacity, to the transformation of the formless into form. Such a singularizing understanding of form does not predetermine the shape of things, but starts at the level of possibly shaping them in the first place: “Mere form” concerns ... the possibility of being given in a representation.\textsuperscript{18}

These seemingly abstract philosophical questions on non-object-oriented concepts of form can also be found in concrete art-historical context. There have consistently been attempts – symptomatically opposed to Panofsky’s neo-Kantian \textit{symbolic form} – to understand a general artistic volition or artistic will [\textit{Kunstwollen}] as a psychological and spatio-temporal category. Wolfgang Kemp has pointed out how much Alois Riegl’s concept of artistic volition [\textit{Kunstwollen}] can be understood as a ‘visual regime’,\textsuperscript{19} as a regulative matrix of an age. Wilhelm Worringer, in his analyses of Gothic art, discovers a non-figurative, abstract-expressive line that is no longer defined by any contouring function. According to the model of such an abstract form–line, and under the strict, foundational Kantian assumption that aesthetics can only ever be aesthetics of form, Worringer even speaks of an ‘a priori form will’,\textsuperscript{20} which lies at the basis of all concrete formal practices. And Otto Pächt, to mention another representative of the Vienna school, observed an ‘unchained ... dynamic’ in the separation of text and image in undercut line forms in medieval illuminated manuscripts, in which the ‘organic form’ comes ‘in flux’.\textsuperscript{21} This ornamental line form, often considered abstract, can also be linked to the \textit{arabesque}, a central concept of early Romantic aesthetics, and at the same time can refer to future artistic abstraction. What can be seen is an artistic and art-theoretical idea of
AESTHETICS OF FORM REVISITED

form that, rather than opposing form and material, focuses on the necessarily material nature of every artistic form. What is decisive, both theoretically and practically, is that it is precisely the desensualization, the shapelessness, of such a form that provides for its productivity in each of the various artistic materials.

The question of singular processes of form-giving is at stake here in multiple respects. Kant’s transcendental-aesthetic theory of form, originally developed from singular – that is, natural – objects judged without any pregiven concept, retains art-theoretical plausibility to this day; that is, into the post-conceptual period of the return to painting in the 1980s. Even when, rereading Kant with Thierry de Duve, the judgement ‘this is beautiful’ becomes replaced by ‘this is art’, the relevance of singular forms retains its force.22 The question now becomes the consequences for our understanding of art if artistic works can no longer be considered simply examples of traditional art genres, but increasingly appear as singular forms, establishing genres as much as they abolish them. Alongside making connections with aesthetic and art-theoretical aspects, the term ‘form’ here proves to be of significance for the theory of genres, and this in a double sense: we need to stress both the unifying tendency of genres to mark boundaries as well as their dynamic qualities and their ability to break boundaries. If we wish to understand genres’ rules, then we must be more precise in defining the two corresponding procedures of aesthetic form, the making dynamic and the singularity of form.

SINGULARITY: WORKS AND GENRES

We can gain insight into the aesthetic singularity of form from three sides: first, in the Kantian interpretation of a singularity of the (termless) judgement of taste as a component of every aesthetic experience; second, as the capacity of artworks to produce spatio-temporal singular events and performances, which, without being generalizable, nonetheless
can claim comprehensive validity; third, from the fact that the term ‘singularity’ underscores the reality that artistic works can no longer be considered simple examples of traditional art genres. Instead, contemporary artworks are singular forms, which both establish genres and artistic disciplines as well as abolishing them. Obviously this has consequences for how the field of art is constituted epistemologically. ‘The aesthetic regime of the arts ... strictly identifies art in the singular’, according to Jacques Rancière, ‘and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres.’ Singularity thus shows itself to enhance processuality in a dual and seemingly contradictory sense: the logic of singularity produces the most excessively dynamic and even formless artworks. Understood in this way, singularity and dynamics are only two operative attributes of form, intrinsically bound up with each other, and not qualities of things. In a modification of Jean-Luc Nancy’s formula être singulier pluriel, the ‘ipseity’ and contradictory equivalence of aesthetic forms can be rewritten as: being singularly dynamic.

