Tropes of Transport

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Acknowledging

They acknowledge themselves as mutually acknowledging each other.
—Phenomenology, § 184

The title of this chapter translates Anerkennen—in Hegel’s trope of gegenseitiges Anerkennen—as “acknowledging” rather than using the standard translation, which is “recognition.” Let me explain this choice. “Recognition” has two meanings in English. The first meaning presupposes a prior knowledge of what or whom one now encounters again. To recognize is to identify again something or somebody one has seen before. This would be Erkennen or Wiedererkennen in German. Secondly, “to recognize somebody” means to appreciate or to formally confer a status of value onto someone. This second use comes indeed very close to the German Anerkennung, but the prefix re reinscribes the sense of retrospection and repetition, which is not there in the German. In order to recognize somebody as embodying a certain value one needs to have a prior knowledge of this value. We need to have norms in place, against the background of which we can confer or receive recognition. Even in the sense of appreciation or of conferring a status of value onto somebody, recognition thus requires either the prior existence of that which is recognized declaratively, or—if we follow the “constitutive” theory of recognition, which contends that the act of recognition creates the status of the recognized—recognition still requires a prior knowledge of what such a status might entail. In any case, whether performative or constative, both senses of re-cognition match a currently encountered object or situation with a preexisting notion or memory of it.

Gegenseitiges Anerkennen, in Hegel’s Phenomenology, is not based on previous knowledge. At the beginning of the chapter on self-consciousness—where the account of Anerkennen is located—the subject has no preexisting notion of who or what the other might be because it has never encountered another subject before. So far, it has been a consciousness
and, as such, has related only to a world of objects. It also has no positive knowledge of itself or of what might constitute self-consciousness, since its very young “self-certainty” has, until now, only consisted in negating the empirical world. It is, thus, a mistake to assume that the parties involved in the movement of acknowledging identify each other as something or someone in particular. And if they did, they would have fallen back to the status of consciousness and would treat each other as objects, rather than subjects.¹

Hegel shows how self-consciousness comes to life in the plural as the movement of mutual acknowledging (gegenseitiges Anerkennen). They “acknowledge themselves as mutually acknowledging each other [sie anerkennen sich als gegenseitig sich anerkennend]” (§ 184, trans. modified). Without a preexisting notion of what they might be and without coming to a substantive conclusion about each other, subjects emerge as the movement of self-reflection without any content other than this movement itself. “An” signifies a movement-toward without a certain aim, while “re” suggests a doubling back to a preexisting notion or object. This is why I choose the verb “acknowledge” to translate anerkennen. It renders the tentativeness as well as the togetherness of anerkennen in its prefix “ac” (as in “accord”) and thus relates the emergence of a “knowledging along with,” as it were.

Such mutual and shared acknowledgment without any substantive notion of subjectivity can obviously not arrive at a judgment, be it a judgment of knowledge (in the modes of Erkennen or Wiedererkennen), or a value judgment (in the mode of Anerkennung).² Hegel thus clearly conceives of acknowledging as a movement in progress (not a completed act). Current political and legal discourse on recognition treats recognition as a relatively stable good that can be conferred or received, withheld or demanded. When this discourse takes place in German, it operates with the word Anerkennung. The suffix -ung points to the stable and regulated character of such an evaluation as well as to its sense of completion. But Hegel does not use the term Anerkennung in the Phenomenology.³ He prefers to turn the verb anerkennen into a noun—das Anerkennen, preferably in the phrase: die Bewegung des Anerkennens (the movement of acknowledging)—because he is concerned here with an unfinished movement (§ 178, trans. modified). I render the continuous character of this movement with the gerund. The movement of mutual acknowledging is necessarily shared, but—because of its incompleteness—it does not produce recognition as a good to be exchanged in reciprocity.
Mutual Penetration and Mutual Embrace

In this chapter I will explore and critique the different valences of Anerken- nen. In order to do so, I will branch out into a discussion of two poems, Goethe’s “Wiederfinden,” written about ten years after the publication of the Phenomenology, and Hölderlin’s “Andenken,” written just a few years before. Wiederfinden relates to Anerkennen on the semantic level, whereas Andenken participates in a chain of signifiers—from Andacht to Andenken to Anerkennen—that challenges those readings of Hegel that see him making claims to completion and perfection. We will see that Goethe’s poem presents an image of perfection and completion while also establishing the world-spiritual three-step that is often attributed to Hegel (native identity, separation through reflection, reunion on a higher level). While in Goethe’s poem truth is static and love hierarchical, Hölderlin’s poem (like Hegel’s philosophy) pursues the question of how to foster the always transient movement of mutual solicitude and participation.

