Tropes of Transport

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Release

This release of itself from the form of its own self is the highest freedom.
—Phenomenology, § 806

I will begin with the end. This first chapter on emotional syntax analyzes how Hegel’s Phenomenology ends, in order to clear the way for a new beginning in the reading of this Hegelian text. Against the expectation raised by the title of the last chapter of the Phenomenology and by the common view that this text is a teleological narrative, the Phenomenology ends not in the presence and plenitude of absolute knowledge, but in release. With his final chapter, Hegel abandons any imperialist project of knowledge that he or his readers might have pursued over the course of the text.

Rather than provide a positive result, which one might be able to identify as “absolute knowledge,” the final chapter of the Phenomenology of Spirit keeps circling. Rather than close the circle of spirit’s self-exploration once and for all, it finds more and more ways to indicate openings. On the fifteen or so pages of the chapter entitled “Absolute Knowledge,” the words entäußern or Entäußerung (self-emptying) appear twenty-eight times. This is the highest concentration of the word in any chapter of the Phenomenology. As if this wasn’t enough, the signifiers of release proliferate—among them, one finds Entlassen (release § 806), Abrassen (giving-up, § 796), Verzichtung (relinquishing, § 796), aufopfern/Aufopferung (sacrifice, § 807), offenbaren/Offenbarung/Offenbarkeit (note the double signifier of exposure: offen [open] and baren [to bare]), sich hinausstellen (put itself forth, § 792, trans. modified), herauskehren (put on view, § 803), and aussprechen (“articulate,” nine times). The chapter on “absolute knowledge” not only thematizes release, but the very end of this last chapter also performs release. The last sentence of the Phenomenology of Spirit is perhaps not exactly grammatically incorrect, but it is certainly grammatically incoherent and thus performs non-closure.
In addition, the text resists coherence by breaking off with a dash, from which two lines of poetry dangle.

In the course of a close analysis of the ending of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I will introduce in this chapter the juggle of poetry and philosophy, which I will further pursue in the next chapter. This opening to another (here, the opening of philosophical syntax to the syntax of poetry) allows me to address the question of whether one needs others in order to become emotional. Attending to the example of grief, this chapter examines to what extent and how mediation is constitutive of emotionality in general.

I will also contend in this chapter that it is an act of friendship when Hegel alters the verses he cites. This claim anticipates the argument, more thoroughly developed in chapter 5, that “mutual acknowledging” is an interaction among self-reflexive parties, in which no one remains intact. But my claim about the nature of friendship also reveals the double bind of my own practice of reading: I derive my method of transformative reading—in good hermeneutic fashion—from the text’s own economy, so that (paradoxically) I remain true to the Hegelian text by transforming it. As a result, no matter how much I alter the text, my reading will still be Hegelian—but hopefully I will have been a good friend and will have introduced a shift in the meaning of “Hegelian.”

For the line of inquiry about mediation as a constitutive element of emotionality, I will rely on Terada’s philosophy of emotion in *Feeling in Theory* and on the work of Hélène Cixous, who, particularly in her book *Déluge*, her play *L’histoire qu’on ne connaîtra jamais*, and in several of the essays assembled in English under the title *Stigmata*, explores the affinity between sorrow and theatricality. Terada argues that “people can feel emotions only through intermediate representations” (Terada 2001, 18). Cixous holds that humans need theater (in the most extended sense) to be able to cry. For what seem to me clearly strategic reasons, Cixous maintains that “the universe of emotion” is human and not gendered. The desire for melodrama—the desire to cry in the theater, at the movies, or while reading a book—is nothing specifically feminine, she would say. Yet the theatrical, fictional, or figurative structure of emotionality—which allows, even necessitates one to have emotions by proxy or as a proxy—makes possible a division of labor in emotional affairs. This division is still mostly organized along gender lines. Women still do emotional work for others while this work goes unrecognized and is disapproved of. For strategic reasons that are different from Cixous’, then, I point out that, with their tears, women clean the house of the self and wash men’s dirty underwear. Against this backdrop, a challenge arises that I am unable to ignore: can I make Hegel cry?
Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* doesn’t appear to shed a tear. The individual figures of consciousness are of interest only as long as their self-contradictions aren’t exhausted. Once understood, they are discarded and the text invests in a new figure of consciousness. Each shape of consciousness dies a death without pain, without grief, without burial, a death that doesn’t haunt. As Butler has it: “There is little time for grief in the *Phenomenology* because renewal is always so close at hand” (Butler 1999, 21). Only when the text is about to end is it able to gesture toward the skeletons in its closet. At its limit, the *Phenomenology* acknowledges its finitude, conjures up a friend, and dissolves in tears.