Walter Benjamin, in his dissertation on the Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism, noted that in Romanticism ‘the idea of art is defined as the medium of reflection of forms’, while the singular-dynamic ‘unity of art lies in the idea of a continuum of forms’. In such an aesthetic reflection on forms of the second order, it is not by chance that the question of the formation or formalization of form is deconstructively doubled: the analysis of the formal conditions of genres often implies a parodic approach. The self-referential ‘second-order re-entry of form’, as diagnosed by systems theorists, is, in fact, the ‘formal irony’ already known to the Romantics as discussed by Benjamin. Such an objective and formal irony ‘presents a paradoxical venture: through demolition to continue building on the formation’ – that is, to achieve form itself from deformation, and in the end, from formlessness.
Since the early Romantic conceptions of ‘Antiform’ as the figure at the boundary of all figurativeness, of irony as ‘permanent parabasis’ qua consistent breaking and interrupting – in short, at least since 1800 – the canonization and decanonization of genres of work based on their conformity to certain rules has endlessly been discussed. It should be stressed yet again that this is a matter of dynamic concepts of genre and their corresponding singular artworks. For, here as well, (artistic) singularity is not to be thought of in opposition to making dynamic. The genres of modernism are not static formations, but instead are wrapped up in a dynamic relationship of exchange with paradigmatic artworks.

DYNAMIC FORM: TEMPORALIZATION
Making form dynamic is thus not, as is so often stated, to be understood as breaking up works or genres, although such an outcome can certainly be catalysed by this process. Initially, ‘making dynamic’ implies an estrangement of two intertwined aspects: the (autopoietic) autonomy of the work and the (organic) closedness of its form. Starting from 1700 the idea of the artwork and its form as a kind of closed cosmos was slowly established, most clearly at first in the field of music, starting with opera and cantata arias, then moving on to the instrumental concert, which was free of text and based on the principle of harmonic totality. It was only later aspects of making dynamic, which were intertwined and worked against closedness, that increasingly concerned a more temporal understanding of form. Even the idea of a dynamic musical form – in music history from the Mannheim School to the Second Viennese School – implies a paradoxical relationship to time. This can be seen most clearly in the dismissal of the classical poetics of rules, and in ideas about form developing around 1800, when the idea of a musical development (Durchführung) came into prominence as a justification for form and, according to Adorno, as the
‘centre of the [sonata] form altogether’. Such a temporal-aesthetic principle of thematic difference and repetition can be viewed as the music-historical equivalent of the increasing concentration on processuality and the effects of form in the visual arts since 1750. Here, too, an aesthetic experience of forms implies that the observer is understood as necessary to their perception, and enters into the complex network of aesthetic form and aesthetic content. For the aesthetic modern since 1800, one can observe the increasing importance of the perception of form (as opposed to the perception of objects or contents). The modern renaissance of form is due to the problematization of a representative logos of form in favour of an artistically new theory and perception of form.

The ‘making dynamic’ that reveals itself in the new formal aesthetics beginning in 1800 is linked to various different strategies and procedures for disclosing the autopoietic dimension of forms (e.g. as one example for the general shift from a natural philosophy to theories of epigenesis). The ‘act of a form is that by which a form forms itself: it is its autogenesis’, which is why every figurative form, along with its representative dimension, also has a ‘genetic-rhythmic’ one, according to Henri Maldiney. It is not by chance that the persistent interest over two centuries in the spatio-temporally paradoxical standstill in movement in time-images uses the symbolism of the crystal. Already the idealistic natural philosophers around 1800 thought about crystals as giving visibility and clarity to a formal drive, that emerges from the amorphous mass of inorganic material. This idea of a formal will or volition caused a new aesthetic interest in how eventful singularities, not governed by rules, are produced. That is, interest was directed less and less at the imitation of pre-established or pre-formed natura naturata, than at attempts to make visible the form-building natura naturans.