Before discussing in more detail what Hegel’s Anerkennen or acknowledging entails, I would like, in this first section, to more firmly establish the contrast between acknowledging and recognizing. We have said that all recognition (appreciation, conferral of status, or identification) involves an element of remembering. The German equivalent that highlights this aspect of recognition would be Wiedererkennen, which is also the literal translation of recognition: re (wieder) and cognition (Erkennen). Wiederfinden is another entry in the same semantic field. Translated literally as “re-finding,” wiederfinden means to recover something or someone and to find this thing or person identical even after a period of separation. Let us turn now to the poem from Goethe’s West-Eastern Divan:

Wiederfinden
Ist es möglich! Stern der Sterne,
Drück ich wieder dich ans Herz!
Ach, was ist die Nacht der Ferne
Für ein Abgrund, für ein Schmerz.
Ja, du bist es! meiner Freuden
 Süßer, lieber Widerpart;
Eingedenk vergangner Leiden,
Schaudr ich vor der Gegenwart.

Als die Welt im tiefsten Grunde
Lag an Gottes ewger Brust,
Ordnet’ er die erste Stunde

Goethe’s West-Eastern Divan:

Wiederfinden
Ist es möglich! Stern der Sterne,
Drück ich wieder dich ans Herz!
Ach, was ist die Nacht der Ferne
Für ein Abgrund, für ein Schmerz.
Ja, du bist es! meiner Freuden
 Süßer, lieber Widerpart;
Eingedenk vergangner Leiden,
Schaudr ich vor der Gegenwart.

Als die Welt im tiefsten Grunde
Lag an Gottes ewger Brust,
Ordnet’ er die erste Stunde
Mit erhabner Schöpfungslust,
Und er sprach das Wort: Es werde!
Da erklang ein schmerzlich Ach!
Als das All mit Machtgebärde
In die Wirklichkeiten brach.

Auf tat sich das Licht: so trennte
Scheu sich Finsternis von ihm,
Und sogleich die Elemente
Scheidend auseinanderfliehn.
Rasch, in wilden, wüsten Träumen
Jedes nach der Weite rang,
Starr, in ungemeßnen Räumen,
Ohne Sehnsucht, ohne Klang.

Stumm war alles, still und öde,
Einsam Gott zum ersten Mal!
Da erschuf er Morgenröte,
Die erbarmte sich der Qual;
Sie entwickelte dem Trüben
Ein erklingend Farbenspiel,
Und nun konnte wieder lieben,
Was erst auseinanderfiel.

Und mit eiligem Bestreben
Sucht sich, was sich angehört,
Und zu ungemeßnem Leben
Ist Gefühl und Blick gekehrt.
Sei's Ergreifen, sei es Raffen,
Wenn es nur sich faßt und hält!
Allah braucht nicht mehr zu schaffen,
Wir erschaffen seine Welt.

So, mit morgenroten Flügeln,
Riß es mich an deinen Mund,
Und die Nacht mit tausend Siegeln
Kräftigt sternenhell den Bund.
Beide sind wir auf der Erde
Musterhaft in Freud und Qual,
Und ein zweites Wort: Es werde!
Trennt uns nicht zum zweitenmal.
(West-Östlicher Divan, 1815)
The first stanza conjures a scene of recognition between two lovers: “O can it be!” (Ist es möglich!)—“Yes, it is you” (ja, du bist es!). Beyond this specific encounter, the exclamation that opens the poem—“O can it be!”—ponders the condition of the possibility of recognition in general. The poem’s answer lies in the projection of a previous familiarity. The title of the poem is “Wiederfinden.” By the second verse, the encounter of the lovers is established as a reprise: “I press you to my heart again!” (Drück ich wieder dich ans Herz!). And the fourth stanza postulates the breakup of a previous union as the condition for the possibility of love: “everything that fell apart / Now could fall in love again.” Even Widerpart, in the sixth line of the first stanza (which means “opponent” or “opposite party,” with wider spelled without an e) phonetically joins the three wie- der of the poem—especially since Widerpart and its rhyme and semantic echo Gegenwart (wider and gegen both mean “against”) together bracket and embrace the activity of recalling (eingedenk) in the seventh line. For Goethe, to love (lieben) means to love again (“wieder lieben,” fourth stanza); love must be grounded in a previous union just as knowledge must take the form of re-cognition.

The scene of recognition is repeatedly interrupted by the memory of separation—“chasm is the night” (Nacht der Ferne), “far apart, what pain!” (Abgrund, Schmerz), “bygone suffering I recall” (eingedenk vergangener Leiden)—but this disturbance also intensifies the lovers’ reunion. The “shudder” (schaudr ich vor der Gegenwart) that allows the lyrical “I” a trembling dis-identification with the “present time” (across the interfering past) could be a true form of emotionality or lighthearted transport in the sense I propose. Yet, it functions here to dramatize and consolidate unification, rather than to emotionalize or destabilize identity.

