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Tropes of Transport

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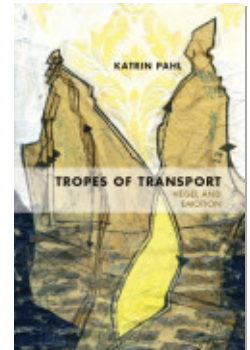
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Tremble

It felt the fear of death, the absolute master. In that feeling, it had internally fallen into dissolution, trembled inwardly in every fiber of its being, and all that was fixed within it had been shaken loose.

—*Phenomenology*, § 194

Tremble becomes an explicit topic in the *Phenomenology* in a brief but memorable moment toward the end of the section on “Self-Sufficiency and Non-Self-Sufficiency of Self-Consciousness; Mastery and Servitude.” In one of the *Phenomenology*’s frequent parabases, the phenomenologist communicates to the reader a truth about the protagonist of which the protagonist is unaware: whereas the servant’s self-image is that of someone who is exclusively attached to and defined by his physical existence, the phenomenologist points out that the servant’s true self encompasses absolute negativity—and its power:

Servitude has this truth of pure negativity . . . *in fact in servitude itself*, for servitude has *experienced* this essence in servitude. This consciousness was not driven with anxiety about just this or that matter, nor did it have anxiety at just this or that moment; rather, it had anxiety about its entire essence. It felt the fear of death, the absolute master. In that feeling, it had internally fallen into dissolution, trembled inwardly in every fiber of its being, and all that was fixed within it had been shaken loose [*Es ist darin innerlich aufgelöst worden hat durchaus in sich selbst erzittert, und alles Fixe hat in ihm gebebt*]. However, this pure universal movement, this way in which all durable existence becomes absolutely fluid [*das absolute Flüssigwerden alles Bestehens*], is the simple essence of self-consciousness; it is absolute negativity, *pure being-for-itself*, which thereby exists in this consciousness. (§ 194, trans. modified)

In its fear of death, the enchained consciousness experiences its own essence as absolute negativity. It is not hard to imagine that chains

would be unable to restrain a body that is thus spiritualized: trembles turn loose. The moment of absolute fear must be considered as the most precious moment of the protagonist's development so far. The shakes and trembles of absolute fear not only actualize the servant's being-for-himself, negate his mere being-for-others, and allow him to access his own power of negativity; they also shift the operative value of the dialectic of mastery and servitude from abstract negativity to absolute negativity.¹ Negation by fear exemplifies a non-abstract mode of negation, one that does not result in death or nothingness. Instead, the trembles dissolve the protagonist's inert being and set it in motion. Moved by fear, consciousness is able to apprehend and express itself "not merely as *substance* but also equally as *subject*" (§ 17).²

The feeling of absolute fear facilitates the shift in self-comprehension. Trembling is a mode of self-reflection. Not only will the servant have understood the true structure of his relation to the master; his embrace of absolute fear will also have changed his situation. Mastery and servitude are founded on the repression of absolute fear. Only the fear of absolute fear is able to arrest and enchain a consciousness that is capable of absolute fluidity. The actual experience of absolute fear destroys the fantasy of mastery and catapults consciousness out of servitude. As speculative negation, absolute fear is a productive force, an "instrument of progression," the motor for development (Cixous 1991, 255).³

Yet consciousness, the protagonist of the *Phenomenology*, is not able to experience absolute fear in the fullest sense of the word "experience." When Hegel, in the above-quoted passage, maintains that "servitude has . . . *experienced* this [truth of pure negativity] in servitude" (*die Knechtschaft . . . hat diese Wahrheit der reinen Negativität . . . an ihr erfahren*), the structure of the parabasis belies the phenomenologist's very observation. The fact that the phenomenologist here separates from the protagonist, who remains absorbed in the scene, and addresses the audience behind the servant's back, means that the servant cannot exactly benefit from the information. What is more, *an ihr*, of *an ihr erfahren*, indicates spatial contiguity but not conscious awareness; it means "in itself," not "for itself." The phenomenologist thus indicates that the servant underwent a fear that was unavailable for consciousness. To be precise, the servant cannot even have unconsciously lived through absolute fear, since he, strictly speaking, wasn't there (yet) to do so. The figure of the servant was only constituted as a reaction to the event of absolute fear. And this reaction consisted in the repression of the intense appreciation of life near death which is the experience of absolute fear. The servant qua servant did not undergo this experience and can have no recollection of the fear that led to his birth.

Therefore, when the phenomenologist retroactively establishes that absolute fear is indeed a factor in the life of this consciousness, this diagnosis can be read as an attempt to empathetically re-create an “experience” that in turn is only now and by this very diagnosis made available to the protagonist who might be shaken by the phenomenologist’s statement. This is an example of Hegel pushing to an interesting emotional extreme the demand made in the preface, that the phenomenologist must surrender control to the self-unfolding of the protagonist’s development. What is more—because the experience of absolute fear is, strictly speaking, unavailable to any one consciousness—we, as readers of the *Phenomenology*, cannot but tremble back and forth between the text’s retroactive accounts on the one hand and the textual anticipations of fear on the other, both of which arrange themselves around the absence of any direct account of experienced fear. The missed experience of absolute fear cannot be claimed by any one figure of consciousness or even by the phenomenologist, but it does instead take shape in the textual trembling between and across various anticipations and recollections of spirit. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* inwardly trembles between the double genitive of its title—between spirit as the agent of the phenomenological inquiry and spirit as its subject matter, between spirit in the form of the protagonist and spirit in the form of the phenomenologist. At the same time, all that is fixed within these two characters—the different figures of the protagonist, the difference between author and various readers, which constitutes the phenomenologist—every fiber of this text shakes loose.

In the following, I will first explore the absence of an expression of fear when fear must have been felt. After an analysis of the retroactive and indirect account, given by the phenomenologist/s, of the servant’s absolute fear, I will highlight the textual anticipations of absolute fear that precede the dialectic of mastery and servitude. Then, I will conclude the first part of this chapter by analyzing the retroactive attempts of the protagonist/s to realize and integrate the missed experience of absolute fear. Finally, in the second part of this chapter, I will explore the textual trembling that surrounds and traverses the chapter transitions of the *Phenomenology*.

Missed Experience

At the beginning of the chapter on mastery and servitude, at the moment when absolute fear must have assailed consciousness, the narrative does

not acknowledge fear as the motivation for the formation of fixed subject positions. The protagonists' quest for mutual acknowledgment has turned into a struggle for life and death. Misunderstanding negativity as abstract nothingness, the individuals involved try to kill one another and themselves in order to gain status and recognition. It takes a near-death experience for consciousness to understand the simple fact that life is of the essence since a dead person can neither give nor receive recognition. Still, there is no mention of the protagonists' fear here at the beginning of the chapter. Absolute fear is identified only retroactively, at the end of the chapter, as a feeling the servant must have had. At the beginning of the chapter, master and servant are logically deduced from the struggle for life and death. The *Phenomenology* accounts for their emergence in a neutral tone without emotion or empathy:

In this experience, self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness. . . . It is by way of that experience that a pure self-consciousness is posited, and a consciousness . . . is posited as an existing consciousness. . . . Both moments are essential. . . . One is self-sufficient; for it, its essence is being-for-itself. The other is non self-sufficient; for it, life, that is, being for an other, is the essence. The former is the *master*, the latter is the *servant*. (§ 189)

With this sober explanation, Hegel locates the necessity for the hierarchical division of consciousness in the protagonists' resistance to complexity. Consciousness refuses to accept contradictory values. For consciousness, either negation or life is of the essence, but not both. Therefore consciousness splits into two consciousnesses with opposed and hierarchically organized values.

The two consciousnesses hardly experience the lesson of the essentiality of life in the same way. The master never even sees the danger of death; he never assumes that negativity could harm him physically—since his body is precisely what he, as master, abstracts from. The master knows no fear. The servant, on the other hand, will have seen the danger clearly. He comes into being by virtue of his brush with death, but his very emergence is a turning away from absolute fear. He turns to the master to save his life. While both avoid the feeling of absolute fear, only one consciousness embraces the idea of life's value, which turns it into a servant; the other consciousness holds on to the idea of abstract negativity as the essence of consciousness, and becomes the master.