The aesthetic materialization of form in modernism must therefore be grasped in its dual meaning, both aesthetic and
art-theoretical. For the artistic practice of modernism, this can be seen – catalysed by the appropriate artistic objects – in a becoming-intrusive of space and time, both of which were still conceived as intangible and non-perceptible by Kant. So construed, the aesthetic forms and artistic contents that reflect upon and destabilize the conditions and conventions of our perception, what Kant calls *a priori* forms of our intuition, become materially objectified *a posteriori*. Here as well, processes of making singular and making dynamic cannot be separated from one another. The artistic becoming-intrusive of space and time results from the collapse and convergence of the traditional physiological and sense-logic of simultaneity and succession, of synchrony and diachrony. Such aesthetic intrusions are provoked by more and more dynamic forms of movement and rhythm. Thereby an aesthetic estrangement is constituted that makes grasurable for the senses the otherwise indiscernible relations in the order of space and time, transforming them into concrete spatial times and temporal spaces. Time and again, for the artistic proponents of materializing form, it is a matter of regaining some original dimension of space and time, which attempts to preserve or rediscover this dimension in its singular eventfulness.\(^32\) This aesthetic interest also explains the insistence on space and time images, on phenomena of dynamic stasis, that generate dynamic processes from singular crystallizations of form. The goal of such form building is to make itself visible in momentary crystallizations: the singularity of dynamic formal processes.

Here we also have an explanation for why it is possible to read concrete social or political aspects in such materialized forms of our perception. Following Christoph Menke we can precisely understand the hetero-autonomous ‘special role of art’ as something ‘that can question all forms through itself’,\(^33\) which is to say that from the analysis of artistic forms one can also infer broader political and cultural meanings.
POLITICS OF FORMS

Aesthetic form and politics are therefore related to each other in at least two ways. First, the reason for, and the necessity of, a political discussion of form lies in the fact that it is through form that art appears connected to areas generally understood as non-artistic. This is also why a politics of seeing has been proposed time and again with formalist arguments. In the discussion of form, not only do aesthetic questions and themes intermix with epistemological ones, they also mix with political ones. A politics of hearing and seeing thus corresponds to a politics of what can be said and written.34 Second, the formal problems and paradoxes addressed above are also repeated at the level of political theory. The attempts to get beyond the naturalized separations of form and matter, of activity and passivity, which characterize Jacques Rancière’s aesthetic regime of identification, correspond to a bipolar understanding of how politics can be applied to artistic forms. On the one hand, a politics of form in the act: the promise of a unity of life and art, the playful suspension according to the model of an artistic play of equivalent forms; opposed to this relational idea of art, in which art only becomes political in the last consequence by the fact that it abolishes itself as art, is a politics that could be called formalist. In this politics, the reverse is claimed: that the social progressiveness of art should result from maintaining a certain distance from any concrete political intervention. In these ‘two great politics of aesthetics: the politics of the becoming-life of art and the politics of the resistant form’,35 it is not difficult to recognize the aspects of dynamics and singularity that touch on a common formal regime in modernity, this time in the area of the political.

In the field of the political as in the field of art, the argument about form is coming up anew. This can be clearly seen in the thinking about form by political theorists of various stripes on the extreme right and radical left. So, for instance, it is not by chance that Alain Badiou’s political
decisionism has been criticized for a corresponding Platonic neo-classicism.\textsuperscript{36} In a similar vein, Carl Schmitt’s theoretical concept of the political is based on a \textit{hylemorphic} model, in which the spiritless material requires ensoulment through a spiritual form.\textsuperscript{37} In his objection to democratic formalism, Schmitt shows himself to be a strict formal classicist, who critiques precisely the formlessness in the eternal discussions of Romantic-modernist parliamentarianism: ‘The weakness is that the people should decide on the basic questions of their political form and their organization without themselves being formed or organized.’\textsuperscript{38}