The most substantial distraction from the present encounter, the drift into the mythical narrative that spans three stanzas, securely establishes in its very first line the preexistence of primordial cosmic love: “When the world lay in the depths / Utmost on God’s eternal breast” (Als die Welt im tiefsten Grunde / Lag an Gottes ewger Brust, trans. modified). This preexisting love grounds and enables the scene of recognition between the two lovers of the first stanza. The lyrical “I” can recognize the other as its Widerpart, its “image, . . . rhyme,” as that which “belong[s]” to it (was [ihm] angehört), because they had lain in each other’s arms before. The same applies for the relation between God and world. God has a preconceived notion of his other. Before he creates the world through a constitutive act of recognition—conferring the status of independent being—the world already exists (whether physically laying on God’s breast or existing as an idea that is close to his heart). There are, thus, two layers of recognition here: the recognition of the other’s separate being (“Es
and then the recognition of the other as the lyrical “I”’s “you” (“Yes, it is you”). The first recognition performs the first act of analysis and thereby initiates reflection and explicit understanding. Yet this realm of analysis is here staunchly described as lacking love. The second recognition is possible only in love—that is to say, through two layers of remembering: remembering the painful separation and remembering the (even deeper) union. In sum, the poem tells a story of three stages that is rather typical for the early nineteenth century: initial union without freedom and reflection, freedom and reflection through separation, reunion and reconciliation of the two prior stages. The question that interests me here is whether the third stage does indeed afford both a loving reflection that acknowledges the other’s freedom, and a self-reflective love that encourages the self’s freedom. And what is its conception of freedom?

Hegel describes reflection as an impersonal activity: as the movement of the concept. The concept envelops all and indwells in everything. As “an infinite and creative form, which includes . . . the fullness of all content,” it is absolutely comprehensive (Hegel 1975a, § 160, Zusatz). And it also acts from within each individual being: “Things are what they are through the action of the concept, immanent in them, and revealing itself in them” (Hegel 1975a, § 163, Zusatz 2, trans. modified). The concept’s activity consists in mutually self-penetrating and mutually self-embracing. (I apologize for this awkward phrasing, but the distinction between self and other is really not stable when it comes to the movement of the concept.)

On the one hand, the concept generates and embraces totalities—as when Hegel suggests that the concept underwrites the integrity of the Phenomenology’s path (“By virtue of the movement of the concept, this path will encompass [umfassen] the complete worldliness of consciousness in its necessity,” § 34). But this embrace is only one aspect of the concept’s movement. The other aspect of its movement is that it empties itself and grants everything an independent existence: it “at the same time releases from itself the fullness of all content” (Hegel 1975a, § 160, Zusatz). The totality that is produced by the enveloping activity of the concept is contained and curtailed by the ambiguity of the concept, which always oscillates between comprising and dispersing or appropriation and externalization.

Hegel’s discussion of conscience offers a good example for the curtailment of totality. It also very nicely stages what we have discussed in the last chapter as the juggle of the concept. Like a line of poetry that resists a quick reading and calls to be reread with a different intonation, the concept moves from one aspect of its movement to another by rereading itself and placing the accent differently the second time:
Insofar as the moment of universality exists in this knowledge, it is part and parcel of the knowledge of conscientious action that it comprehensively grasp [umfassen] the actuality before it in an unrestricted manner and that it thus both precisely know the circumstances of the case and take everything into consideration. However, since it is acquainted with universality as a moment, this knowledge of these circumstances is thus the kind of knowledge which is fully aware that it does not comprehensively grasp [umfassen] them, that is, it is aware that it is not therein conscientious. (§ 642)

The stress on universality allows for a comprehensive embrace, but once a different emphasis has brought into view that such totality is in fact partial (that it is only a “moment”), the totality has de facto disintegrated. The other aspect of the concept’s movement thus consists in letting itself be penetrated and separated from itself. Only non-reflective self-naturalizing substantiality “resists all invasion” (nichts in sich eindringen lassen will; Hegel 1975a, § 159). The example of “sense certainty”—a form of consciousness that refuses self-reflection and preserves its truth “as a relation remaining in parity with itself [sich selbst gleichbleibende] . . . and into which . . . no disparity [Unterschied] at all can force its entry [eindringen]”—shows ex negativo that the concept moves against such selfsame integrity and instead invites division (§ 104). In short, the concept is (self-)totalizing and (self-)fragmenting, infinite and finite, at the same time.

At first take, Goethe’s poem seems to suggest a similar dynamic. The third stage of its narrative is characterized by a sense of life as both finite (because individual) and infinite or “measureless” (ungemeßnem). It combines the unifying feeling of love with the eye’s faculty for discrimination: “Sight and feeling hurtle them / Back to life that’s measureless” (Und zu ungemeßnem Leben / Ist Gefühl und Blick gekehrt). The word Ergreifen (grasp) in the next line echoes Hegel’s Begriff. Yet the rest of the line is a bit more disturbing. Raffen means something like “reap” and carries overtones of obsession and ruthlessness. With the lines, “Grasp or snatch, no matter how, / Take hold they must, if they’re to be” (Sei’s Ergreifen, sei es Raffen, / Wenn es nur sich faßt und hält!), Goethe seems to suggest that the means do not matter as long as the embrace is tight. This begs the question whether the third stage, which is supposed to reconcile love with freedom and understanding, doesn’t give freedom a raw deal, and whether it does so perhaps because it overcompensates for the void associated with the second phase.