That the one who has developed further is subjected to the one who stubbornly refuses insight certainly offends the notion that the *Phenomenology* follows a logic of progression. The retrograde motion stems

from the untimeliness of the servant's development. Not only the servant was unprepared for his encounter with death and his sudden appreciation of life. The spirit of his time is not ready to integrate the insight into the value of life either. As we have seen in the discussion of mutual acknowledging in our previous chapter, the "essence" or the main value that the entire chapter on "mastery and servitude" pursues is self-sufficiency. The servant might have already moved beyond the paradigm of self-sufficiency, and might be on the way toward reconciliation of being-for-self and being-for-another. Yet he is judged based on the standard of self-sufficient being-for-self and is thus enchained.⁴

Anticipation

The first anticipation of fear in the *Phenomenology*—before absolute fear is mentioned explicitly at the end of the chapter on mastery and servitude—can be found around the transition from the dialectic of perception to the dialectic of the understanding. Here, consciousness appears afraid of its own implication in the development of the other, its "object." Its fear takes the ironic form of an anxious avoidance of trembling. Already in the dialectic of perception, the protagonist realizes that he is implicated in the movement of the object which he thought to merely observe:

For consciousness, it has thereby been determined just how its perceiving is essentially composed, namely, not as a simple, pure act of apprehending, but rather as *in its act of apprehending* at the same time taking a *reflective turn into itself from out of the true*. This return of consciousness into itself, which immediately *blends* itself into that pure apprehending . . . alters the true. (§ 118, trans. modified)

By way of acknowledging the mingling of subject and object, consciousness turns into a new figure of itself; it becomes the understanding.⁵ But the insight does not carry through. The understanding loses access to the fleeting realization that it is entangled in the object because it is afraid of such entanglement: "For us, this object [the object of the understanding] has come to be through the movement of consciousness such that this consciousness is interwoven in the coming-to-be of the object. . . . However . . . consciousness itself is still withdrawing from what has come to be" (§ 132).

As a reader of the *Phenomenology*, one often wonders why the pro-

tagonists are so slow to develop. Consciousness often appears dumb and dense. Something has become more than obvious to us, but the protagonist still doesn't see it. This is because consciousness is afraid to discover new truths. It fears losing the stability of its current certainty when the alternative might be a world where "the truth is the bacchanalian revel where no member is not drunk" (§ 47, trans. modified). Consciousness dreads to surrender to the dance of the speculative. The apprehensive anticipation of, and flight from, absolute fear slows down consciousness's development toward "absolute knowing."

The consciousness of the understanding insists on separating its own movement of explaining from the object's movement, which it describes here as a play of forces. The act of explaining is for the understanding a self-gratification that can do without touching and being touched by the object.

It is precisely for that reason that there is so much self-satisfaction in explanation, because the consciousness involved in it is, to put it this way, in an immediate conversation with itself, enjoying only itself. While it undeniably seems to be pursuing something else, it is really just consorting with itself [*sich nur mit sich selbst herumtreibt*]. (§ 163)

Consciousness manages to reduce its immediate implication in the movement of the other to the distant relation of voyeurism. It pretends that it "has no part in [the object's] free realization but rather merely looks on that realization and purely apprehends it" (§ 133). Making the object exhibit itself, the protagonist withdraws into safety and masturbates.⁶ Consciousness thereby escapes the erotic danger that Hegel mentions at the end of the dialectic of perception. It is the danger of being captured by the object, attracted by its force and pushed around in its whirl. This danger arises because the object is a manifestation of the self-reflecting concept, the concept in Hegel's emphatic sense. As such, the object does not exhibit a simple identity but comprises multiple "moments." Each moment of the concept is at once an abstraction of the whole and the whole. Thus, despite their status as abstractions, these moments can assume independent existence.⁷ The object has multiplied, and consciousness is thrown from one embrace to the other, losing itself in an orgy of abstractions:

Perceptual understanding, often called healthy common-sense . . . is, in the act of perceiving, merely the game played by *these abstractions*. . . . It is pushed around by these empty characters [*Wesen*] and thus thrown out of the arms of one abstraction into the arms of another. . . .

Common-sense is the prey of these abstractions which spin it round and round in their whirling circle. (§ 131, trans. modified)

The pleasure that perception finds in merely observing the other might be without interest, in the Kantian sense, but here, by contrast with Kant's third *Critique*, the free play of forces (*Kräfte*) is located not only in the observer but also—and frighteningly so—in the observed. What consciousness here still calls “the object”—and doesn't yet acknowledge as another subject—has its own pleasure and draws the observer in.⁸

For now, fear is not felt as such, but avoided. The protagonist pays for this denial of fear with the impediment of his development. Consciousness, in the form of the understanding, is afraid to do what Hegel, in the preface to the *Phenomenology*, describes as the prerequisite for speculative thinking or true comprehension, that is, to “let [its] freedom descend into the content [of the ‘object’]” (§ 58). Consciousness is afraid to lose control.

Atremble with Freedom

The experience of absolute fear would open consciousness for the actualization of mutual acknowledging. The servant understands that recognition is possible only among living individuals (an insight that the master refused). But is he ready to embrace the fearful experience of mutual acknowledging?

In the beginning of the chapter on mastery and servitude, Hegel offers his account of mutual acknowledging. Mutual acknowledging creates an ecstatic relation where, in a circular movement of displacements, each consciousness finds and loses itself in the other. It is important to note that Hegel conceives of recognition not as a securing of one's position and dignity, but as an experience of mutual exposure and vulnerability. In the process of acknowledging, consciousness “does indeed get *outside of itself*” (*kommt es wohl außer sich*, § 184). What is more, the other cannot be expected to ground such a constitutively ecstatic self-consciousness. Why not? Because he is just as little in control and therefore cannot stabilize their relation either. The circular structure of mutual acknowledging shatters any attempt on the part of the individual to secure an identity. Instead, the process reaches its ideal shape when the parties involved become aware of the bottomless movement of their mutual acknowledging: when “they *acknowledge* themselves as *mutually acknowledging each other*” (§ 184, trans. modified). The experience thus

draws the protagonist into the whirl of forces that the understanding consciousness had managed to avoid: “In this movement we see the process repeat itself which had been exhibited as the play of forces in consciousness” (ibid.). The fear that the understanding was able to repress now returns. It is the fear of losing control, of all too easily being carried away by an orgy of abstractions because one’s own existence is not very substantive.

As in the dialectic of the understanding, the fear induced by the ecstatic movement of acknowledging is at first avoided. Instead of abandoning themselves to the bottomless process of “*acknowledging* themselves as *mutually acknowledging each other*,” the two parties settle down in a stable relation where a firm hierarchy gives each one a solid identity: one is the master, the other the servant. These subject positions develop as strategic formations in the defense against the absolute fear that the bottomless movement of mutual acknowledging gives rise to. As such they prove effective: the master is indeed never afraid, and the servant gets away with merely being brushed by fear. The servant has the potential to turn fear into a resource, as Audre Lorde implies when she rearticulates Descartes’ dictum as: “I feel therefore I can be free.”⁹ Instead of impeding the servant’s development, “the fear of the master [could be] the beginning of wisdom” (§ 195, trans. modified). But the servant’s fear of revisiting absolute fear enchains him now. Hegel’s account reveals that the avoidance of absolute fear importantly motivates the constitution of repressive social and political structures.