The power or uniqueness of singular aesthetic forms is, on the contrary, a dynamic openness and opening towards beholder, society and the current surroundings. One decisive aspect of aesthetic forms is exactly that they both are produced by artistic decisions and at the same time destabilize those decisions. In conjunction with his reflections on formalism, Jan Verwoert has noted that in Tomma Abts’s paintings ‘the definitive decision resulting in the painting’s completion succeeds in revealing once more the potential of this and other decisions.’\textsuperscript{39} This anti-decisionist simultaneity of necessity and contingency, obviously still at stake in contemporary art, correlates with what Kant called aesthetic judgements of taste, where objects are encountered outside any conceptual or discursive framework. To judge objects, situations or relations in their very singularity, in their very singular form, means at the same time having to deal with their varying historical, cultural and contextual contents.

2 Alain Badiou, \textit{The Century}, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 159–60. Badiou understands the \textit{form} in ‘formalization’ not in opposition to ‘matter’ or ‘content’, but as ‘an Idea as given in its material index, a singularity that can only be activated in the real grip of an act’.
3 In German the word \textit{Prozess} is also the word for ‘trial’ in the legal sense.

5 However, this form/content opposition is still visible in Adorno’s definition of form as ‘sedimented content’; see Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 5.


10 By ‘generic forms’ I mean forms that are both the result and the product of material procedures in the various fields of art.


13 This Neo-Kantian approach was especially dominant in music psychology (from Helmholtz’s physiology of the sense of hearing to Riemann’s music theory), especially in its conception of a categorical formation of a passive material of sensation (see Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Musiktheorie im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Grundzüge einer Systematik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1984, pp. 54 ff.) and in the idea of formal composition as ‘works of the spirit in spiritually competent material’ (see Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (1854), Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1981, p. 35).


17 This is why the (dissident) readings of Kant outlined here do not focus on the teleological orientation of the judgment of taste, understood as an aesthetic proof of a para-epistemic human faculty, which turns up precisely where appropriate terms are lacking in respect to singular objects.


19 ‘Artistic volition [Kunstwollen] ... is not – as is often fallaciously supposed – a creative instinct that slumbers in the obscure depths of nations and times: it operates by schooling and gratifying the eye, and it constitutes the “visual regime” of an age.’ Wolfgang Kemp, ‘Introduction’, in Alois Riegl, *The Group
AESTHETICS OF FORM REVISITED


24 This is in contrast to the arts in general, which are to be taken as 'plural singularities'; see Jean-Luc Nancy, Being Singular Plural, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2000.


27 Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', p. 165.


32 Art and cultural historians from Alois Riegl (Raumscheu, dread of space) to Pamela M. Lee (chronophobia) have pointed to the symptomatic insistence on spatio-temporal disturbances throughout history.

33 Stefan Germer, 'Form als Selbstunterlaufung. Ein Interview mit Christoph Menke', Texte zur Kunst 27, September 1997, pp. 73–6, p. 76.

34 The fact that such a form, shot through with socially expressive character, would also become a politically contentious term within the historical avant-garde, has been well documented since the discussions of Russian formalism. The principle of estrangement, as formulated by Viktor Shklovsky, was originally focused on the particular capacity of singular artworks to work against the automatism of our perceptive apparatus through deformation. Radical breaks with our habits of seeing and hearing also formed the model of a fundamental revolution of perception a generation later in Marcuse, which was projected as necessary to achieve further social reconfiguration.


37 Even in the communist and liberal alternatives to the dictatorial violence of forms, the question of democratic forms and the specific political meaning
of form have not been set aside. On the contrary, it seems, in fact, as if ‘the liberalism declared to reign shared the vision of Marxism, said to be defunct: a vision that conceptualizes the forms of politics in terms of the duality of form and content, political appearance and social reality.’ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1999, p. 98.