The second phase is experienced as “stiffened” (starr), “void, and mute, and still” (stumm, . . . still und öde), and characterized by “solitude” (einsam), because of an absence of feeling, especially of love. The only
feeling mentioned in those three stanzas is “diffidence” (Scheu). We will see in a later section of this chapter that Hegel considers shyness (he uses the word Scham) to be a speculative transport that draws lovers together by pulling them apart. For Hölderlin, Scheue works similarly. But the love of Goethe’s poem is “without longing” (ohne Sehnsucht). It doesn’t draw together; it only repels in search of independence. The god of this poem repairs the situation with a more instrumental than sublime second act of creation: “then he made the rose of dawn” (Da erschuf er Morgenröte). According to Benjamin Hederich’s Gründliches mythologisches Lexikon—Goethe’s preferred source on Greco-Roman mythology—Aurora was punished by Venus with an insatiable desire for love, and her role in this poem’s mythical account of genesis is to provide the necessary desire (Sehnsucht) to counteract the drive for independence. Goethe thus divides into two different emotions the double pull that characterizes shyness in Hegel and Hölderlin. Of course, we could read “the rose of dawn” as a figure for Scheu: the blushing of the morning after, the rosy glow that veils the stark contrast between “light” (Licht) and “dark” (Finsternis). The rose of dawn invents a game of hues and harmonies to distract from the abyss (Abgrund) and to mediate between the elements that “fell apart” (auseinanderfielen) and “clove apart” (auseinanderfliehn). But as we will see, the fact that the mediation is an aesthetic one—the beautiful semblance of harmony—has an important impact on the experience of love and freedom created by this poem.

The reconciliation through the aesthetics of beauty that the morning-red affords is mirrored by Goethe’s poem as a whole. Despite its insistent evocations of pain, separation, and death, the poem ends firmly on the positive note of unassailable unification: “And a second word ‘Become!’ / Shall not tear us apart again” (Und ein zweites Wort: Es werde! / Trennt uns nicht zum zweitenmal). With its six stanzas of equal length and its consistent cross rhyme (ababcdcd), the poem impresses balance and harmony on the ear and the eye. It is a perfectly organized, well-rounded, and unified piece of beauty. And so are its characters: the two lovers are described as “exemplars” (musterhaft); they represent the most beautiful of humanity in both joy and pain (Freud und Qual). The beloved stands out among the many as “star of stars” (Stern der Sterne) and the lyrical “I” reflects itself in the image of God when it tells the mythical story of God’s separation from the world. At no point does the evocation of primordial cosmic events become seriously threatening because the two stanzas presenting individual human love (the first and the last stanza) literally bracket and contain the cosmic love and breakup that is dealt with in the middle stanzas. There is pain here, but no excess or ecstasy. Even the sublime delight of God (mit erhabner Schöpfungslust) is restrained
by human measure, which calibrates the unified into the unique (even though, as we have seen, unification requires repetition) by putting an end to repetition from here on: “nicht zum zweitenmal.” At last, the savage and desolate dreams (wilde, wüste Träume) of primordial lust and flight are reined in by the beautiful image that shows the cosmic powers (all the stars in the universe) reduced to witnesses to the marriage of these two exemplary individuals: “Starbright with a thousand seals / Night the bond will ratify” (Und die Nacht mit tausend Siegeln / Kräftigt sternenhell den Bund).

In such play of mirrors between universality and individuality, the sense for plurality—that is to say, the sense for real differences—gets lost. Everything echoes the exemplary couple. What is more, there is no indication of mutual love within the couple. Just as the play of mirrors between the human and the divine or between individuality and universality establishes a clear hierarchy in favor of the human individual, there is a hierarchy within the couple so strong that we get no sense for the freedom of the beloved. The only time she (the poem does suggest the feminine gender) has an independent existence, this existence is experienced as “void, and mute, and still.”

The unification that is realized under the sign of taking hold (sich faßt und hält) establishes the singular. If this love allows for freedom, it is the freedom of one, and freedom means self-sufficiency. The tight grip on the other of fassen and halten affords the one his Fassung (composure) and Haltung (poise). It realizes an aesthetics of balance and composure that disavows vulnerability, struggle, emotionality, and difference within the couple. Mutuality has no value here; instead, the lyrical “I” loves itself. Satisfied with itself, it has overcome division. Just as the lyrical “I” has no need for an independent lover, this poem does not need the reader. It is perfect in itself. The poem is the image of self-sufficiency. Goethe might offer a specific account of love with “Wiederfinden,” but he is not looking for love. He has found it already. Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, on the other hand, needs readers. Only through the reader, in the identificatory journey of reading along the path of spirit, does spirit actually gain an awareness of itself.