The most important question—even beyond the specifics of the dialectic of master and servant—is then whether one is indeed capable of *experiencing* absolute fear. In the following, I will trace how this and subsequent figures of consciousness will try to recover the missed experience. It is crucial that fear be experienced as a physical affection (a tremble) rather than merely intellectually thematized. It is crucial that it be “absolute” fear rather than a particular, circumscribed fear. And it is important that consciousness find (its) pleasure in absolute fear. For, if consciousness “could not stand [*ausgestanden*] absolute fear but only a few anxieties, then the negative essence will have remained an externality in his eyes, and his substance will not have been infected all the way through by it. Because not each and every one of the ways in which his natural consciousness was brought to fruition has come to totter [*wankend geworden*], he is still attached *in himself* to determinate being” (§ 196, trans. modified).¹⁰

Only an unrestrained fear, an absolute fear, or a fear for fear’s sake, so to speak, can emancipate the servant from the master because the master’s power is lodged in the servant’s investment in subsistence. Any

circumscribed fear of something specific at a particular moment and for a certain aspect of consciousness's being, only reinforces consciousness's attachment to its particular reality. Only a fear that doesn't trigger a protective mechanism, but is experienced for its own sake—that is, for the sake of thoroughly melting away one's entire being—can set consciousness free. While Hegel positions freedom here clearly in opposition to determinism, he also avoids conflating freedom with autonomy. Rather, he points to the self-deluding character of autonomy when he underscores that, in self-determination, freedom and unfreedom are entangled: “having a mind of his own is merely *stubbornness* [*der eigne Sinn ist Eigensinn*], a freedom that remains bogged down within the bounds of servility” (§ 196).¹¹ It is true that the master can take advantage of the servant's belief in determinism in order to instrumentalize him. But if the servant seeks self-determination instead, he instrumentalizes himself. For Hegel, therefore, freedom speculatively integrates self-determination and self-abandon, self-investiture and self-dispossession.¹²

But how can consciousness not pursue its own will? Even if the servant selflessly labors to realize the desire of the master, he still does so in order to preserve himself. Naturally, with every fiber of its being, with every line of thought, consciousness tries to resist its own dissolution, tries to flee from absolute fear. How, under these circumstances, can consciousness *experience* absolute fear? The beginning of the answer to this question lies in the ambivalent pull of fear. On the one hand, consciousness is afraid of fear; on the other hand, it yearns to experience absolute fear in order to gain freedom as a subject.¹³ Absolute fear pushes and pulls, repels and attracts consciousness. In repeatedly moving toward and away from fear, the subject enacts the experience of trembling.

To actualize fear—not in order to do away with it but to learn to cherish a living fear—will be the aim of consciousness's *Bildung* from now on. In his work, which he develops beyond the mere satisfaction of his master into an artful fashioning of things (*Bilden des Dinges*), the servant tries to acknowledge his trembling, tries to live it again or, rather, for the first time really (§ 196). In fashioning the thing, the servant actively uses the same power of negation that he passively succumbs to in fear: “this objective *negative* is precisely the alien essence before which he trembled” (§ 196). So far fear had been a traumatic event that could not be integrated into conscious experience: “without culturally formative activity [*ohne das Bilden*], fear remains inward and mute” (ibid., trans. modified). Now “in forming the thing, his own negativity, that is, his being-for-itself, . . . becomes an object in his own eyes” (ibid.).

In his work, the servant objectifies fear, turns it outward. Rather than fleeing fear, consciousness now expresses its fear. The servant's la-

bor takes on a therapeutic aspect. He fashions objects in order to come to terms with the traumatic experience of the trembles of absolute life. Hegel is not uncritical of the therapeutic paradigm. On the one hand, trembles finally become real and objective through the labor of expression and the occupational therapy that the servant engages in. On the other hand, the therapeutic impetus of “coming to terms” with fear only allows for a domesticated version of fear. It does not enable the experience of the trembling life of absolute fear.

The activity of confronting fear by way of producing objects that bear the trace of one’s fear holds a therapeutic promise. This promise relies on the power of the understanding, as it is described in the preface to the *Phenomenology*: “The act of parting [*die Tätigkeit des Scheidens*] is the force and labor of the *understanding*, the most astonishing and greatest of all the powers . . . spirit is this power only when it looks the negative *in the face* and lingers with it” (§ 32, my emphasis). To “face one’s fear,” to imagine standing before one (*vorstellen*), actually allows one to keep one’s distance from the tremble and the infectious rhythm of fear’s negativity. When it “keep[s] and hold[s] fast to [*festzuhalten*]” the negative, the understanding turns that negative into “*thoughts* which are themselves familiar and fixed . . . [and] motionless determinations” (§ 32). The understanding “start(s) with A as in ANT and give(s) to every terror a soothing name.”¹⁴ Abstract intelligence tames the negative and calms the fear by turning fluid, uncontrollable negativity into something that is known and can be labeled. “This lingering [with the negative] is the magical power that converts it into being” (§ 32). The fashioned object functions as a mirror for consciousness and as a tool for its self-fashioning. It reflects back to consciousness an image of itself as a stable being that has overcome negation and now remains “within the element of continuance” (§ 32).¹⁵ Having thus liberated his work from the desires of the master and having developed it instead into a means for self-reflection, the working consciousness exceeds servitude proper. It has not, however, experienced the absolute transience epitomized in absolute fear.

Yet Hegel clarifies that work cannot overcome transience altogether; it is merely “vanishing *staved off*” (*aufgehaltenes Verschwinden*, § 195). The servant has enough time to see himself in his products, but these works nevertheless eventually disappear, and therefore reflect the servant’s own mortality.¹⁶ Similarly, Hegel pushes further his account of the understanding. For him the movement has not come to an end when rational “analysis arrives at *thoughts* which are themselves . . . fixed . . . determinations” (§ 32, trans. modified). The movement has only just begun, “for the concrete is self-moving only because it divides itself and turns itself into the non-actual” (*ibid.*). The understanding’s power to make

something out of nothing by separating what is inseparable sets things in motion. Fixity and fluidity overlap; and the rationality of the understanding is not as neatly opposed to the emotionality of absolute fear as one might assume.¹⁷

Consciousness, the protagonist of the *Phenomenology*, is certainly still afraid of absolute movement. At this stage of its *Bildung*—the therapeutic labor of expression—it is only willing to cope with one shift: from consciousness to the fashioned object. Consciousness is not (yet) able to negotiate the contradictions of speculative negation. Instead, the servant fashions the thing while clinging to a logic of non-contradiction where fixity excludes fluidity, self-will excludes another's will, and affirmation excludes negation. He envisions his *Bilden* as pure production, affirmation and self-immortalizing, while he views the master as purely negating and consuming. The servant and the master see themselves in a life-or-death struggle and not, as Hegel puts it, in a struggle for “life *and* death” (§ 187, my emphasis).

If absolute fear were felt, it would offer an experience of the overlap of negation and affirmation, of absolute rather than abstract negativity. Absolute fear dissolves the inert matter of consciousness, but this dissolution is itself material. It manifests itself as a trembling and shaking. Trembles and shakes are bodily modes of unsettling the body. Since the body is at the same time the object and the subject of the negation, it preserves itself in its supersession. Fear is not an abstract negation like death but a speculative negation, a dying within life that, instead of simply destroying the body, sets it in motion.

As a bodily negation of the body, absolute fear not only preserves the body in negation but actually produces the body. Throughout the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness occupies a naively disembodied position. Consciousness does not reflect on its own physical condition since the object is its only focus. Only when its object develops for it into another consciousness or an alter ego, is it confronted with its bodily condition. It immediately engages in the struggle for life and death to show that its body is inessential for its self-image. As a result of this struggle, it nevertheless becomes apparent that a living body is indispensable for consciousness. But even this insight remains at first disembodied. As I have shown here, the insight is not experienced by an embodied consciousness but is logically deduced. Only in the trembling of fear can the lesson of the body be experienced. As Cixous puts it, “one must almost die in order to take pleasure in being made of flesh.”¹⁸ The trembling of fear awakens a body for consciousness and, for the first time in the *Phenomenology*, it presents consciousness's insight as a bodily experience.