**Hegel’s Tears**

The title of the *Phenomenology*’s last chapter seems to suggest the final supersession of all non-knowledge (ignorance, error, opinion, madness, etc.) in “absolute knowledge.” The final word of the chapter, *seine Unendlichkeit* (its infinity), would then present the grandiose culminating point of a narrative of progressive self-awareness. Yet, upon close examination, this apparent closure of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* looks more like a release and an abortion of the project of self-knowledge. Lacoue-Labarthe had the inkling that “the closure [of the speculative system] can scarcely contain the pressure under which it has perhaps already succumbed without anyone’s becoming aware of it” (Lacoue-Labarthe 1989, 224). Perhaps it is time to take notice.

The very last lines of the *Phenomenology* are preceded by fifteen or so pages of an almost unintelligible whirl of sentences that McCumber has called a “stew of words” (McCumber 1993, 21). Spirit has been cooked and recooked for a long time now. In the last chapter more than anywhere, the *Phenomenology* reads itself and, to borrow a phrase from Agamben, “bend[s] the prose of philosophy into a ring” turning upon itself and returning to itself, round and around (Agamben 1991, 78). The pressure mounts. Finally, this concoction froths over:

Out of the chalice of this realm of spirits
Foams forth to it its infinity.

(§ 808, trans. modified)

This ending might be read as an ejaculation. The *Phenomenology*’s cum shot, where spirit finally gets to see its own sperm. Instead of losing the seeds of its wisdom again and again in the chalice of phenomenologi-
cal inquiry, recognition foams back out of the abyss of experience—and spirit succeeds in knowing itself. Schiller’s “Ode to Joy,” a poem that is kindred in its acclamation for friendship to the one Hegel quotes here (Schiller’s poem “Friendship”), celebrates such male homosocial and autoerotic exuberance:

Joy in foaming beakers creams:—
Influenced by the golden vine,
Civilized the savage seems,
Timid hearts with valour shine.
Let the generous flagon pass;
Brethren, in your sites rise,
To good fortune drain a glass,
Effervescing to the skies!
(“To Joy,” trans. Arnold-Forster; Schiller 1902, 63–64)

The brothers used to be at each other’s throats and feeding upon each other like cannibals. But they are assuaged now, and in this round they feel like heroes (they drink Heldenmut). In a carousal that has orgiastic overtones, they encourage each other to aim for the stars with their ejaculates (Laßt den Schaum zum Himmel spritzen): even the good heavenly spirit might be impressed by that!

Yet this intertextual reference also reveals the despair (die Verzweiflung) that underlies such self-aggrandizing exuberance. One can read the line that features Verzweiflung as a parallel structure to “trinken Sanftmuth Kannibalen,” thus translating it into something like “courageous heroes imbibe despair.” In chapter 7, I will elaborate on the fractures and ruptures that are the physical manifestations of despair. Here, we must at least notice that the triumphant ending to the book-length self-reflection of spirit is sapped by an uncanny word choice. Let’s look at the full passage of Hegel’s ending:

The goal, absolute knowledge, that is, spirit knowing itself as spirit, has for its path the recollection [Erinnerung] of spirits as they are in themselves and as they achieve the organization of their realm. Their preservation [Aufbewahrung] in terms of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency is history, but in terms of their conceptually grasped organization, it is the science of phenomenal knowledge. Both together are conceptually grasped history; they form the recollection [Erinnerung] and the skull place [Schädelstätte] of absolute spirit, the actuality, the truth, the certainty of its throne, without which [ohne den] it would be lifeless and alone; only—
Out of the chalice of this realm of spirits
Foams forth to it its infinity. (§ 808, trans. modified)\(^5\)

Das Ziel, das absolute Wissen, oder der sich als Geist wissende Geist hat zu
seinem Wege die Erinnerung der Geister, wie sie an ihnen selbst sind und die
Organisation ihres Reiches vollbringen. Ihre Aufbewahrung nach der Seite ihres
freien in der Form der Zufälligkeit erscheinenden Daseins ist die Geschichte, nach
der Seite ihrer begriffenen Organisation aber die Wissenschaft des erscheinenden
Wissens; beide zusammen, die begriffene Geschichte, bilden die Erinnerung
und Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes, die Wirklichkeit, Wahrheit und Gewiß-
heit seines Throns, ohne den er nur das leblose Einsame wäre; nur —
aus dem Kelche dieses Geisterreiches
schäumt ihm seine Unendlichkeit.

What kind of fluid is it, after all, that foams back at spirit? The text
doesn’t name the liquid, but circumscribes it as “infinity.” Earlier in the
Phenomenology, at the end of the chapter on the understanding, infinity is
described as the “universal blood” (das allgemeine Blut, § 162). Does abso-
lute spirit drink blood? There is certainly something vampiric about the
constant need for Aufhebung. I can almost see spirit frothing at the mouth
from a mad desire for the life essence of its manifestations. Infinity, the
last word of the Phenomenology, suddenly seems less than the triumphant
culminating point of a narrative of progress. And the glorious chord of
“the actuality, the truth, the certainty” that buttresses absolute spirit’s
throne is slowly and creepingly drowned out by the ghastly overtone of
the word Schädelstätte (literally: “skull site”).