Luck of Love

Hegel’s style demands a reading of love. It does so in both senses of the phrase. It demands a practice of reading that engages the reader in a—for a philosophical work perhaps unusually sensual—love relationship
with the text. And it demands a reading of the trope of love—or, to be more precise, the trope of “mutual acknowledging”—that we find in the text and that also structures the text.\textsuperscript{6}

The fact that The Phenomenology of Spirit demands love means that it isn’t sure of it. In the previous section we discussed a poem where love (between two individuals, between world and God) is presupposed as a given. There, I have also begun to explain that Hegel understands the “concept” as a mutual physical-cum-intellectual penetration and embrace of subject and object, or of self and other, or of different “moments” of the concept, like individuality and universality. Nevertheless, Hegel never presents such interpenetration as a given. Even when he describes interpenetration—as he does in the section on mutual acknowledging—his account is so obviously ideal that it cannot quite produce the impression of present existence. The text asks for love: it asks the reader to acknowledge, that is to say, to join and share the movement of mutual acknowledging, in order to actualize—imperfectly—what the author can only offer as an ideal. The text’s call for love is not a desire for recognition.

The Phenomenology tries to seduce the reader to join its conceptual movements. It doesn’t allow her to remain at a distance, safely withdrawn. It doesn’t offer itself to a quick opening of the optical lens. It wants the reader to expose herself to the phenomenological development and to engage with it—to enter the text and to let herself be enveloped by it, but also to take it in and be unsettled and altered by it. It demands a mutual penetration and a mutual embrace of reader and text.

Rather than stringing together thoughts (Gedanken), the Phenomenology proceeds by way of concepts (Begriffe). Hegel wrote in his notebook while working on the Phenomenology: “Thoughts are not so much the issue anymore. We have enough of them, good and bad, beautiful and bold. Rather, concepts are the issue” (Hegel 2002, 251, trans. modified). The difference that he establishes between “thoughts” and “concepts” is one between stasis and movement: he suggests—perhaps counterintuitively, but coherently throughout his work—that “thoughts” denote the end of the activity of thinking, whereas concepts move and motivate one to think. Concepts dynamically realize thought. “Thoughts,” on the other hand, are fixed and compact; they can be easily appropriated (“we have enough of them”). Yet, even though they come in all varieties to suit every taste—“good and bad, beautiful and bold”—to possess thoughts doesn’t yield much satisfaction for Hegel. Uninterested in ownership, he desires the interaction with a free subject. With the Phenomenology, Hegel is looking for love.

Just as they are easily appropriated, “thoughts” are easily exchanged
from one person to another. They are universal currency, accepted by everyone because their value is stamped on their face: “thoughts” are “through themselves immediately made valid,” Hegel’s aphorism continues (ibid.). Similar to Descartes’ “intuitions,” Hegel’s “thoughts” immediately present themselves as common sense. But to have them does not mean to penetrate or to embrace them.

“Concepts,” on the other hand, are neither good, nor beautiful, nor bold; they are embarrassing: “But in that thoughts are through themselves immediately made valid, whereas concepts, on the contrary, must be made comprehensible, the form of writing thereby undergoes a change and acquires a form of appearance demanding a perhaps painful and embarrassing [peinlich] effort” (Hegel 2002, 251, trans. modified). Concepts do not immediately offer a clear picture of their value. They thus produce embarrassment. Concepts exhibit themselves without presenting a face. They don’t represent but come naked (skinless, even) and demand of the readers to similarly denude themselves. This is not a pretty picture. Unlike “representational thinking” (Vorstellungsdenken), the concept doesn’t provide images that are easily absorbed. Instead, the movement of concepts involves groping, touching, trying and tasting. It seduces the reader to the humiliating labor of Selbstdenken, a thinking that engages the embodied, desiring, experiencing subject while exposing it to change: “The last royal road in studying is thinking for oneself [Selbstdenken]” (Hegel 2002, 251).

The text of the Phenomenology demands a more than cursory penetration from the reader. Thoroughly, not just with one organ from which the mind has withdrawn, but completely naked, with her bare hands, lips, and nose, the reader is asked to open skin after skin until her body reaches fluidity and drinks the slime of the written. Some reject this gift: “They stick their noses straight into the texts—and immediately withdraw them, choking and gasping for air” (McCumber 1986, 641). More than embarrassing, concepts can be repulsive, even painful. Barely having received the gift, some spit out the slimy fluid that isn’t easily swallowed. It sticks between the roof of the mouth and the root of the tongue and forms threads in the throat. Like Schelling, they hastily and with clattering chimes retire into their shell, and spit the stuff at Hegel’s feet. They refuse to digest what seems indigestible.

