Why Read Hegel Now?

Judith Butler

Abstract: Reading Hegel now introduces us to a sense of disorientation in time and space that speaks to our time. Without being able to situated ourselves in relation to a progressive history or a geopolitical location unrelated to other such locations, we ask, what time is it? And, where are we? Hegel also gives us a way to think about contemporary conflicts in such a way that our social and global interdependency can be foregrounded. By taking distance from communitarian accounts of identity informing border politics and developing a relational ethics for the present derived from Hegel's thought, we can discern the basic form of a social philosophy of nonviolence.

Keywords: Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, conflict, interdependency, time, nonviolence

We are asking a question: Why read Hegel now?[1] That question involves us from the start in the question of how to read him, whether he is readable at all, and under what conditions? It also involves us in trying to understand the "now" which is surely not the same "now" in which Hegel wrote more than 200 years ago. The "now" is also a philosophical and historical problem that could preoccupy us for a very long time. Let us for the moment remember that Hegel discusses this problem of "the now" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: the now is the same moment in which "the now" passes, and becomes a then. By the time I say "now" in order to indicate this now, I am already speaking falsely, since the now has passed by the time it is named, and the time of the name is another time altogether. We know about Hegel's Owl of Minerva. What we may not have realized is that that Owl sits on our shoulders every time we seek to capture the present moment. Philosophy itself always arrives too late on any temporal scene. But today I want to speak about the contemporary *historical* scene, and where Hegel may live within it. We understand too late, or belatedness (*nachträglichkeit*) seems to be a predicament of thinking. This suggests that we cannot anticipate what is to take place nor can we easily or adequately speak about the present. And yet, Hegel is not so useless, and perhaps not so lost to the past. Many of us of course now live with fear or anguish, or we have passed over into mourning, because we think that the conditions of democracy have been too strongly challenged or eroded from within. Is the time of democracy over, and can democracy only become a true thought on the occasion of its passing? If I suggest that this very conviction and sentiment that a time, an epoch, is over is a recurrent one, I do not mean to underestimate the enormous challenge that we face in our present lives. It is true, I

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would suggest, that the sense of temporal disorientation in which we live is very real, and that we may seek to quell the anxiety with which we live with a certain conviction: the earth is lost; democracy is over; the future is foreclosed. That form of fatalism suffers from an exaggerated sense of certainty. When we say that a time is over, we are saying that we no longer experience the same sort of confidence about living in a specific time or era that we once had. We had a felt sense, perhaps an unquestioned sense, of forward movement, and we accepted that phenomenological sense of time as one that could not be called into question or, rather, could no longer be called into question. But if some time is said to be over, if some historical time appears now to have come to an end, that means only that we have lost a confident sense of historical time because there is now a question of what time we are in. We might find that Hegel's reflections on the French revolution pose this question as one important temporal question that emerges under conditions of revolution, namely, *what time is it*?

I certainly do not want to claim that we are living in revolutionary times, but perhaps we are, without knowing it. Rather, I seek only to suggest that this unknowingness about what time it is, this disorientation, suggests that what some of us took for granted as the temporal conditions of experience seem no longer to hold in the way they once did. That may be because in various cultural encounters we find that people live with a very different sense of past, present, and future, or because what some have called "progress" was called "ruination" by others (Benjamin suggested that this was the case when we take progress to be purely technological).[2] It may also be the case if we thought that Nazism was a political movement of the past or that US racism was definitively overcome by the civil rights movement. We were apparently wrong to rely on a sense of time as moving forward in a straight line, with no potential for regression or reversal. Perhaps we thought that market rationality could never become the paradigm for rationality, or that an ethics of hospitality would remain uncontested within Europe. Perhaps we thought that environmental activism was strong enough to save the species and the earth. Perhaps we thought that both nationalism and possessive individualism would give way to a transnational community. What I am calling "disorientation" is at once a sense of shock, loss, defeat, and disillusionment. But it is also a situation that gives rise to a question, and even a questioning spirit: *what time is it?* Who can tell the time during these times? What language do we need now in order to tell the time, for once we understand the temporal and spatial coordinates of our experience, we may be able to orient ourselves better toward the task of social transformation and even the affirmation of life. If we feel condemned to live within these times, or we worry that the next

2 Benjamin 2006, p.393

generation will condemn us for leaving them a broken world, perhaps we can ask at least two questions: how might this sense of a broken world point to a path forward? Where and how do we come to affirm this historical life, the life we live in this historical time?