Certainly, with a little bit of effort, Schädelstätte can be read as com-
municating a sense of sovereignty. The Latin caput combines the mean-
ing of skull with that of “head” or “chief,” and Schädel can profit met-
onymically from its Latin counterpart. Of course Schädelstätte can also
easily be translated into Calvary or Golgotha, and will receive from the
Christian context the absolution that a swift elevation to heaven affords.
But Schädelstätte reinscribes what the Latin-derived Kalvarienberg (Cal-
vary) or the Aramaic-derived Golgatha (Golgotha) covers over: a linger-
ing sense of death.\(^6\) Schädelstätte means “skull site” or “place for skulls”
as do Calvary and Golgotha for those who know Latin and Aramaic).
Some say that the hill by Jerusalem got its name from its skull-like shape.\(^7\)
Legend has it that the skull of Adam was buried there, and the belief is
that Jesus sacrificed himself there to expiate Adam and reverse man’s
death.\(^8\) These stories are attempts to soften the drastic ring of the word
Schädelstätte by reducing the numerous skulls to one, which then can
more easily be turned into n-one. Yet Schädelstätte has the very profane
meaning of mass grave: a place where a large number of skulls come to
lie either at once (due to war) or as accumulated over time. Golgotha was Jerusalem’s place for executions; it is a site of serial killings. Jesus died on a heap of bones; he simply added one to the numberless skulls that were already amassed there. He was one among many. Similarly dies “absolute knowledge.”

Absolute spirit has erected its throne on a pile of bones. The message of these last lines is very clear: without the death of many, absolute spirit would be lifeless. Its life is the result of the path of suffering that is the Phenomenology and the death of many figures of consciousness that went down in the annals of history. In a footnote to the word Schädelstätte, Nancy notes the obvious, namely that “history is also a vast and pain-ridden ossuary, a place where suffering and death are preserved” (Nancy 1997, 143, my translation). The Phenomenology of Spirit reads the bones of history and re-stashes them in an orderly fashion. The book preserves the various forms of spirit and organizes them according to the rules of “the science of phenomenal knowledge.” Yet from the depth of the mountain of skulls, a putrid liquid wells up and muddles things. It foams forth to remind absolute spirit that it is made of death and thus subject to death. The infinity of knowledge is not unlimited. Its reign (Reich) doesn’t hold. Hegel’s last words don’t give us absolute knowledge once and for all. They also do not implement the neat organization (according to the rules of “the science of phenomenal knowledge”) that they assert. Instead they veer into confusion. Like the fifteen or so pages leading up to it, the last sentence teeters at the edge of intelligibility. It does so not because it ventures out into unknown zones of knowledge, but because it circles back and back again, refusing to come to the point. Hegel’s last words don’t tell us what absolute knowledge consists of. Thank God! — one might say. We have learned not to ask. Absolute knowledge is nothing but the path toward absolute knowledge (“the truth is the whole[,] however, the whole is only the essence completing itself through its own development”), and so the request to state what spirit knows when it has come to know itself would launch us back into the entire development again (§ 20). Hegel’s last sentence doesn’t give us absolute knowledge. Rather, as if the author was distracted at the very apex of the phenomenological development, it oddly shifts referents and slips into an incoherence so slight that it would have almost remained unperceived.

Note the relative pronoun in the phrase ohne den. Grammatically it is not incorrect—it can refer to the throne (both are masculine in German)—but it certainly interrupts the parallel structure of this convoluted sentence: “beide zusammen, die begriffene Geschichte, bilden die Erinnerung und Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes, die Wirklichkeit, Wahrheit und Gewißheit seines Throns, ohne den er nur das leblose Einsame wäre” (one ex-
pects ohne die—die Wirklichkeit, Wahrheit und Gewißheit). The final sentence folds back on the one before it. The penultimate sentence bravely—with “a hero’s courage [Heldenmuth],” we could say—pronounces the goal (das Ziel) right away, then names it as “absolute knowledge,” then defines it as “spirit knowing itself as spirit,” and then continues its regress by describing the path toward absolute knowledge rather than telling us what this knowledge actually consists of. The final sentence repeats, with some additional clarifications, what the penultimate sentence already stated. “Their preservation” in the final sentence repeats “the recollection of spirits” in the penultimate. Similarly, “in terms of their free existence…” repeats “as they are in themselves” from before. And again, “in terms of their conceptually grasped organization” repeats “as they achieve the organization of their realm.” Then comes another summary (“both together”) and we arrive back at the beginning: “recollection.” This is “the actuality, the truth, the certainty” of “spirit knowing itself as spirit,” without which spirit would be lifeless and alone. Without what? Without the actuality of the realm of spirits, or without the recollection of spirits? Either one would make sense, but Wirklichkeit, Erinnerung, Aufbewahrung—all the words that would offer up a coherent meaning—are feminine. Den must refer to the throne—but it is incoherent with the rest of Hegel’s philosophy to say that spirit be lifeless without its throne. Absolute knowledge does not need to prop up its power with such a dead symbol. The sentence makes more sense if we consider another, more remote, possibility: if we take den to refer to “absolute spirit.” The gender alignment works (Geist is also masculine). It would be more Hegelian to say that the throne would be lifeless without absolute spirit. Yet, apart from the syntactical stretch of this version (den is too far away from des absoluten Geistes to sustain the reference), we are also not able to meaningfully relate the proposition’s remaining attributes to the throne (should the throne be das Einsame and the thing that drinks infinity out of the chalice?).