Hegel must have been very offended by the fact that Schelling didn’t read past the preface of the Phenomenology. He could become furious when people—let alone one of his best friends—looked for quick answers in easily digestible bites instead of responding to the embarrassing exposure of the concept by exposing themselves to its movement in return. With an ironic attack he anticipates the scene of injury in the
preface to the Phenomenology, expressing his indignation at readers who barely touch a book and yet believe they got its main ideas:

No matter how much a man asks for a royal road to science, no more convenient and comfortable way can be suggested to him than to put his trust in healthy common sense; and then for what else remains, to advance simply with the times and with philosophy and to read reviews of philosophical works, perhaps even go so far as to read the prefaces and the first paragraphs of the works themselves. (§ 70)

One of Hegel's strategies to foil readerly shortcuts is to produce an indigestible preface, one that sticks in the reader's throat and prolongs the contact. For more than fifty pages, Hegel refuses to write a preface. Instead, he argues against summarizing his arguments and forces the reader to turn around in circles without understanding a thing. Slowly, his preface undresses its readers and strips them of everything they know and everything they rightfully expect. It is the foreplay to the lovemaking of concepts.

Promise of Vulnerability

The lovemaking of the concept is a grasping that both penetrates and embraces. It involves mutual exposure and mutual solicitude. Hegel describes acknowledging as a “movement of self-consciousness in its relation to another self-consciousness,” that is, as an act of mediation that engenders the self as double or, rather, as plural (§ 182). Common parlance often describes the self-mediating movement of the concept as “self-reflection.” Unfortunately, “reflection” comes with the ballast of a visual notion of thought. Selbstvermittlung, or self-mediation—the term Hegel actually uses—is indeed not visual. In addition, “mediation” introduces a third element into the dyad—a medium that has its own materiality and subjectivity, as it were, and that thus opens and exposes the closed relation of self-consciousness onto a multiplicity. If we use the term “self-reflection,” we need to keep in mind the physical and even sometimes existential valences of penetration and embrace, exposure and care. Hegelian “reflection” loses its critical potential if it is reduced to a Wiederkennen of myself in the other or to a simple mirroring. As we have established in the opening section of this chapter, Anerkennen is not “recognition” in the sense of Wiederkennen; it doesn’t take place between two already established subjects but generates subjectivity as
shared and exposed. This exposure takes concrete material, physical, sometimes even deadly forms.

The movement of self-reflection or self-mediation-with-another (ac-knowledging) introduces an important ambiguity (Doppelsinnigkeit) into the structure of the subject/s: “This twofold sense . . . lies in the essence of self-consciousness, which is to be infinite or immediately the opposite of the determinateness in which it is posited” (§ 178, trans. modified). This ambiguity prevents the subject/s from ever fully coinciding with themselves; it is the root of the constitutive emotionality of subjectivity. Hegel characterizes self-differentiality negatively as “negativity” (as self-conscious, I relentlessly question myself) and positively as “infinity” (self-negation moves me beyond any particular identity).

The ambiguity of self-consciousness—the fact that it opposes or negates itself as much as it affirms or identifies itself—creates a plural subject. Subject/s emerge in the plural. The subject/s’ doubleness is duplicious in the sense that they freely, and often imperceptibly to themselves and others, shift between inner dialogue and outward conversation—that they address themselves indirectly by way of addressing one another and are spoken by another when they mean to speak themselves. All this is to say that, theoretically, ac-knowledging cannot be not mutual: “They acknowledge themselves as mutually acknowledging each other” (§ 184, trans. modified).

Yet the experience is usually quite different. Experience tells us that subjects do not necessarily engage in a reciprocal exchange of recognition. The fact that I gain recognition from you in no way forces me to give it back. On the contrary, if we expect reciprocity, we will most certainly be frustrated. The Phenomenology relentlessly paints scenes of failing reciprocity: beginning with the first figure of self-consciousness, whose fall from the ideal of mutual acknowledging ends the struggle for life and death in servitude, and ending with the last figure of spirit, who is provoked to the “highest rebellion” (höchste Empörung) by the fact that its admission of wrongdoing remains unilateral (§ 667). If reciprocity happened—and it is uncertain that it ever does—it would be by accident. It cannot be brought about by the force of necessity that we invest in the dialectical process.

Granted, subject/s come to life through mutual acknowledging. That is to say, there is no subject that isn’t being acknowledged in some way or another—otherwise, it wouldn’t be a subject. “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself because and by way of its existing in and for itself for an other; i.e., it exists only as an acknowledged being [als ein Anerkanntes]” (§ 178, trans. modified). Yet the fact that subject/s come to life
as inherently dialogical (and duplicitous in this dialogue) also means that they lose their independence or self-sufficiency (Selbstständigkeit) at the very moment that they gain it. It means, to put it in a somewhat different register, that the autonomous subject can legislate itself only when it posits itself as being bound by external forces. Subjects are evidently more dejected by the loss of something they never had (self-sufficiency) than they are elated by the gain of something they cannot do without (a mutual relation). Due to this strong frustration, self-sufficiency becomes the dominant trope in the subject’s unending self-mediation; it will be pursued with an obsessive \textit{Begierde} and ruthless hunger that is reminiscent of Goethe’s \textit{Raffen} (“Grasp or snatch, no matter how”) in “Wiederfinden.”