My suggestion is to look back to Hegel in order to look forward. In this way, I take issue with those who tell us that Hegel's thought, by definition, always arrives too late to be useful in the present. And yet, Hegel's philosophy gives us a way to understand how social bonds can be forged from potentially violent conflict, and in this way, he speaks to the present and our disorientation. We are not the first to ask, what, if anything, holds us together as a society? Are there social bonds that obligate us to one another? These questions presuppose that we can think of ourselves not only as self-interested individuals but as social beings whose obligations to one another exceed our communitarian alliances. Our social lives, our very status as social beings, are characterized by forms of interdependency that exceed both nation and territory. I hope to show, with the assistance of Hegel, how we might think about both sociality and nonviolence as potentials within this time, ones that may give us a way to affirm the potentials that reside within the historical time in which we live.

In *The Philosophy of Right*, we learn that every time we declare a right, we assume a certain kind of society from which that claim emerges. Even though rights claims are generally abstract, that does not mean that they exist in an abstract domain. Rather, they have been abstracted and distilled from an order of *Sittlichkeit*, the operative norms and conventions found in a given society. As Christoph Menke has persuasively argued, the kind of society presumed by rights claims belongs to a market economy: individual pursue their desires and interests, and it is on the basis of those interests that rights claims are built.[3] For Menke, this process involves a "naturalization of the social" such that we rarely ask anymore what kinds of presumptions about society are being made when rights are being asserted. Are they rights that belong to self-interested individuals, considered as the basic units of society, or are there social bonds that are appropriately asserted as "rights"? Too often a social ontology of individualism is presumed to be the basis of rights claims, which entails setting aside community norms, social bonds, and forms of ethical connection that constitute our moral and political modes of belonging and participation. At worst, rights claims deny our social relations, insisting that we conceive of ourselves as those who conform with ideals of the self-interested egos at the expense of our social lives, including social forms of political mobilization and transformation.

3 Menke 2020

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Although *The Elements of Philosophy of Right* perhaps most effectively introduces the system of needs and the general conception of *Sittlichkeit*, we can see the emergence of an ontological interdependency in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as well.[4] One problem with the third element of right underscored by Hegel in *The Elements of Philosophy of Right* is that it assumes that we can base our practical judgments on a shared conception of social mores, conventions and norms. When, however, we live in multi-cultural and multi-lingual societies, we can no longer assume the common character of *Sittlichkeit*. Indeed, any recourse we make to *Sittlichkeit* is either parochial and limited, or involves us straightaway in a field of conflicting social values. Hegel assumed the relative stability of civil society and the family, and yet both of those domains have been reformulated and contested by demographic changes within civil society, the enfranchisement of the colonized, and the radical shifts in contemporary family and kinship in the light of new social forms of intimate association, gay and blended marriages, enduring and sequential social and intimate bonds outside of the conjugal model. If we cannot fully agree with Hegel's account of the social forms that precede and condition legal and political rights claims, can we find other resources in Hegel to give us a broader conception of sociality in which we might draw for the present.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we were and are confronted with many issues, but chief among them is the question of how the sensuous form of a knowing subject becomes increasingly aware of its own inter-relatedness with a series of sensuous objects and, eventually, with another sensuous consciousness. That single other will be duplicated in time, and at a certain point that consciousness becomes part of *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel begins, as you know, with what is called sense-certainty, trying to initiate the experience of reading by beginning with what seems most indisputable and certain – the experience of the senses, the results of indexical reference – and that is where the here, the now, the day and the night all become central actors in this unfolding set of scenes. As the certainties furnished by the senses and the most simple forms of referentiality become subject to doubt, it is important to note that neither the senses nor sensuous phenomenon nor referentiality is ever fully negated – they prove insufficient as grounds for knowledge, but they also prove to be indispensable to any future form of knowledge. As the text proceeds, and our experience of reading becomes the site where every argument is at once displayed and demonstrated, we find, for instance, that there is obduracy to the sensuous world that cannot be overcome, just as in the early theological writings, there was an obduracy and persistence of the body that could not be overcome, except in forms of self-destruction or death. In the *Phenomenology*, death