The significance of this pronoun, I’d like to propose, is something other than its semantic referent. Ohne den marks a qualitative shift in the syntax of the sentence, which both consolidates the confusion and interrupts it. Mieszkowski has argued that the figure of anacoluthon (a change of grammatical structure within one sentence) shows up language’s emotionality, that is to say, its incapability of creating a truly monolithic organizing schema (Mieszkowski 2009, 648–65). While the strange, almost imperceptible shift that ohne den initiates can perhaps not be qualified as an anacoluthon in the strict sense, it certainly marks the fact that this sentence relates to itself as to something other than what it presents itself to be. This sentence is not at peace with itself, but emotional. Even if ohne
*den* is nothing but a small mistake, it breaks with the endless repetition of recollection. With it, the structuring of spirit’s “realm” (*Reich*) comes undone, and absolute knowledge begins to dissolve. *Ohne den* is the tear in absolute knowledge. Because of it, the throne totters. In despite of it, the stew bubbles over. And absolute spirit breaks into tears.

**Make a Scene**

How to experience the moment of grief that takes spirit by surprise and that it loses immediately as the text breaks off? On the way toward answering a similar question, Cixous notices in the human psyche an infinite desire to shed tears. Puzzled by the observation that we enjoy sad stories, she asks, “Why do we read books that make us weep?” Her response is, “undoubtedly because we never have, in reality, enough to lament” (Cixous 1998, 42). With this statement Cixous certainly does not mean to deny real experiences of suffering. Instead, she points to the problematic relationship between reality and emotionality.

“In reality,” we never have “enough to lament,” not because the lamentable isn’t real or there is not enough of it in real life, but because we need something in addition to the real in order to be able to lament. Affects—in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of the non-conscious and non-linguistic experience of intensity—have an immediate quality to them that gives us no means to lament. Physical pain might be one of the most-discussed examples of such intensity. Scarry notes that pain is difficult to describe because it destroys language.10 “Pain has an element of blank,” writes Emily Dickinson.11 Pain subjects us to its absolute presence since “it cannot recollect / When it began” and “It has no future but itself” (Dickinson 1891). For the body in pain, circumscribing, that is, re-presenting pain through recollecting and anticipating its limits are impossible operations because they require an (if ever so slight) distance from the present, a slight gap or lag—precisely that which pain eliminates in its absolute rule. Without this interval, no lament, no language of pain is possible. “In reality, we never have enough [distance] to lament.”12

Against the idea of immediate affect and dumb pain, Hegel contends that subjectivity requires the pain of (self-)negation. Self-reflection and pain are thus intertwined for Hegel. He considers pain as a form of mediation: pain is mediated and reflects itself, and self-reflection or subjectivity involves pain. The subject needs to show “that there is nothing on hand in it itself which could not be a vanishing moment for it” (§ 187). Yet, it is obviously a paradoxical demand on the subject-
to-become that self-negation be constitutive of subject formation. One can enjoy self-negation only as long as one survives it. This is the lesson of the Phenomenology’s “struggle for life and death.” “We need to mourn for ourselves. And yet to stay alive,” notes Cixous (Cixous 1998, 42). She admires Siegfried’s swan song in the Nibelungenlied: his extraordinary capacity for transport. Siegfried is able to lament his own death because he anticipates it and because he identifies with those surviving him:

In former times, the husband of Kriemhild collapsed among the flowers in stanza 988, one saw the blood pouring from his wound. . . . Sigfrid didn’t want to die without having said everything he thought. Dying, he spoke by turns to his friends and to his traitors, and to everybody he said, fatally wounded, what he had to say. In stanza 999 the flowers all around were drenched in blood. At the end, the dying Sigfrid still bothered to suffer vicariously for [à la place de] his father, his mother, and his barons. When he had no more strength to speak he still exhaled at the end one terrible stanza. He had such a furious pity for those who waited his return for long. It was the agony of those who waited for him in vain that he wanted to lament before he died.