When the *Phenomenology* thus suggests that physical existence is not a simple given for consciousness, it actually—contrary to what one might assume at first—undoes, or speculatively reconciles, the traditional dichotomy of spirit and body. Hegel shows that the body is not to be *presumed* as a solid container for the movements of the soul (the interiority model of emotion) or as a stable matrix for feelings (the impression/expression model of emotion), but that absolute fear retroactively produces the body as trembling, precarious, and ecstatic matter. The servant has a body because he is afraid.

The trembling body *is* the actualization of absolute fear. As a trembling body, absolute fear is therefore not confined to interiority—it does not “remain inward and mute”—but is an experience in the full sense, in and for itself (§ 196). Trembling combines externalizing and inwardizing (*erinnern*), affirming and negating in a movement of self-reflection. This self-reflection does not need consciousness to take place. In fact, the figures of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* cannot quite claim absolute fear because they are still new to the speculative thinking of bodily experience. The structure of experience is paradoxical and highly precarious because it requires bodily involvement in order to produce the body by negating it. All this happens in the flash of an instant: the body needs to be engaged in order to be produced, and only in its negation will the body have been affirmed. The body is at the same time the subject and the object of its production. What is to come requires for its advent that it be already there. So how can it ever arrive? It is impossible—at least within a logic of non-contradiction. And so we might begin to understand why, for a consciousness that works with a relatively simple logic, absolute fear is so difficult to experience. Consciousness is utterly unprepared for the bodily thinking of speculative transports.

We have observed the rejection of embodiment in the figure of the master, who projects his bodily being onto the servant. The servant timidly misunderstands the lessons of the struggle for life and death, and of the fashioning of things. While he grasps the importance of saving his life, he misunderstands what life is, namely movement and interdependence. While he is attached to natural existence, he fails to understand that his body is not a simple given, but a speculative, self-reflecting subject. We have witnessed the anticipatory refusal of fear bound up with the rejection of the body in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*, where materiality was exclusively assigned to the realm of objectivity. We will now continue to see the protagonists’ dismissal of bodily life when we discuss some of the configurations of consciousness after the dialectic of mastery and servitude.

Retroaction

In the further development of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness stubbornly clings to an idea of the self as constant and autonomous, or Stoic.¹⁹ But consciousness cannot escape from its precarious body or from the trembling movement of fear. Even fear in its negative form, as the fearful flight from fear, produces the body as the focus of consciousness's, albeit negative, attention.²⁰ The unhappy consciousness—the protagonist of the next chapter after mastery and servitude—tries to detach from the body and to rise to the metaphysical sphere of “the unchangeable.” But its flight from the body brings the body all the more into focus. The unhappy consciousness's obsession with its body, when it is “brooding” over its “animal functions,” is rooted in its inability to experience absolute fear and to understand the logic of fear (§ 225). Because consciousness still thinks in abstract terms, because it still values the unchangeable instead of the absolute movement of speculative negation, it remains unhappily bound to its physical existence rather than taking pleasure in absolute fear. Inadvertently, the unhappy consciousness performs one speculative negation, that is to say, one bodily negation of the body, after the other. Yet, according to its timorously abstract logic, these negations don't count precisely because they preserve the body in its negation.²¹

The link between freedom and fear, which we have seen in our analysis of the dialectic of mastery and servitude, resurfaces when Hegel discusses the kind of spirit that drove the French Revolution.²² It is a spirit that acknowledges negativity and absolute fluidity as the essence of freedom, but excludes any positive stance from its highly abstract notion of freedom. That is why this freedom spreads terror rather than enabling the experience of absolute fear. In a continuous revolutionary upheaval, which is an attack on fixed differences among subjects and on the value of unchangeability in general, the spirit of absolute freedom abolishes anything that tries to establish lasting existence. It cuts off the breath of any self-will. Misconceiving still the meaning of absolute negativity, it performs abstract negations or killings en masse. In this purely negative action, this “*fury of disappearing*” (*Furie des Verschwindens*) which it calls “absolute freedom,” it remains cold and dry (§ 589). As a “simple, unbending cold universality,” it performs an “arid destruction” (*trocknen Vertilgen*, § 590/§ 591). And as the “discrete, absolute and hard, unaccommodating and obstinate isolation [*eigensinnige Punktualität*] of actual self-consciousness,” it refuses fear (§ 590). The attempt to actualize absolute freedom is, thus, in the last analysis, still directed against the body. The body is here still understood as inert matter, or “*abstract existence as such*,” and not as a self-negating, moving, or trembling body (*ibid.*).

The consciousness of this revolutionary world has finally affirmed and realized what the consciousness of perception was so afraid of: the entanglement of subject and object. Yet the revolutionary consciousness both overshoots and undershoots the goal of acknowledging entanglement when it wants to see absolutely no difference between subject and object. As “pure *insightfulness*” (*reines Einsehen*, § 583), this shape of consciousness figures a penetrating gaze that knows neither interference nor limit. “This movement is thereby the interplay of consciousness with itself in which it lets nothing break loose so that it would come to be a free-standing object confronting it” (§ 588). Far from implying sympathy across difference, “insight” here means the direct “gazing of the self into the self” without the interference of any positive, meaningful, or objective difference (§ 583). The entanglement of “subject” and “object” has thus been reduced to a doubling of the same. In the mania of its “absolutely seeing-*itself-as-doubled*” (*das absolute sich selbst doppelt Sehen*, *ibid.*), the self gazes into the self and death stares back at it.

This sudden encounter with death is the terror of absolute freedom, its *Schrecken*, or fright. But I would not consider this sudden fright as an experience of absolute fear. All trembling is excluded from the terror of massive, uniform death: it is “the coldest, emptiest death of all” (§ 590). “The individuality of the universal will,” by negating all inner difference, is reduced to the “banality of one syllable [*Plattheit dieser Silbe*]”: death (*Tod*) (§ 591, trans. modified). The monosyllable remains mute because the flatness of its self-identity provides no volume—no interval for the song of death to resonate, and no leeway for the spiritualized body to tremble.²³ Instead of lingering with the negative, and trembling in fear, consciousness starts up in terror, turns around, and runs back to an earlier form of its life—or leaps “into another land” (§ 595).

The protagonist is still running when it becomes the *Phenomenology*’s final figure of consciousness, the beautiful soul, who despite or, rather, because of its “completely transparent” knowledge of itself, continues to live on the run, in suspicion, and in fear of absolute fear (§ 658):

It lives with the anxiety that it will stain the glory of its inwardness by means of action and existence. Thus, to preserve the purity of its heart, it *flees* from contact with actuality, and it steadfastly perseveres in its obstinate powerlessness to renounce its own self, . . . to transform its thought into being and to *entrust* itself [*sich anzuvertrauen*] to absolute difference. (§ 658, trans. modified, my emphasis)

The beautiful soul—the last figure of consciousness and the pinnacle of self-knowledge and sensibility before “absolute knowledge”—

still exhibits the characteristic reluctance of the individual to abandon itself and to acknowledge the entanglement of thought and being, subject and object, and life and death, which the experience of absolute fear affords.²⁴

There is thus no evidence in the *Phenomenology* that consciousness ever experiences absolute fear, or that the experience of absolute fear is even possible. Because consciousness is an abstraction, absolute fear simply destroys it.²⁵ As mere consciousnesses, the protagonists of the *Phenomenology* don't enjoy the elasticity to stand absolute fear.

So far, we have established that the fear of absolute fear at the same time impedes and facilitates consciousness's movement toward absolute knowing. By repeatedly averting the realization of absolute change, consciousness draws its path. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss how this path—which twists and turns—performs precisely the movement of change and interdependence that consciousness is afraid of. In its turning back and forth—away from and toward fear—the text actualizes the oscillating movement, the absolute trembling of absolute fear. No single figure of consciousness experiences absolute fear, but in their arrangement or in their syntax the various figures of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* together realize fear's trembling motion.

I have argued that the development of the *Phenomenology* is driven by absolute fear, without that fear ever being experienced by any single consciousness. I will argue in the next part of this chapter that absolute fear occurs in between figures of consciousness, in the blanks between the chapters. If the experience of absolute fear is not possible for consciousness, it might be possible before consciousness, or after. It might be possible during the synopes of consciousness, between consciousness and consciousness, during the impossible transition from one shape of consciousness to another.