4 Hegel 1977, Hegel 1991

becomes more central, first as a site of regeneration, as exemplified in the Bacchanalian revel (one member falls away, and another comes forward, so the dance remains infinite). But then again in Lordship and Bondage where two shapes, two animated, living, and conscious shapes become aware of their similitude, and this recognition of oneself as another, or another as oneself, becomes the basis of what is called Self-Consciousness. This means very simply that self-knowledge, understood as a condition in which one takes oneself as an object for knowledge (and we would have to add, in an Hegelian sense, a *living* object of knowledge) is social. Self-consciousness, or a reflexive form of consciousness, is never fully solitary, and it depends upon another living embodiment of consciousness, which means that *only as a social being can I begin to reflect upon myself*. The scene of the encounter is the scene of self-consciousness. We cannot say simply that there is one subject over here who is self-conscious and then another over there who is self-conscious, since neither is self-conscious without encountering the other. It is the encounter that articulates self-consciousness, which is why self-consciousness is, by definition, social. One might say that it is the emergence of sociality in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* itself. Unfortunately, after a quick experience of anger and dispossession, there seems to be a resolve to destroy the other. And it is not really possible to say that one decides to destroy the other, and the other decides to defend him or herself. What is happening with the one is happening with the other – which is why this encounter cannot be understood as a sociological or psychological description simply. We are used to thinking about one subject acting on another, and that will happen very soon, but at this moment, the life and death struggle is one in which both subjects engage since they are scandalized to find another embodied consciousness, and must destroy that other in order to regain what Hegel calls self-certainty. But it turns out that if the other can be destroyed, so too can the one, that their lives are in that sense interlinked, and that the strategy of destruction inevitably imperils them both. If one is destroyed, then one cannot have certainty in oneself, at which point we are lead to conclude that one must remain alive and social in order to achieve self-certainty and that *recognition is itself always mutual, which means that it is a feature of a social relationship*, and so not an act that one "I" can perform alone (one reason why Charles Taylor's use of Kant to associate recognition with respect is faulty). There is also, I would suggest, an ethical valence in this encounter, namely, that my life is never my life alone, since my life belongs (a) to living processes that exceed and sustain me, and to (b) other lives, all those other animated and conscious shapes, as it were. And this means that I cannot destroy another's life without attacking a set of living processes of which I am a part. In other words, in destroying another's life, I destroy my own, which is not to say that I am the sole agent on the scene. It is rather to say that there is no

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way as a living being fully to individuate myself from other living beings. One could say, and I have tried to say, that this idea of a living socius is a possible argument for non-violence that emerges from Hegel's text, even if Hegel himself does not follow that line of reasoning.

The subject of the *Phenomenology* does not know in advance that it is a social creature, but this recognition emerges in the aftermath of a life and death struggle. It is, in fact, in the turning away from violence that the social bond appears for the first time. Violence emerges as a distinct possibility, but recognition that violence will not work is what inaugurates the sense of an ethical imperative to find a way of keeping oneself and the other alive, regardless of the conflict between us. Hegel's account suggests that the first encounter with another self-consciousness is an angry and destructive one. Who is this other who has stolen my identity, who replicates me, and robs me of my singularity? And yet, precisely because this other is in some indeterminate sense "me" I realize that I cannot do away with this other without also doing away with myself. How then am I to proceed? At the moment that destroying the other is ruled out as a possibility, I realize that I am bound to this other, and that there is some way that my life is bound up with the other's life. On my reading of Hegel, this recognition that I am bound to the other is (a) an insight into bodily interdependency and (b) reciprocal ethical obligation.

Of course, not everyone agrees with this reading. For instance, the important analysis provided by Axel Honneth maintains that each self-consciousness recognizes the other, and that recognition should be defined as the action by which each attributes a normative status to the other.[5] Each is treated as bearing value, and the relation becomes reciprocal on the occasion which each attributes a normative status to other that attributes value. Indeed, recognition comes to look very much like Kantian respect on Honneth's model. In the Kantian reformulation of Hegelian recognition, the reciprocity of that relation becomes transformative; each is transformed by the respect of the other. We are, each of us, changed by respect, a view confirmed by Toni Morrison's recently published essays entitle *Self-Regard*.[6] I would understand that slightly differently. The two subjects who encounter each other are not only transformed by one another, but also formed by one another. In other words, if we ask how a subject comes into being, we see that every subject emerges from dependency, struggling with the process of differentiation. From the beginning, one cannot stand on one's own; one cannot exist without the support of the other and by implication, the social and economic network of support on which the caregiver relies. Each subject emerges as a distinct thinking and speaking being by virtue of a

5 Honneth 1996

6 Morrison 2020

formation at once social and psychological, bound up with dependency. Sometimes that dependency is joy but other times it is psychically unmanageable. Dependency is thus fraught with ambivalence.