(Cixous 1992, 15, my translation)

Siegfried gives the best proof of his subjectivity when, rather than getting swallowed by the mute reality of sheer pain and death, he finds the intervals of negativity (anticipating his death and putting himself in the position of those around him) that allow his feelings to resonate. Of course, that was “in former times,” and we are no Siegfried. That is why we need books that make us weep. Because in reality we don’t have Siegfried’s sublime ability to invite self-difference, we need fiction, metaphor, or theater to create the interval that makes emotion resonate and allows us to experience it in the first place. The sheer “reality” of pain is not an emotion; the lament is the true emotional experience. Emotion is, thus, a manner of speaking.13

Our ability to feel emotion is, then, a matter of understanding emotionality. I mean this in the double sense. Emotionality is a mode of understanding, or, as Terada puts it, “emotions are an interpretive act that involves representation and mediation” (Terada 2001, 17). But we also need the right understanding of emotionality—we need to understand emotionality as self-reflective—if we want to feel emotions. If we think that the authenticity of emotion lies in its immediacy, we will have a hard time experiencing emotion. On the other hand, the fiction that opens a gap within emotion takes nothing away from the truth of emotion. On the contrary, the idea of affective clarity and integrity emerges as a dis-
avowed fiction when Terada describes it as the white mythology of emotion, which wants emotions to be “affective cognitions with none of the disadvantages of affects” (Terada 2001, 31). In the first chapter of *Déluge*, entitled “C’était l’entre deux,” Cixous stresses our disappearing ability to live in-between. For her, “the emotion is born *at the angle* of one state with another state” (Cixous 1998, 26). The self-identical facticity of brute loss, for example, doesn’t resonate emotionally. One feels numb about it until one makes a scene of it. “I need imagination to ‘excite’ sorrow even at a loss of my own” (Terada 2001, 38). I need to find that distance to myself—to my own loss—that allows me to lament it. “Making a scene” thus involves reflecting and refracting the loss across various figurations of loss, self, and presence.

This turns emotion into transport, into a traveling across states that figure one another and that by this very figuration get condensed. For example, a weeping act can be understood as a chant that echoes past and future losses. With one’s tears one repeats the loss that one anticipates. At times the reflection takes place externally; sometimes a figure of the in-between hits one from outside—as it happened to the “old friend” Cixous remembers, “who had just lost her husband. . . . And she said to me, with an utterly surprised air: you know, at the corner of *boulevard Jourdan* and *rue Deutsch de la Meurthe*, all of a sudden, I started to cry. Well, that is the point: it takes place quite exactly at the corner, at the angle” (Cixous 1997, 42). But it takes understanding for grief to take place; it takes an understanding of emotionality as transport; it takes the suppleness to comprehend (to penetrate and embrace) and identify with different figures and states across intervals (without eliminating the differences) to experience grief or any other transport.

Emotional transport involves time travel (past and future losses), spatial constellations (tears at the corner), interpersonal identifications (Siegfried and his entourage), or intrapersonal identifications (I’ll come to this in a moment). Yet what I have distinguished here—time and space, inter- and intrapersonal relations—indeed overlaps, because emotionality cuts across the distinction and separation between inside and outside. The idea of emotion as a mental content (to be expressed) illustrates well how the wrong conception of emotion generates only numbness and leaves us feeling empty. “Emotions appear to be exemplary inner contents . . . because the history of thought about emotion has invested in theories of expression” (Terada 2001, 28). But emotions are never fully inside or fully outside; they travel across and in-between. The expressive hypothesis can be confirmed by experience only when it has gone through deconstruction, and when expression is understood in the rather uncommon way Mark Taylor understands “secret(ion)s”: 
“Secretions, it seems, are always entre-deux. While a secret is an outside that is inside, a secretion is an inside that is outside” (Taylor 1990, 190). There is no inner plenitude that can be perfectly put into language or other forms of expressions; rather, the inner is already alienated from itself when the uncanny fluid wells up and the shedding of tears or other secretions makes one feel the tears (Zerrissenheit) within.

This brings me to the somewhat counterintuitive notion of intra-personal identification. “We feel not to the extent that experience seems immediate, but to the extent that it doesn’t; not to the extent that other people’s experiences remind us of our own, but to the extent that our own seem like somebody else’s” (Terada 2001, 22). Terada notes here something very important, namely, that the cross-identification required for emotion does not simply aggrandize the self by appropriating the other, but estranges the self as well. We feel to the extent that our own experiences seem like somebody else’s. Our self-feeling paradoxically turns us into objects for ourselves. “A situation that Wittgenstein considers too absurd seriously to contemplate—in which people can feel emotions only through intermediate representations, which he likens to ‘inanimate things’ or ‘dolls’—is the case even when the intermediary is oneself” (Terada 2001, 18). Even self-feeling turns us into things: dense and inanimate objects—dolls, for example, or dummies or skull bones—things that are not entirely transparent to us. It is to Hegel’s great credit that he embraces this kind of self-alienation. There is no absolute knowledge without spirit acknowledging “that the being of the I is a thing” (§ 790).