In the following, I want to read the silences between the chapters of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* without filling them in and thereby losing them. Resisting the desire to explain how these chapters form a coherent line, I will interpret the leaps from one figure of consciousness to the next. The leap opens a space of negativity between the positive shapes of consciousness. This is the space of "absolute fear," an interval of trembling. The *Phenomenology* asks us to allow for the trembles of fear, to explore it, to find its joy, and its promise of freedom. In keeping with this demand, I propose a reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in dialogue with Cixous' *L'ange au secret*. Cixous writes:

And a child remembers the fear before being born, being born losing,
before gaining in losing.

But nobody there to tell the passion of birth, the expulsion and the

joy, at the same time, the sudden fall and then the slow resurrection.
 Nobody there to tell the fairy tale. Not me either: the instant is too
 fragile to take into my hand. Yet behind my memory from before I knew
 how to speak I feel a very first instant glimmering, a trembling of fear.
 (Cixous 1991, 15)

My reading between Hegel and Cixous will attend to the birth of any new consciousness as a transport that trembles back and forth between where I am and where I am not, or between where I am and where I am differently.

Blank in Transition

In an essay on the chapter “Absolute Freedom and Terror,” a frustrated reader of the *Phenomenology* notes that “transitions are not the *Phenomenology*’s strong point.”²⁶ This statement strikes me as a very accurate re-enactment (not description) of the *Phenomenology*’s mode of operation. The critic implies that the transitions from one chapter to the next, or from one dialectic to the next, are not worth looking at because they don’t make any sense. Exasperated, he turns away, and thereby imitates the attitude he accuses Hegel of, that is, of not being “strong,” not being in control, not being present to clarify what happens.

The fact that Hegel’s text does not satisfy the reader’s desire for logical and narrative continuity is precisely its strength. Despite expectations to the contrary, the *Phenomenology* does not offer a continuous exposition and does not provide coherent logical derivations of each shape of consciousness out of the preceding one. As a result of these gaps or leaps in progression, it appears that the *Phenomenology* does not have one protagonist who develops to ever greater self-awareness, but many protagonists. This does not mean that the many figures of consciousness and spirit are unrelated, but (a) that their sequential relation is tenuous, and (b) that they form connections other than linear.

The movement between chapters differs from the movement within chapters. Every particular figure of consciousness—from sense certainty to the beautiful soul—follows its path according to a particular logic. Within this logic, one moment engenders the next. Just like the critic—whose statement “transitions are not the *Phenomenology*’s strong point” speaks of a wish for an unambiguous logic, for a continuous line as a railing to hold onto—consciousness needs to have a sense of where it is going: forward, of course; and the reader is happy to accompany the protagonist as long as she feels that she is taking a step up on the ladder

toward absolute knowledge. Consciousness sets out with certainty and goes straight ahead to interpret the world or to create reality according to what it holds to be true. Yet, on its path of allegedly straightforward progress, consciousness has to twist and turn in order to keep hold of its certainty.²⁷ It does so eagerly, because it is absolutely defined by the particular “essence” or value or truth criterion of its certainty. To let go of what it holds to be true would mean to abandon its *raison d’être*.²⁸

Over the course of many chapters it becomes clear that pure affirmation is impossible, that every affirmation is riddled with negation, that every actualizing of something held to be true also means abandoning that truth. Yet, for consciousness, because it is an abstraction lacking the elasticity of the full concept, such self-dispossession is impossible. What seemed to be a ladder to climb the heights of reason comes to lie crosswise in front of consciousness barring its way. No matter how often it turns, consciousness will always come up against the bars of its limited logic. They make up all sides of the cage in which each figure of consciousness circles while convincing itself of its own progress. To actually realize what it holds to be true would mean to put itself out there, would mean to cross the bar. Consciousness would have to go beyond the realm of its control. Suddenly it will be unclear what the next step could be. The future cannot be deduced; it can only be leaped or fallen into. As Lispector puts it in *Stream of Life* (1989)—a text Cixous is in dialogue with when she writes *L’ange au secret*: “I’m still afraid to depart from logic because I fall . . . into the future.”²⁹

Is consciousness alive? Does it feel absolute fear? “By the stiffness of my neck and of my members, and at the shock of my heart against the bars [*barreaux*], I can tell that it is fear” (Cixous 1991, 28). The protagonist hardens. If it paid attention, it could infer from the tension in its body and the paralysis of its mind that it must be afraid. But does it tremble? Is consciousness present during the transition? Does it experience absolute fear?

The interval of trembling, the moment when consciousness oscillates between two shapes or figures of itself, is a space of freedom. When the body is permeable to and the consciousness is open for the other, when the other shudders through the “I,” speculative thought becomes reality. But consciousness doesn’t quite understand speculative logic. The wind of fear “rattles until it falls” (*secoue jusqu’à tomber*, Cixous 1991, 9)—until the bar falls, until consciousness falls, until the wind falls.

Consciousness falls and faints. It loses consciousness so as not to witness its own dissolution. “I fall’ we say. Watch out! says Clarice breathlessly, I will die. It’s the truth. We die. Sometimes a day, it can go up to four. Then she comes back. ‘I’m back’ she says to us. Without quite knowing yet who this *I* is” (Cixous 1991, 73). Consciousness turns and

goes blank, the text with it, until it comes round on the other side of the transition as a new shape of consciousness. The new shape of consciousness opens its eyes not knowing what happened to it. “Ah if I only knew the score by heart, I would sing of fear” (Cixous 1991, 30). It doesn’t know fear, not by heart. Its heart doesn’t know it. It hasn’t experienced it. It doesn’t remember feeling its joy. Consciousness is always already the result of a transition; the transition has passed through it and has forgotten the liberating negativity of fear.

Transitions are moments of absolute fear. They are moments of death and of birth. They are frightful because there is no rule to go by. The railing, the ladder, the bars, everything that gives stability and security begins to tremble. “All that was fixed within it had been shaken loose” (§ 194). Absolute fear jeopardizes consciousness’s entire being: “every fiber” of its body trembles; every certainty, every rung of the ladder consciousness sets its foot on, every sash bar that organizes its vision is seized by the wind of freedom (ibid.). “The free wind, the young one is getting to the bars [*barreaux*] and rattles” (Cixous 1991, 9).

As “this way in which all durable existence becomes absolutely fluid,” absolute fear disappears as soon as it is thematized (§ 194). “The instant is too fragile to take into my hand” (Cixous 1991, 15).³⁰ Absolute fear is a moment of absolute negativity that can only be accounted for performatively. Spirit cannot grasp the transition from one figure of consciousness to the next; it goes through it. The wind blows through spirit, and consciousness goes blank. “Nobody there to tell the fairy tale.” “Nobody there to tell the passion of birth” (Cixous 1991, 15). Fear escapes the narration of the *Phenomenology*.

Out of politeness, one might try to attenuate the rupture: “I think that now I’ll have to ask for permission to die a little. Excuse me, will you? I won’t be long. Thanks” (Lispector 1989, 53). But then one will have lost not only the experience of absolute fear, but also its negative presence as an unexpected break in expository coherence: “No. I couldn’t die” (ibid.). It requires some strength to simply break with the demand for coherence:

I’m going now.