Thus, I share with Honneth the Hegelian view that we are the sorts of the creatures who desire recognition, and who come to understand ourselves by virtue of the social relations by which recognition is conferred and received. But our distinct status as subjects bearing individual values is the effect of a social formation, one over which we do not have individual control. That first moment of encounter in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in which it appears as if the other has supplanted me is enraging and unexpected. The other appears first as an unexpected likeness, and instead of being happy to have some company, the subject experiences this sudden duplication of itself as a threat. How is the first self-consciousness to gain certainty of itself? To recover his singularity, his non-reproducibility, the other must be extinguished; this combative resolve is the most defensive and destructive position that emerges in the course of subject formation. But luckily, it is overcome. As in all Hegelian progression, the overcoming of murderous intention leaves its active trace: aggression survives, as does conflict, but physical destruction is no longer an option. But why? What lets us move beyond that scene of potential and reciprocal murder is the recognition not just that the other is like me and equal to me, deserving respect in the way that I do, but that our two lives are bound together. We are bound together an interdependent relationship as two living processes dependent upon the continuing life systems of nature, infrastructural systems that support life, and the very possibility of the economic reproduction of living beings. Thus, when we come to understand ourselves as social creatures we also recognize, even if belatedly, that we are already related to those with whom we negotiate the terms of recognition, and that we are each defined by that relationality. With Martin Buber, himself influenced by Hegel, we can say that we are in a living relation to one another.[7] This insight moves beyond the dyadic structure of caregiver and infant. The caregiver who secures the life of the child must also have her life secured by a broader network of support, including paid labor. What appears in childhood as dependency is not overcome with the advent of independent individuals. It moves, rather into forms of social interdependency, a combination that might be described in Hegelian terms as both a system of needs and *Sittlichkeit*. Indeed, if my life depends on yours, and yours on mine, then this reciprocity characterizes a common condition, a form of belonging. Indeed, over and against the Kantian view, I would argue that we belong to one another prior to the act of recognition that constitutes our respective value in the eyes of each other. When we recognize each other, we take stock of a relationship that has bound us together from the outset, even

7 Buber 1971

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though, in the scene that Hegel describes, it seems we each were full-blown adults, independently living shapes (*Gestalten*), who just happened upon another such living form in the course of a strange journey.

Thus, there remain good reasons in our reconstruction of Hegel for not separating the struggle for recognition from the life and death struggle. One key reason is that the ethical imperative not to kill emerges precisely from the recognition that what can happen to the other can also happen to me and that we are bound together in this predicament and process called life. The social bond between us depends upon this reciprocal recognition of our living dependency, our interdependency as part of our shared life. Of course, dependency and interdependency are not always beautiful experiences. The life and death struggle survives in transmuted form in the Lordship and Bondage section of the text. The dependency of the worker on a lord who does not recognize his humanity is not finally tolerable. That worker discovers his independence in the object, but the object cannot be separated from the economy unless every worker is a radically self-sustaining individual. Here Hegel prefigures a psychoanalytic insight that dependency is both necessary and sometimes intolerable. For Freud, it is the infant who seeks to differentiate from those on which she depends at the same time that that differentiation is never fully complete. The ego psychologists imagine that differentiation as complete, but Winnicott and relational psychoanalysis more broadly disputes that possibility.[8] The self-conscious subject who thinks it can destroy the other does not realize that its own life depends upon the continuing life of the other. The nature of life is that it generates independently living beings, but they are part of living processes that exceed their individuality. In Hegel, this is the tension between universal and particular life. In recognizing that in killing the other I may also be killed, I recognize something more than mere likeness. This is also my life over there, and that life is also in or of my life in some way. I may not have chosen to be connected with that other and, surely, I was never given a contract to sign. The bond is precontractual in the sense that no life emerges without another, and that this implication of one life in another is part of the very process we call life. Once that dependency is acknowledged, new solutions to aggression must be found that exclude the possibility of the violent destruction of the other's life. With Freud, and with Klein, I do not think that aggression can be fully overcome (Freud claimed that ambivalence was constitutive of all love relations).[9] And Hegel understood by *Aufhebung* a process in which something was cancelled, overcome, and yet preserved. Aggression both preserves and overcomes the life and death struggle. And though it is not a word that

8 Mitchell 1988

9 See Butler 2020

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we find in Hegel, we can discern its trace in the continuing struggle of the bondsman, and the internal conflicts of the ascetic and the skeptic. An ethical imperative emerges here that is, in my view, more robust than respect. It does no less than reformulate the commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Kill". Ethically, we are all under an obligation to find modes of expression that are not destructive, to cultivate ethical practices that acknowledge and work with aggression without allowing its conversion into violence.