We can lament only when we relate to ourselves as something else. I remarked earlier that emotion is a way of speaking; now we can specify that emotion is an indirect way of speaking. Only by way of indirection can we communicate (even to ourselves) what we truly feel. “The ventriloquist spills his or her guts by speaking from the belly. . . . Ventriloquists, of course, do not speak directly. They speak indirectly by speaking through an other who cannot speak and who is, therefore, a dummy” (Taylor 1990, 190). Only by relating to ourselves as dummies or things can we find that interval that allows us to cry.

Yet the assumption that the doll or the skull bone is a dummy who cannot speak still belongs to what Terada identifies as the “ideology of emotion” (Terada 2001, 3). This ideology is based on the idea that feeling distinguishes humanity from inhumanity. Hegel, on the other hand, allows us to register the fact that the “dummy” does speak and does experience transports at least to the same extent that human subjects do—that “the thing is I” and I can only echo this thing (§ 791). Emotionality, then, comes always in multiple voices that mix and mingle, that affirm and negate, that interrupt one another and inaccurately echo one another.
Cixous puts it, “I live of living and dying interwoven into a sonata. I don’t want the world by one eye and just one dimension, no, our life is not cut and dry, but at least five times varied, awry, contorted” (Cixous 1992, 16, my translation). Emotionality, thus, has a sense for complexity, and furthers ethical relationalities where each party imitates other tongues without simply translating them into one unified voice that it claims as its own.\(^{14}\)

Joys of Grief

The interval that generates emotionality also affects individual emotions. Self-distance opens a gap within emotions and gives them an ironic character: emotions are experienced not as clear and simple, but as oscillating between different, often opposite flavors. There is, for example, an overtone of pleasure in the experience of grief. With his speculative logic—which elastically captures the unity of opposites and the difference within identity—Hegel offers an excellent tool for attending to this ambivalence of emotionality. The speculative quality of tears—the fact that these secretions nourish—is not lost on Cixous, either. “Pouring out and taking in,” we drink our tears, she notes (Cixous 1998, 47). “It is salted milk” that suits the taste of adults (Cixous 1997, 44).\(^{15}\) If spirit breaks into tears at the very end of the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel’s thoughts on infinity and alienation enable absolute spirit to drink its tears from the chalice of spirits.

The need for a metaphoric distance from pain is bound up with the theatricality of grief. The staging of grief proves necessary for the feeling of grief to be registered at all, and it also mixes grief with pleasure: the “happiness in tears . . . is connected to the theater, to representation, to the fact that there are witnesses” (Cixous 1998, 47). Only shared grief allows full pleasure. This explains Hegel’s theatrical paroxysm at the end of the Phenomenology of Spirit. With the final lines of the book he suddenly slips into the language of poetry and into the character of a friend. Hegel thematically and performatively conjures up friends who can introduce the self-difference necessary for the joyful experience of grief. Only the echo of another’s voice allows the Phenomenology to dissolve into tears. This other is easily identified as Schiller, the end of whose poem “Die Freundschaft” (“Friendship”) Hegel cites here. Another other called to the scene is poetry, the ambivalent friend of philosophical discourse.

When Hegel mimics poetry by unfaithfully reciting Schiller’s poem “Friendship,” an unexperienced grief unexpectedly interrupts this ostensibly triumphant phase of “absolute knowledge.” In the indirect presence
of a friend, Hegel is able to abandon the imperialist gesture of systematic knowledge. He has reached his limit. If there is any content to “absolute knowledge,” it can only be the reflexive claim that for knowledge “to know its limit [i.e., to know itself] means to know that it is to sacrifice itself” (§ 807). In keeping with the unending regress of his final chapter, Hegel at first seems to circle back to the empirical material that phenomenology processes: “This sacrifice is the self-emptying within which spirit exhibits its coming-to-be spirit in the form of a free contingent event” (ibid). In its function as a chalice or container, the book holds and organizes the sacrificial manifestations of spirit. But at the end of the Phenomenology this containment finds its limit. Self-emptying takes the form of a shedding of tears. The spirits bubble over the rim of this chalice that is the Phenomenology and systematic discourse breaks into song. With his ventriloquism (of Schiller), Hegel spills his guts: he empties himself. He abandons control over the book. But to him—who argues that the “release of itself from the form of its own self is the highest freedom”—such surrender of control is a freedom more meaningful than the problematic notions of intention, agency, and free will (§ 806).