The desire for independence and self-sufficiency (the lost promise of subject formation) translates into a negative relation to the entire realm of alterity—into a need to treat all other subjects as objects and all objects as something to be either destroyed or absorbed into the self. On the phenomenological path, the movement of acknowledging develops out of the movement of \textit{Begierde}. Even though the subject enjoys the power to destroy, it meets the limits of its ability to negate the other in the infinity of its object. No destruction is definitive. For every head it severs, two new ones grow from the wound. Its desire never reaches full and lasting satisfaction, but feeds on its own accomplishments. The desiring consciousness is therefore forced to acknowledge the object of its desire as another subject that is as self-sufficient and ecstatic as itself—one that is infinite in its own right and freely exercises its own negativity, but is also exposed and vulnerable in its relation to alterity. Out of unsatisfied appetite, another self-consciousness is born as inassimilably different from yet fundamentally bound to the first. Hegel’s treatment of Faust—Goethe’s glorious drama of \textit{Begierde}, which Hegel alludes to in the section on “Pleasure and Necessity” of the chapter on “Reason”—shows the same experience in its temporal aspect. According to Hegel, Faust realizes that he cannot undo what he has done (abandon Gretchen): he realizes that his current self cannot absorb his former self. Because his prior self retains an inassimilable independence, Faust must ac-knowledge his prior actions. \textit{Begierde} aims at assimilating all that is external to the form of present consciousness (fantasized as pure self-transparency). Mutual acknowledging, in contrast, affects consciousness with opacity. It opens self-consciousness’s pure being-for-self onto an inassimilable beyond, to the touch of an irreducible other. In this encounter with another self-consciousness, “consciousness . . . does indeed get outside of itself \textit{[außer sich]}” (§ 184). For a moment only, Hegel’s text gives us a taste of mu-
tual acknowledging: it is a precarious movement shared with plural subjects, where each is “out of itself” yet sustained by another, without any one being in control of itself or of the whole movement—unable, for that matter, to guarantee its continuation. The default response of consciousness will be to deny the loss of self-sufficiency and to guard against the precariousness that comes with mutuality. What the trope of mutual acknowledging demands of us, therefore, ethically and politically, is to learn to experience exposure and vulnerability.

Charles Taylor has initiated an important discussion about the “need for recognition.” But why do we experience a need for recognition when, as we have seen, acknowledging cannot not be mutual? In Taylor’s account, subjects are not only driven by the desire for self-sufficiency, but they also want to be recognized as self-sufficient—as who they really are, as self-made men, or as artists whose most accomplished creations are themselves. All of these options define acknowledging as a re-cognition of preexisting independent identities. But precisely this kind of recognition interrupts mutuality. Taylor contends that our attempts to win positive (celebratory) and substantive recognition (as something) can fail. Hegel would say that they must fail, because we do not get to make our identities autonomously. But if substantive recognition is forced into existence—and this can be done through the power of individuals or the power of norms—such recognition fails the mutuality of acknowledging. Subjects emerge together, in a messy entanglement with others from whom they are not even clearly distinguishable. Who we are can only be provisionally determined in action, that is to say, in the interaction with (our) others. Hegel shatters all dreams of complete self-sufficiency. But he also shows that the desire for self-sufficiency remains, and that this desire in turn ruins any utopia of a world without masters or servants.

With the promise of self-sufficiency lost, and the relation within/between subject/s firmly established as a relation of dependency between a master and a servant, Begierde thus makes a comeback. Perhaps luckily so—after all, what would a love relation be without appetite! Yet, given the destructive legacy of Begierde in Hegel’s Phenomenology, Begierde affects recognition in the form of a desire to kill the other. At the same time, the master’s need for recognition inevitably turns against him. The master’s controlling attitude toward recognition would be unnecessary if he didn’t in fact have a need for recognition. Thus experiencing his own insufficiency—his need—he desires an other who can sovereignly grant recognition and who can provide him with the self-knowledge he doesn’t possess on his own. Yet, the other of the master is not a self-sufficient subject. Rather, the other of the master embodies the fundamental condition of self-consciousness to be bound to an unassimilable other: he
is the servant. The master thus finds his own recognition dependent on another who is vulnerable and not in control. The servant’s vulnerability spurs the master’s desire to kill him. The master needs to get this image of dependency out of his sight. He needs to put an end to the precarious movement of acknowledging. The threat of death, on the other hand, binds the servant only more securely to the master, and they both find themselves deeper and deeper mired in the catch-22 of their mutual dependency.