I’m back. Now I’ll try to catch up again with what happens to me in the moment—and that way I’ll create myself. (Lispector 1989, 69)

Transitions are in fact the *Phenomenology*’s strong point because they are the points where spirit shows that its movement is not a continuous progression. Consciousness dies and is reborn in a different incarnation, a different “*Gestalt*.” The chapter transitions of the *Phenomenology*—albeit much wordier than Lispector’s economic and elegant meditations on

transport—enact the same break, the same death within life that she presents us with. The last few lines of the chapter on “absolute freedom and terror” offer an exemplary illustration of this (non-)transition: “Absolute freedom passes over [*geht über*] from its self-destroying actuality into another land of self-conscious spirit. . . . What has emerged is a new shape, that of the *moral spirit*” (§ 595). The so-called transition is effected as a leap across the border from revolutionary France to German moral philosophy à la Kant. Having led one shape of consciousness to the realization of its own destructiveness and destruction, the narrative turns away from it, leaves it to its own (ineffective, we know) devices, and turns to a new figure of consciousness. Rather than leading us, step by step, through a transition, Hegel presents us with a past event: “What has emerged is a new shape, that of the *moral spirit*.” The old shape of consciousness has passed on, the exact moment of the emergence of the new one has passed us by, and the protagonists are certainly not more actively engaged than we are in their death and birth. After a typographical blank space between the chapters, a newborn consciousness begins to slowly create itself. The next chapter (on morality) will meticulously describe this new figure’s development; consciousness will catch up with what happens to it in the moment.

Again somewhat heavier than Lispector’s lithe narration in the first person, Hegel regularly (at times explicitly, at others implicitly) interpolates a “we,” the first-person plural of the phenomenologist, around the moments of transport. It might be Hegel’s (somewhat awkward) way of being polite when he makes a bit of a fuss inserting explanations and excuses, anticipation and retrospection from the perspective of the phenomenologist/s right before and right after the break between chapters. Here is the end of the chapter on the understanding:

In the inner division [*innern Unterschiede*], infinity indeed becomes itself the *object* of the understanding, but once again the understanding fails to notice it as such. . . . What is an object in sensuous covering for the understanding is now there for us in its essential shape as the pure concept. This apprehending of division [*Unterschied*] as it is *in truth*, that is, the apprehending of *infinity* as such, exists *for us*, that is, *in itself*. . . . However, consciousness as it *immediately* possesses this concept once again comes on the scene as its own form or as a new shape of consciousness that does not take cognizance of its essence in what has gone before but instead regards it as something completely other [*etwas ganz anderes*]. (§ 164, trans. modified)

The phenomenologist steps in to explain not so much how we get from one figure of consciousness to the next, but why there is no apparent

connection between the two: each consciousness has a strong sense of its own individuality and considers its previous shape to be “something completely other.”

After the transition from the figure of the unhappy consciousness to that of reason, the phenomenologist observes the same more or less active forgetting in consciousness: “Since self-consciousness is reason, what had so far been its negative relation to otherness is now converted [*schlägt um*] into a positive relation” (§ 232). It took one final twist and suddenly all the pain of the previous figure’s attempts to negate and escape worldly existence is forgotten and reason is happy to embrace the world.

The phenomenologist lends support to each consciousness’s sense of substance and separate individuality when he indicates that the old shape of consciousness does not transform into the new one, but continues to exist the same way it had before, even after the exposition has turned its attention away from this figure. Here the end of the dialectic of the unhappy consciousness:

For on the one hand, surrendering one’s own will is merely negative in terms of *its concept*, that is, *in itself*, but at the same time it is positive, specifically, it is the positing of the will . . . as universal, not as the will of an individual. . . . Hence, *for consciousness*, its will becomes universal will, a will existing *in itself*, although in its own eyes, it itself is not this will *in-itself*. . . . However, *for the consciousness itself*, activity continues, and its actual activity remains impoverished. Its enjoyment in consumption remains sorrowful, and the sublation of these in any positive sense continues to be postponed to an *otherworldly beyond*. (§ 230)

The unhappy consciousness remains unhappy. But that does not concern “us” anymore, since “within this object, the representational thought [*Vorstellung*] of *reason* has . . . come to be,” and this is what interests “us” now (§ 230). Hegel’s *Phenomenology* does not tell the story of *one* protagonist who consistently grows and continuously progresses toward absolute knowledge. It follows many protagonists observing each one faithfully until a new figure has “emerged,” one knows not exactly how (§ 595).

Our Own Epoch

In addition to the performed transitions, that is, in addition to the blanks or the positive nothings between the chapters, Hegel offers two paradigmatic descriptions of transports. One of them can be found in the preface

to the *Phenomenology*. On one hand, the preface is a methodological piece, which allows us to assume that what Hegel says there about the logic of transport is valid also for the transports in the text itself. On the other hand, Hegel explicitly refuses the notion of method; he refuses to offer us the railing that allows us to look down at the text without falling into it. Therefore, he gives no general theory of transport in the preface but simply an example. Or rather, *the* example: the transport we ideally experience as readers: “it is not difficult to see that our own epoch is a time of birth and a transition to a new period” (§ 11). What Hegel calls here “our own epoch” is not the historical time in which he lived. It should have become clear by now that transports do not take place within historical time; they are—or make up—the interstices in and between historical times.³¹ “Our own epoch” is the textual time of the *Phenomenology*—that is, according to Hegel’s system, the time of transition from historical time to the infinite (and, as we will see, itself interstitial) time of Hegel’s philosophical science: the time it takes to transport the reader from one into the other:

Besides, it is not difficult to see that our own epoch is a time of birth and a transition to a new period. Spirit has broken with the previous world of its existence and its ways of thinking; it is in the process of submerging them in the past [*in die Vergangenheit hinab zu versenken*] and working on its own transformation. To be sure, spirit is never at rest but rather always moving forward [*immer in fortschreitender Bewegung*]. However, just as with a child, who after a long silent period of nourishment draws his first breath and breaks with the gradualness of merely quantitative growth [*nur vermehrenden Fortgang*]*—*a qualitative leap*—*and as now the child is born so too, in bringing itself to cultural maturity, spirit ripens slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world . . . This gradual crumbling [*Zerbröckeln*], which left unaltered the physiognomy of the whole, is interrupted by the ascent [*Aufgang*], which, a flash [*ein Blitz*], puts forth all at once the structure of the new world.

Yet this newness is no more completely actual than is the newborn child, . . . so little is the reached concept of the whole the whole itself. . . . The actuality of this simple whole consists in those shapes which, having become moments of the whole, once again develop themselves anew and give themselves a shape, but this time within their new element, within the new meaning which itself has come to be.
(§ 11–12, trans. modified)

Spirit is “never at rest,” always growing and crumbling at the same time. Its transformations nevertheless leave “unaltered the physiognomy of the

whole.” Spirit moves without realizing it—or it realizes that it moves without showing it. It is moved but remains motionless, like a king in a sedan chair or a statue on a dolly. Spirit saves face and denies change until it breaks down. In this breakdown, a new world immediately replaces the old one. We leap from one world to the next. The interval of negativity or of trembling fails to become part of our experience; the time of infinity is reduced to virtually nothing. Transport appears as a flash or as lightning (*Blitz*).

The lightning destroys the old world and illuminates the new one. In the flash of an insight, we have been transported from a long and painful history of misrecognitions into the new reality of speculative science. The birth of speculative science should mean the end of history. Yet, surprisingly, Hegel insists here on a continuity between historical time and the non-linear time of speculative science. Just like the many figures of consciousness within the book, “we,” the readers of the *Phenomenology*—even after we have grasped the logic of the infinite and leapt into the realm of the speculative—need to labor at giving spirit actuality and to “once again develop [its moments] anew and give them . . . a shape.” Hegel insists that the labor of the concept is continuous and progressive, that “spirit is never at rest but rather always moving forward.” Just like spirit, we can be “never at rest.” And with this admonishment, Hegel has covered over the space of the blank, the lighthearted time of the leap, the rupture of the flash.

Hegel, who, as phenomenologist, shows the strength to frustrate the desire for continuity and to present transitions as leaps, succumbs to this desire in the moment when he thematizes the transition he himself undergoes when writing the *Phenomenology*: the transition from historical time to the non-historical time of speculative science. The dismissive “besides” and the boastful “it is not difficult to see” that introduce the passage are symptoms of his denial of fear. Refusing to show the strength to lose control together with his subject, Hegel remains a distant observer who claims to know better than to tremble with “our own epoch.”