Of course, Hegel does not release his book without hoping that he might get a response—that in some way or another the liquid he spills might come back to nourish him. Ten years earlier he had mused about the speculative reversal of natural force. On vacation in the Alps in 1796, Hegel has the opportunity to observe that liquid—even a liquid that is not bound in an organism—does not submit to the law of linear progression. Even water that falls off the mountain (i.e., water that is propelled with considerable force in one direction) will change direction and come back up. He commits his pleasure at this speculative reversal to a travel log. While mountains and glaciers interest him little, Hegel describes in detail three different waterfalls (the falls of the Staubbach, the Reichenbach, and the Aar). He doesn’t tire of specifying again and again how the water dust, produced by the water foaming back, dances in the sun and wets his face, clothes, and body. One waterfall is accessible via a footbridge: “The Aar makes a few glorious waterfalls that plunge down with terrible force. One of these is spanned by an audacious bridge, on which one gets completely wet from the dust” (Hegel 1986a, 1:616, my translation). Another one is not so easy to reach, but as soon as Hegel and his friends spy it, their excitement gets them wet: “Suddenly the upper part of the Reichenbach fall now presented itself to us . . . and we approached it merrily through wet meadows. On the green hill opposite the fall, the water dust—that the wind caused by the fall chases toward us—soaked us completely” (Hegel 1986a, 1:615, my translation). Linger ing near the “brink of the abyss,” Hegel meticulously describes the play of the falling waves in their course through the air and over the rocks.
Here the surprising return of the river appears most poignantly. After the falling water is already out of sight, it miraculously comes out of the abyss back to life: “After the waves thus . . . plunge into the abyss where the gaze cannot follow them . . . one perceives smoke surging out of a crevasse. This smoke one recognizes as the foam that shoots up from the fall” (ibid.). About ten years later, Hegel conjures up a similar image with the final lines of the *Phenomenology*: “out of the chalice of this realm of spirits / foams forth to it its infinity.” He does so surely in part to reassure himself that the thoughts he just put forward and the words he just spilled will not be lost in dank darkness, but will freely come back to him with increased liveliness. But, at the same time—across the Alpine hikes—he is now in the position of someone who submits to the fluid as something strange, of someone who runs through the meadow to be wetted by a liquid that comes from someplace else. The act of release presents a conscious gesture of exposing his work to alteration and dispersal. Like the waters of the Reichenbach, the *Phenomenology* will return “not unified into one substance” but “ever dissolving and leaping apart” (Hegel 1986a, 1:614, my translation).

Readers and Friends

Quoting is an act of friendship—not only because Hegel allows Schiller to take the floor before he has finished his sentence to give his own book closure, but also because he borrows Schiller’s lines not without transforming them. The friendship of philosophy and poetry consists in the fact that neither of them speaks alone here—each gains voice through the other and each twists the other’s words. Hegel moves what he quotes and changes what he reads. By that I mean not only that the lines of Schiller’s poem receive a new meaning in the very different context of the *Phenomenology*, but that Hegel actually modifies almost every word in this “quotation.” Schiller’s original reads:

Friendless was the great master of the worlds,
Felt a want—so he created spirits,
Blessed mirrors of his blessedness!—
Found the highest Being not his like,
From the chalice of the entire realm of souls
Foams forth to him—infinity.

*(my translation)*

Friendlos war der grosse Weltenmeister,
Fühlte Mangel—darum schuf er Geister,
Sel’ge Spiegel seiner Seligkeit!—
Fand das höchste Wesen schon kein Gleiches,
Aus dem Kelch des ganzen Seelenreiches Schäumt ihm—die Unendlichkeit.

*(Schiller, “Die Freundschaft,” last stanza)*
In a careful analysis of the discrepancies between Schiller’s and Hegel’s versions, McCumber argues convincingly that Hegel’s alterations take the form of “a series of dereifications, in which all references to anything unconditioned or atemporal . . . are replaced in favor of various kinds of situated (local and passing) phenomena” (McCumber 2000, 49). 17 While Schiller’s lyrical “I” mirrors itself in “the great master of the worlds” when it sings its hymn to friendship, Hegel’s “absolute spirit” does not lay claim to mastery. 18 As I have discussed in chapter 1 (drawing upon Nancy’s work), Hegel doesn’t accept the idea of a creator who is above and beyond the world; similarly, he doesn’t propose that spirit be the author or independent and masterful creator of its story. Rather, “manifestation surges up out of nothing, into nothing. The manifested is something, and every thing is manifested. But there is no ‘manifester’ that would be yet another thing than manifestation itself” (Nancy 2002, 33). Similarly, just as there is no creator beyond manifestation, there can be no knowledge outside of manifestation. The knowledge that the last chapter of the Phenomenology provides is not absolute in the sense that it can stand on its own as a categorical, timeless truth. “Absolute knowledge” does not supersede all the errors that led us here, but it is part of the erroneous path. Or, as McCumber puts it, “the universal—the goal of the whole process—is now, like all other stages of the book, nothing more than its position in the whole” (McCumber 2000, 56). Absolute knowledge is self-reflective, but it doesn’t close the system, since the system—because of its strict immanence—must logically be an open or unfinished system. Spirit that knows itself knows that it cannot lay claim to totality, and so Hegel changes Schiller’s Aus dem Kelch des ganzen Seelenreiches / Schäumt ihm—die Unendlichkeit (From the chalice of the entire realm of souls / Foams forth to him—infinity) into aus dem Kelche dieses Geisterreiches / schäumt ihm seine Unendlichkeit (Out of the chalice of this realm of spirits / Foams forth to it its infinity)—thus effectively situating “absolute knowledge.”