The theme of interdependency becomes explicit in the Lordship and Bondage section of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will not reconstruct that encounter in detail, but I draw attention to that section because indirectly it introduces an economic dimension to social life and, as we know, provides one model for Marx as he seeks to understand exploitation and hold out hope for emancipation. Hegel's Lordship and Bondage describes a feudal relation, and yet some aspects of the analysis anticipate Marx's account of alienated labor within industrial societies. You will remember that the bondsman is treated as an object and yet finds himself working on an object. Is he the same kind of object as the one on which he works? In the process of working on the object, the bondsman sees the effects of his own labor on the object, and his self-consciousness emerges in the course of making that recognition. It was doubtless terrible to be an object, and yet only by existing outside himself in external form was he able to see himself, and to recognize that he is something other than the object that he sees. His object bears a human trace. As a body that labors, the body also bears the trace of the object, a shape among shapes in the phenomenal world. It is tempting to resort to an anthropocentric reading and to claim "ah, the object is now nothing more than an extension of the subject, a projection of the subject, and whatever is deemed valuable in the object is the result of human labor. But the object is more than the repository or expression of human freedom or labor. The human dependency on the object is insuperable, for the object can be nourishment or it can be the stuff from which shelter is made, or shoes, or machines that let us breathe or, indeed, the entire infrastructural apparatus without which human life cannot be sustained. Self-consciousness is only possible *within an object world*, and without objects, none of us could know ourselves as humans. They are not our opposite, but our supports, the conditions of our existence. The slave emerges from enslavement within a social world of objects, and if he seeks to rid himself of the object-world, or his/her own status as a body in the world, that denial cannot be sustained. Asceticism has its allure, especially for a subject who comes to experience his separateness from the object as a terrifying freedom.

Hegel tells us that this fear and trembling coincides with the recognition that the bondsman is free or, rather, that his labour can and has become the means through which he can achieve his independence

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from the Lord and even know himself as a free and independent consciousness. But does the bondsman, in breaking free of the Lord, break of free of all social interdependency? Or does he break free only from a form of dependency that is exploitative. After all, his labor is extracted under a condition of unfreedom. Similarly, the Lord does not know what to do upon seeing clearly his own dependency on the bondsman. The bondman feeds the lord, builds his shelter, surrounds him with a world of objects. He finds that whereas the bondsman was earlier chained to the Lord, and the object, the Lord is now chained to the bondsman for whatever goods he requires to live. This form of economic dependency is wretched and exploitative. But that does not mean that interdependency can, or should be, replaced by independence or radical individualism. It means that the system of needs, foregrounded in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, has to be thought in terms of a sustaining *Sittlichkeit*, a set of norms, conventions, and practices that sustain a shared mode of life.

The future is hardly clear once the reader moves past "The Struggle for Recognition" and "The Life and Death Struggle," once the bondsman frees himself from the Lord, and the Lord sinks into a defeated recognition of his own dependency on those who labour for him. But a few principles emerge from these famous philosophical scenes. At the end of the Life and Death Struggle, we come to understand the imperative not to kill. Further, that proscription does not simply apply to an individual ethics. Rather, now what is called for is a *social organization* for our lives that reflects and honors this living interdependency, this set of interdependent lives – one no longer organized by violence or exploitation. And though individuals, groups, and nations can and do destroy one another, can it be also said that at such moments they are destroying themselves, not only making themselves into candidates for destruction, but increasing the possibility of a reciprocal act of destruction. One could make a causal argument: one form of violence leads to another. But Hegel's point is different: as social creatures, we are to some extent defined by our social bonds: any attack on that bond is an attack on the self. And any attack on oneself or another is an attack on that social bond. This insight resonates with Hobbes but finally runs counter to his conclusions.