The *Phenomenology* keeps a record of what happens “behind the back of consciousness” (§ 87). It records the unconscious or unregistered experiences of the protagonists, and it archives the figures that the progressive development of the exposition leaves behind. The *Phenomenology*, as a text, functions as the archive or the “memory [that] still preserves the dead mode of spirit’s previous shape as a passed history” (§ 545). As such, it is fundamentally torn within. On the one hand, this archive satisfies Hegel’s anxious demand for continuous labor; on the other hand and by the same token it spoils his desire for the leap to the end of history and into a new, speculative world.³² Despite Hegel’s timorous reserve, the

text syntactically (not thematically) cultivates the trembling movement of absolute fear that neither its authors nor its protagonists endure.³³ The *Phenomenology* as a text thus offers neither the (impossible) linear, continuous, and causal development from history to the end of history, nor the leap into the speculative via the erasure of the non-speculative. Rather, the text gives us to read a trembling-back-and-forth between the finite and the infinite, between the speculative and the non-speculative.

By insisting in the preface on his authority and superior knowledge, Hegel lends weight to a linear reading of the text. By describing the movement as a progression, he favors the next “higher” form of consciousness over the previous one. And by stressing that spirit’s movement is continuous, he encourages the sense that the *Phenomenology* has only one protagonist and that the differences between the *Gestalten* indicate a development or growth of consciousness rather than an interaction between different consciousnesses. But in order to register the trembling of absolute fear, the different figures of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* need to be read neither as one consciousness in a linear development, nor as many strictly separate consciousnesses, but as a multiplicity of consciousnesses that are neither completely different nor strictly the same, that move through each other without collapsing into one, and that send each other into ecstasies.³⁴

Hegel’s weakness is to pretend that there is nothing to fear because Spirit always progresses. Thus, we need to modify the critic’s remark: meta-discourse about transitions is not the *Phenomenology*’s strong point. Evidently, the phenomenologist (a narrative persona that includes the reader function) shows more strength than the author. Despite his strong overall argument for self-abandon and exposure, the preface to the *Phenomenology* shows that Hegel is afraid to abandon authority. We can take a breath: Hegel is no *Übermensch*, no absolute master of the speculative. Just like his protagonists, he avoids absolute fear.

Of course, Hegel’s reserve in the preface will not prevent absolute fear from rising. According to his own account, saving face is an integral part of “the work [of self-] transformation” (§ 11). Avoiding the transition “to the other side of life,” from where “the other side of me is calling,” I “try to distract myself from [the] fear” that seizes us with a “pervading infection” (Lispector 1989, 12, 13; Hegel, § 545). Eventually, you cannot resist the onslaught any longer.³⁵ Suddenly your body jerks: you almost fall asleep; you almost fall into the future of speculative thought, but at the last moment you flinch and yank yourself back: “in the nightmare I finally in a sudden convulsion fall prostrate back onto this side” (Lispector 1989, 13). You wake up “*some fine morning*”: “safe” (Hegel, § 545; Lispector 1989, 13). The lightning didn’t strike, the scene is “bloodless,” yet

spirit crossed a line (§ 545). In a “sudden fall,” he slipped through the bars, and the “kadump!” with which he hits the ground again jerks him out of his reverie (Cixous 1991, 15; Hegel, § 545). He will have been “on the other side of life,” but any consciousness—and here Hegel is not different from his protagonists—considers where it is to be “this side,” the *Diesselts*, or “this life” (Lispector 1989, 12). “Consciousness as such has never slept”; it has always been engaged in a continuous movement and does not conceive of its side as the other side (Nancy 1993, 16). While the nightmare of speculative thinking thus remains a well-kept secret, consciousness starts anew to set itself out as if nothing happened. It “has in this way painlessly shed merely its withered skin”:

Rather, now that it is an invisible and undetected spirit, [pure insight] thoroughly infiltrates [*durchschleicht*] all the nobler parts, and it has soon taken complete hold over all the fibers and members of the unaware idol. At that point, “*some fine morning* it gives its comrade a shove with the elbow, and thump! kadump! the idol is lying on the floor.” —*Some fine morning*, the noon of which is bloodless if the infection has permeated every organ of spiritual life. Memory alone then still preserves the dead mode of spirit’s previous shape as a passed history (passed one knows not how exactly), and the new serpent of wisdom, elevated for adoration, has in this way painlessly shed merely its withered skin. (§ 545, trans. modified)

This is the second exemplary description of a transition that I want to consider. It is located in the body of the text, not between chapters, but within the chapter on the enlightenment. While specifically describing consciousness’s transformation from believer to enlightened subject, it also functions as an exemplary description of transitions in general and reflects on the *Phenomenology* as transition.

The account is torn between the perspective of the consciousness after the transition and that of the consciousness before the transition. From the perspective of the enlightened consciousness, the transition is painless. It didn’t feel a thing. Consciousness wakes up to its new life without knowing what happened and, what is more, without knowing that it was indeed asleep or blacked-out. Emerging as a so-called enlightened and, thus, supposedly free consciousness, it did not experience absolute fear. Spirit’s “work on its own transformation” (§ 11)—that is, the spreading of “pure insight” in the mind of the naively faithful consciousness—is identified as an unconscious work, a “pervading infection [that] is not noticeable beforehand” but “thoroughly infiltrates all the nobler parts” (§ 545).

Already in the dialectic of master and servant, the labor of fear was described as an infection. There we read that if consciousness “could not stand absolute fear . . . his substance will not have been infected [*angesteckt*] all the way through” by negativity (§ 196). Absolute fear produces self-consciousness by infecting substance with negativity. It performs its work quietly; we read in the above-quoted passage that insight “flows into” the believer and hollows out the idol.³⁶ This “way in which all durable existence becomes absolutely fluid” leaves “unaltered the physiognomy” of consciousness (§ 194; § 11). The change goes unnoticed until pure insight pushes the king from his sedan chair, and with a bang, it becomes apparent that the old shape of consciousness is already dead, and that the new one has already taken its place. The transition again happens in a trice; while in the passage from the preface it appears as a flash or lightning, here it is a sudden noise, a bang or thunder.

Again, the protagonist does not experience absolute fear. But somewhere the secret is kept. A trace of fear, a memory from before remains in the body after the leap: “And a child remembers the fear before being born” (Cixous 1991, 15). The young consciousness, “the newborn child” begins to tremble after the fact (§ 12). “It is only when the infection has become widespread that it is *for consciousness*” (§ 545). Then it flinches and yanks itself around, defends itself and struggles against its dissolution. Retroactively, consciousness fights against a fear it has never quite felt. In this struggle, which in our last example takes the form of a dispute between enlightenment and faith, the consciousness after the transition reenacts the consciousness before the transition. For itself, the enlightened consciousness is pure insight and pure intention, and its struggle “is directed against the impure intentions and perverse insights” of priests and believers (§ 537, trans. modified). But, in its fight against absolute fear, “pure insight . . . becomes the negative of pure insight; it becomes untruth and unreason, and as intention it becomes the negative of pure intention and grows into lies and dishonesty about its purpose” (§ 547).³⁷ The old idol, victim of an infection, comes back to haunt the new enlightened consciousness. Pure insight is infected with belief: it has faith in reason. So it indeed “fall[s] prostrate back onto this side,” the side of the believer (Lispector 1989, 13). And the “noisy ruckus” of both figures’ “violent struggle” echoes the wild roars of an even earlier figure of consciousness: the spiritual kingdom of animals and its deception (§ 546).³⁸

Led by fear of absolute fear, we like to construe a firm separation between one life and another. That is why we tend to read the chapters of the *Phenomenology* separately. We pretend that each of these figures is stable and self-contained, and forget that they figure one another. One

shape of spirit inadvertently replicates previous shapes of spirit and so the textual life of spirit retroactively makes up the experience of trembling it didn't have before.³⁹ The text keeps the secret. And that is why the newborn child, the new period of spirit can—if it is not too afraid of fear—rejoice in the replication of shapes across the lightning of the qualitative leap, and delight in hearing the echo through the thunder. The child might take pleasure in fright. Without a warning, the winds of fear and the shivers of birth rise again in its body. It does not avoid contact with the bars. Sitting on a climbing frame at the playground—with one leg in front of birth and one leg behind it—the child rocks back and forth. “On the spot we rode them, secretly, and we enjoyed ourselves on their backs. . . . On bars we traveled before all travel” (Cixous 1991, 9). Thus consciousness might remember the fear it has felt when it was someone other than it is now. The enlightened consciousness trembles, permeated by its previous shapes. “I’m still afraid. But my heart is beating. . . . You are a way of my being me, and I a way of you being you” (Lispector 1989, 54).