In the circular structure of its self-referentiality, “spirit knowing itself as spirit” is infinite. Yet its infinity is local and temporal and therefore finite. Spirit can gain knowledge of itself only as this spirit. Across the specific narrative of this book, this spirit gains self-awareness—not as the only possible formation of spirit, but as this spirit that has gained this shape across this history. McCumber explains the surprisingly frequent use of demonstrative pronouns in the last chapter of the Phenomenology, arguing that “the universal . . . the truth which was to be written down . . . thus dies away in its separate being and becomes nothing more than the knowledge of this sequence of shapes of consciousness” (McCumber 2000, 56). 19 Universal truth dies away. The kind of truth that can be written down because it will be the same tomorrow as it was today, this no-
tion of truth as categorical and unchangeable, which was the operative notion of truth for the protagonist throughout the *Phenomenology*, finally dies here, at the very end of the book.

While we might want to rejoice over the death of the problematic and often repressive ideology of timeless truth, this is also, perhaps more than ever, the moment to ask whether the *Phenomenology* can mourn its dead. Is there finally time for grief here, at the end of the book, where we don’t have to hasten to the next step on the ladder of *Aufhebung*? Where, for once, renewal is not at hand? Can the protagonist of the *Phenomenology* shed tears over the loss of an idea, in which it had invested for its whole life? Not if the book (and our interest in the protagonist) comes to a definite end. This is why this last chapter keeps circling—so as to protract the reader’s being done with it. Acknowledging “the necessity of interval,” Hegel finally stages an interruption and allows for tears (Blanchot 1993, 75). He lets poetry and philosophy interrupt themselves and one another—but not just in order to (let) speak, but rather, in order also to render possible the worklessness or désoeuvrement of tears (pronounced both ways). Breaking into verse, the text sheds tears not only for the countless “skulls” that litter the path toward absolute knowing, but also for the idea of an unchanging and eternal truth, which has animated all the shapes of consciousness and formations of spirit.

The last word authored by Hegel alone is *nur* (only). It is a lonely word and a sad word—a signifier of restriction, disappointment, and finitude. Isolated by a semicolon on its left side and a dash on its right, *nur* stands between two discourses (Hegel’s and Schiller’s, philosophy and poetry) and works on both. *Nur* reverses the gesture of Schiller’s poem. Schiller’s “great master of the worlds” has a master’s appetite (*Begierde*) and needs the entirety of creation to provide him with a sense of infinity, which means that Schiller envisions this master’s self-knowledge in the form of a universal and eternal truth. Meanwhile, the subject of Hegel’s version of Schiller’s lines drinks its infinity “only” from a specific chalice and its truth is therefore circumscribed. But this “only” also applies to what precedes it and thus it affects our way of reading the Hegelian text, as well. Across the word *nur* Schiller’s poetry and Hegel’s philosophy syncopate each other. The verses bend the linear movement of philosophical prose while *nur* functions as the pivot. Looking back at the Hegelian text from the vantage point of the two verses at the end, we come to understand that the truth of absolute knowledge is not the kind of truth that can be simply written down. Rather, it is like the truth that we encountered at the very beginning of the book—in the chapter on “sense certainty”—the truth that was lost by writing it down. Absolute knowledge is “only” the kind of truth that one cannot hold onto by
preserving it unchanged. Or better—and this would be reading his text backward from the end—absolute knowledge acknowledges that its truth changes with every utterance. It knows itself to be the kind of truth that is altered by being written down and altered by being read.

This is the point where the *Phenomenology* sets the reader free, and that is why I began my discussion of emotional syntax here, at the end. In the end, the spirit of this *Phenomenology* surrenders to the uncontrol- lable effects of place and time and gives itself over to the future that will come to it from its readers. Readers from other places and other times now arrive to interrupt this way of “writing down (up) the truth.” Some might do so by moving and transforming the text—as is done among friends. Others might consider the *Phenomenology* to be dated and not worthy of being reworked, as Hegel did when he wrote in 1831: “peculiar early work, not to be reworked—related to the time of its composition” (quoted in McCumber 2000, 57). The latter attitude takes the book’s meaning to be like sense certainty’s truth: only a *Meinen* (mere opinion). At any rate, with its last lines, the *Phenomenology* releases the grip it had on its reader, from whom it had demanded extraordinary suppleness and complete devotion. Now, the *Phenomenology* abandons itself to its own *Aufhebung*—to being altered and turned from the vantage point of another perspective.

In my proximity to Hegel—a mediated and self-referential proximity that leaves enough room for the syncopating rhythms of mutual acknowledgment to resonate and that can serve as an echo chamber for the tears, the trembling, and the brokenness of Hegel’s text—with my supple yet firm hand on the small of his back, I have just led him into a slight turn in an unexpected direction.