The Hobbesian wager is that if I seek to destroy the other, the other may, seeing signs of my intention, decide it is better to destroy me first. We each calculate the risks to ourselves in doing violence to one another. The operative mode of reasoning is instrumental, and probabilistic. And yet, if we belong to societies in which we seek to sustain the lives of everyone who is, or should be, part of that society, then we embrace a principle of equality on the basis of this insight into interdependency. Further, we support social services as public goods worthy of support, including health care, environmental regulations that guarantee clean water and eliminate toxic waste. It follows as well that we would oppose

all forms of economic exploitation in the name of our shared life together, the life in which we share as interdependent beings.

This view runs counter to the calculating individual of classical liberal theory, of which Hobbes is but one representative. But this view in favor of social welfare and public goods also runs counter to the neoliberal modes of governance that would outsource all public goods to the market in its limitless drive toward the full privatization of those goods and entitlements that were once defined as central features of social democracy. Hegel's perspective allows us to accept the differentiated character of society without embracing fascist notions of social unity or classical liberal notions of radical individualism. And yet, Hegel's philosophy depends upon the idea of the people as a unified nation, and a political form of strong national state power. In a time in which national sovereignty is challenged by transregional and global processes of immigration, security, and financialization, what use is Hegel for us now?

You have been kind to listen to my readings of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, but I can already anticipate a series of critical questions you may have: who belongs to this society? Who is permitted entry? And who is stopped at the border or pushed back into conditions of precarity and dispossession? Hegel cannot give us the answer we need, but perhaps we can draw from his work to reconfigure this time of mass immigration and increasing hostility toward the rights of migrants, the human rights of those who seek sanctuary and asylum or the chance to secure a livelihood that would let them emerge from poverty or escape from famine or war.

In the final part of this paper, I propose to turn to Hegel's discussion of criminality, also in *The Phenomenology*, to ask about the powers of exclusion that allow the nation-state to seal its borders and establish itself as a closed unity. Finally, I will return to the question of whether potential for affirming the historical time in which we live can be found in Hegel, suggesting that the time of his text and the time of our lives are not the same time, but that the encounter between them is disorienting. Whether or not this disorientation is productive will be yours to decide, but I wish to suggest that reading our time through a book from another time allows for a disorientating perspective that we may rightly call *critical*. At the same time, it makes possible a new orientation in which we might affirm the social values against the threat of their destruction.

On the face of it, Hegel's idea of culture or *Sittlichkeit* seems conservative, if not reactionary. After all, it refers to the collection of customs, conventions, practices, and norms that govern and direct conduct. *Sittlichkeit* takes a different form in the *Phenomenology* than in *The Philosophy of Right*. It includes, for instance, the unconscious ways that those very conventions, practices, and norms are reproduced in everyday life. Hegel gives the example of Oedipus who did not know

the father in the man he slew. He writes, "the son does not recognize the father in the man who has wronged him and whom he slays, nor his mother in the queen whom he makes his wife. In this way, a power which shuns the light of day ensnares the ethical self-consciousness, a power that breaks forth only after the deed is done, and seizes the doer in the act. "(E238) And yet, this truth – and the interdiction against killing – makes itself felt as the city becomes afflicted by a plague. The guilt that follows is the unconscious operation of that interdiction. And law then emerges as a way to codify that interdiction. But *Sittlichkeit* is more than law; it is the customs (*Sitten*), norms, and practices in which law is embedded. For our contemporary purposes, we could say that *Sittlichkeit* names the implicit or unconscious power of culture articulated in action and conduct and whose organizing principles and aims are generally revealed only in the aftermath of action and through its consequences. This is an instance of that *Nachträglichkeit* with which we began. *Sittlichkeit* names the power of cultural norms, for instance, to act upon us, to form us quite without our knowing. So before there is any question of whether or not we are conforming to the demands of culture or following certain culturally stipulated rules, we are in the midst of a matrix of norms and rules that we never chose and whose power over us is only partially articulable at any given time. In the section on "the ethical order" or *Sittlichkeit*, Hegel remarks that it is in and through speech that any of us come into existence, and that speech is that kind of action that establishes the singular "I" in the world. But this speech always, he argues, "comes as such into existence, so that it exists for others....Language...alone expresses the "I", the "I" itself... its manifesting is also at once the externalization and vanishing of *this* particular "I"...(it is an infection, heard or perceived, [and so passes into the lives of others..,] ***its vanishing is its abiding...***" Here we understand that any assertion of identity is a statement made to and for others, and that its actual or potential addressee is part of the assertion itself. No one asserts an identity to the air, unless that air is thought to arrive as breath for another to take in. In other words, even our most self-referential and monologic linguistic actions are for others, operating in a grammar that is shared, indicating the desire to be heard or understood, to vocalize, or reach another. Every statement of identity implies the other, takes place within a scene of address, and so moves toward a social world that exceeds identity.