The memory and anticipation of one figure of consciousness in the other—as one figure shudders through the other—is the experience of absolute fear. The consciousness before the turn and the consciousness after the turn exchange shapes. The moments of impossible absolute fear function as turning points around which the movement of the *Phenomenology* pivots, oscillating between before and after. Fear keeps the different shapes of consciousness apart, and mediates between them at the same time. The moment of synthesis in Hegel’s dialectic does not consist in the next higher form of consciousness, but precisely in this turning point, this blank, this flash of an instant that cannot be grasped because it is the concept itself that trembles and turns at this instant.⁴⁰

If we linger a bit with the passing moment of reconciliation, we might, from this perspective, be able to register the trembles of the text that take place despite the author’s call for steady work. Even the passage from the preface is several times torn and trembles across its multiple tears. Chiefly remarkable is the parenthesis “a flash” that completely interrupts the syntax of an otherwise well-organized sentence and thus performs the interruption that Hegel here thematizes: “This gradual crumbling, which left unaltered the physiognomy of the whole, is interrupted by the ascent, which, a flash, puts forth all at once the structure of the new world” (§ 11). Then one notices that the description cuts across spirit in transition and the authorial perspective that keeps a distance from such transport. It oscillates between modeling a moment within the *Phenomenology* and describing the moment of the *Phenomenology*. It moves back and forth between identifying gradual growth and

gradual crumbling, or progress and dissolution. And finally one would be hard-pressed to precisely locate in time this account as it seems to shift with the transport it is describing. On the one hand, “spirit has broken with the previous world of its existence and its ways of thinking,” which implies that the transition took place already (*ibid.*). On the other hand, the transition is about to occur, and spirit “is about to submerge them in the past” (*ibid.*). Moving between before and after, trembling across the limit line, the passage lingers in transition. It turns out that this description of transport is divided between calling it a leap and describing it as a continuous development.

Let’s also look again at another one of the performative (not descriptive) accounts of transport. So far, we said that the blanks between the chapters mark the interruption of continuity and negatively present the experience of absolute fear. In the following, I will argue that the text trembles around these blanks. I want to consider again the transition from “Absolute Freedom and Terror” to “Spirit Certain of Itself: Morality.” I have already mentioned that “absolute freedom passes over from its self-destroying actuality” and jumps the border “into another land of self-conscious spirit, . . . that of the *moral spirit*” (§ 595). For a moment, the phenomenologist follows not the line of progression but that of regress; he notes that the jump might as well take the shape of a similarly abrupt movement in the other direction—a being hurled back:

In the way that it emerged from out of this tumult [of the revolution], spirit might have been hurled back to its starting-point, the ethical world and the real world of cultural maturation, which had only been refreshed and rejuvenated by the fear of the master, a fear which had once again entered into people’s hearts. (§ 594)

We know that history could not benefit from the subjunctive Hegel employs here. A period of restoration did in fact follow the French Revolution. Hegel alludes to that historical fact:

These individuals, who have felt the fear of their absolute master—death—now once again acquiesce in negation and divisions, put themselves into the various orderings of the social spheres and return to a divided and limited work. However, as a result, they return back to their substantial actuality. (§ 593, trans. modified)

In order to escape the terror of a meaningless death, society returns to stratification, discrimination, and servitude. As I have discussed in the first part of this chapter, terror does not afford an experience of

absolute fear. It doesn't teach consciousness the pleasures of a living fear, but merely reminds it of its fear of death. The result repeats the outcome of the struggle for life and death: consciousness accepts a limited but secure position within a hierarchy.

But not only historically, also logically, spirit is bound to be thrown back to its starting point and to "run through this cycle of necessity all over again" (§ 594). The dialectic of absolute freedom and terror teaches a lesson in logic, namely that pure self-identity is impossible. When the universal will aspires to total self-identity and sets out to negate all difference within, it inadvertently negates itself. What is more, even death cheats the universal will out of the desired integrity: self-negation offers no relief from self-difference since self-negation only evinces self-difference: "As the *pure* parity-with-itself of the universal will, absolute freedom thus has the *negation* in it, and in turn it thereby has the *division* as such in it, and it develops this once again as *actual* division" (§ 593). The "actual division" here takes the shape of spheres or classes and apportioned tasks. Hegel makes it quite clear that the historical fact of a period of restoration following the revolution is only consistent with logical necessity.

In any case, the narrative development of Hegel's *Phenomenology* does not take its orders from history but from speculative necessity. Indeed, Hegel not only alludes here to historical events, but also refers to earlier chapters of the *Phenomenology*. "The ethical world and the real world of cultural maturation" to which "spirit might have been hurled back" (§ 594) refers to the preceding parts of the section on spirit: "True Spirit, Ethical Life" and "Spirit Alienated from Itself: Cultural Maturation." We are also, as I already indicated, thrown back even further, to the chapter on mastery and servitude with its preference for hierarchical yet stable relations over the uncertainty of mutual acknowledging. For the narrative of the *Phenomenology*, the only possibility to escape this eternal return is the leap into the next chapter.

The narrative trembles and turns on the meaninglessness of death. On one hand, the mass terror of senseless death throws the late consciousness of absolute freedom back to the beginning and into an endless cycle of repetitions. On the other hand, this same acknowledging of the absolute meaninglessness of death projects consciousness into the next dialectic. The massive negation is so abstract that it offers no recompense: "the *universal will* can give nothing in return for the sacrifice" (§ 594).⁴¹ This means that no positive actuality can distract consciousness from acknowledging that its own essence is absolute negativity: "this negation in its actuality is not *alien*," but "is unmediated oneness with self-consciousness" (ibid.). With this acknowledgment, "the meaningless

death, the unfilled negativity of the self, changes over suddenly into absolute positivity" (ibid.). We have reached here the point where the extremes of pure negativity and pure positivity touch one another across infinity and where we tremble back and forth from one to the other.

For a brief moment, the exposition reveals the pleasure in trembles that even the stern moral philosopher from Königsberg takes: "Spirit feasts [*sich labt*] on the thought of this truth" (§ 595, trans. modified). The truth here is that freedom consists in the sudden "changing-over" (*Umschlagen*) of pure positivity (universal will) into pure negativity (terror) and back into pure positivity (forms of experience that are transparent to knowledge) (§ 594). Morality, the next figure of consciousness, will quickly forget the pleasure of the "pure universal movement, this way in which all durable existence becomes absolutely fluid" (§ 194). But "we," as readers of the *Phenomenology*, can stand (*ausstehen*) or linger with death by trembling back to earlier parts of the text and forth to the following exposition.

If we read the *Phenomenology* forward and backward starting from its moments of transition, our reading could perform the trembles of fear. It will be no easy task; it takes a long time to unfold one instant. "We'll labor for months to copy the flash" (Cixous 1991, 70). Every figure of consciousness has to be read as permeated by many others. Every proposition of this book has to be read backward and forward. The entire development of the *Phenomenology* presents a meticulous actualization, and thereby multiplication, of *one* transport or instant of transition. The *Phenomenology* not only cuts across time periods and figures of consciousness, but, situated between history and philosophical science, it moves between time and non-time, or between linear time and the trembling of an infinite present. The linearity of its development as a whole is therefore broken up by a to and fro of different times echoing in each other. In the *Phenomenology*, time shudders with interlacing rhythms. Different times strike against one another, oppose each other, rub against one another, take each other's place in a trembling rhythm with the text's "heart beating wildly" (Lispector 1989, 54).