Under conditions of multi-lingualism, translation is the only possible way for language to reach pass national and territorial border, or for the nation itself to commit to its internal heterogeneity. Translation is a practice that seeks to bridge the divide between one language and another, but also to accept the overlapping and evolving spheres of *Sittlichkeit.* As important as hospitality is as an ethics and a political practice, it holds onto the idea of the host and the guest.

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A truly multi-lingual and multi-cultural community is one in which that very heterogeneity defines the socius. If there is no way to recognize another without a language that facilitates and mediates that recognition, and one feels recognized only in and through the language that one speaks, then some new sense of recognition has to be found in the midst of translation itself. This does not mean that everyone is separated by their separate language; rather, languages in the plural are important to the emerging sense of society that is now permanently transformed my immigration, displacement, and multi-lingualism. Translation becomes then both the means and the end of reciprocal recognition. Translation cannot be a one-way street, assimilating foreign languages to the national or dominant language. Translating a work, or a conversation, into a language can transform that language that now houses the foreign as part of itself; the distinction between what is foreign and what belongs transforms in the course of translation itself. And translation brings out those elements in language that resonate with another, a sphere of affinity that renews languages and leads to new coinage, new syntax, and new poetry. As important as it is to preserve German, it is equally important to release German into its contemporary life so that it may live in history, transformed by its contact with other languages, indebted to the foreign and the foreigner.

Hegel was right that the process of recognition transforms those who are recognized. We are recognized for what we are and the language we speak, but in the course of being recognized, we are also transformed by that very process: we become different, and we start to belong, through an intimate translation, to a broader community, one that is defined not by its national border nor, indeed, by its national language. Hegel would disagree with me here, for sure. But perhaps by reading Hegel now it becomes possible to think about the practice of translation within a multi-lingual word as a contemporary practice of recognition. I depart from Hegel, but that means he is a point of departure for what I think, but also a thinker I had to leave in order to continue to think on my own terms. What I take from Hegel still are his insights into the encounter with difference, the potential aggression, the interdiction against violence, the condition and ideal of interdependency, and the challenge to think beyond the nation state and its closed borders. Hegel helps to orient me in times like these where I do not know how to tell the time, or to establish a clear spatial and temporal orientation within the political world. He shows us how the potential to commit violence is averted through the affirmation that one life is bound up with another life, and that neither subjugation nor exclusion work as a strategy to restore a notion of national unity that is already gone. The heterogeneity that has taken its place establishes us at the edge of translation where the boundaries of language are porous, and the chance to become transformed by what is foreign is

promising.[10] It does not destroy the language we speak, but animates its worldliness. Yes, we are individuals, but we do not have to follow a form of individualism which leads to anomie and isolation. In our differences, we can, and do come together, to preserve the very conditions of livable life: the environment, medical care, freedoms of movement and expression, economic equality and a rejection of exploitation and sustained precarity. The lines we draw to differentiate us from others may appear at first to be the condition of survival. But those we exclude through drawing such a line are among those upon whom we depend, in their absence, to build what we call our identity. Beyond identity is the possibility of a reciprocal transformation, one that accepts the hostility, the challenge of translation, the possibility of a mutual recognition that is transforming and enlivening. There we find no simple harmony among us, but a struggle worth continuing to keep each other alive for a life transformed and transformative, alive with the sense of a social and natural world on which we depend and which we must safeguard. The closed border defines those inside by those who have been refused, but those considered foreigners within constitute an internally refused population, a population treated as refuse. Hegel exposes the impossibility of this strategy of negation that is mistaken about how best to preserve life. For it is only through the contact with what is unexpected, disturbing, and promising, that we come to see, hopefully not too late, the social bonds that, without our knowing, claim us ethically. These are the bonds that, for better or worse, let us live, and live on, in a sense that is truly alive.

10 Adorno 1992, pp.287-291

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