And yet there is an ethical side to the death wish. It is part of the subject/s’ freedom. Mutual acknowledging depends on the desire to kill the other and the desire to kill the self. To be sure, literally killing the other or the self is a desperate—albeit deplorably frequent—attempt to put an end to mutual acknowledging. But exclusive and complete affirmation is not the solution to this problem. Of course, I have the desire to define myself and to establish a stable and recognizable \( \text{wiedererkennbar} \) identity, but every such recognition also deals a blow. The very act that affirms my identity and self-sufficiency negates my status as a self-mediating, infinite, and free subject. It denies “the essence of self-consciousness, which is to be . . . immediately the opposite of the determinateness in which it is posited,” that is, it denies my condition of being-outside-myself-in-another (§ 178). To receive recognition, in the sense of respect for what or who one is, is never entirely rewarding because it truncates the constitutive ambiguity and duplicity \( \text{(Doppelsinnigkeit)} \) of subjectivity. I might be recognized in my subject position, but not in my \( \text{ekstasis} \) in relation to this position. Respect might give me security, but it probably fails to give me my vulnerability. I am free only if I can abandon my present self in favor of an uncertain future, an uncontrollable other, or an unwanted past: “It is solely by staking one’s life that freedom is realized and proven \( \text{(bewährt)} \)” (§ 187, trans. modified). Nevertheless, it is also important to remember that such staking of one’s life does not require the literality and earnestness of dramatic life changes, but can happen in the lighthearted and unprestigious manner of everyday life.\(^{20}\)

As self-reflective beings born into freedom and mutuality, we find ourselves torn between a desire for affirmation and a desire for negation. It is our responsibility to respond to both. Hegel dramatizes the strict ambiguity of freedom in the “life and death struggle [\text{Kampf auf Leben und Tod}]” (§ 187). This is not a struggle for survival or supremacy, but a struggle for the “and” between life and death. The struggle for life and death figures the forbiddingly difficult and at the same time pleasurably lighthearted effort to realize the mutuality of self-consciousness in all its duplicity.
Struggle for Mutuality

Mutuality must be wrested from the vigorous resistance of subjects against the destabilizing effects of acknowledging. In order to explore this struggle for mutuality—or, more precisely, the struggle to acknowledge the always transient mutuality of acknowledging—it is now time to turn to Hölderlin’s poem “Andenken.” I will read the blowing of the wind presented by “Andenken” as a conversation between lovers—indeed as the intersection of several conversations: between Friedrich Hölderlin and Susette Gontard, between the poet and the reader, between Hölderlin and Hegel, and even between the familiar and the foreign.

For Hegel, speculative thought is a form of self-mediation. It takes place in the mode of ac-knowledging, that is to say, as a coming-to-know-along-with-another the subject as in many ways doubled, ambiguous, and duplicitous. Speculative thought can be embarrassing, painful, and thoroughly troubling; it renders the subject emotional because consciousness has to respond to and negotiate its doubling, as well as the resulting ambiguity and duplicity. In the last chapter, we have discussed how speculative thinking takes the physical shape of a dance—of somebody dancing to her own heartbeat, affecting her pulse with her dance moves and adjusting her movements in turn to the new beat; or of different bodies bringing different rhythms to bear on one another with not one of these dancers leading. In the current context of acknowledging, speculative thought manifests physically as mutual self-penetration and mutual self-embrace. Here as well, whom one is coming to penetrate and embrace changes in the process. Self-consciousness has no stable identity. It transforms when it is grasped (through being grasped, indeed) and is transported when it penetrates. Hölderlin casts this shared movement as a conversation. But the conversation is no less physical—it takes place through trees, rivers, and winds. The medium of the self-mediation among lovers has its own materiality and subjectivity and thus opens the closed relation of self-consciousness onto a multiplicity of self-relating bodies. Any truth about the subject is negated in its affirmation; the conversation between the lovers thus keeps changing the subject and consciousness indeed has to juggle a multiplicity of selves. Such plasticity, multivalency, and uncertainty are hard to take. It is always easier to stabilize the scene of mutual acknowledging by establishing recognition. But such recognition, we will see, can also mean death.

Working with the enjambements Doch gut / Ist ein Gespräch (But good / Is converse) and Mancher / Trägt Scheue (Some / Bear shyness [my translation]) as the main coordinates of my reading, I will highlight the poem’s efforts to facilitate a love that is mutual while interrupting and opening the dyad of the couple.
Andenken

Der Nordost wehet,
Der liebste unter den Winden
Mir, weil er feurigen Geist
Und gute Fahrt verheißet den Schiffern.
Geh aber nun und grüße
Die schöne Garonne,
Und die Gärten von Bourdeaux
Dort, wo am scharfen Ufer
Hingehet der Steg und in den Strom
Tief fällt der Bach, darüber aber
Hinschautet ein edel Paar
von Eichen und Silberpappeln;

Noch denket das mir wohl und wie
Die breiten Gipfel neiget
Der Ulmwald, über die Mühl’,
Im Hofe aber wächst ein Feigenbaum.
An Feiertagen gehn
Die braunen Frauen daselbst
Auf seidnen Boden,
Zur Märzenzeit,
Wenn gleich ist Nacht und Tag,
Und über langsamten Stegen,
Von goldenen Träumen schwer,
Einwiegende Lüfte ziehen.

Es reiche aber,
Des dunkeln Lichtes voll,
Mir einer den duftenden Becher,
Damit ich ruhen möge; denn süß
Wär’ unter Schatten der Schlummer.
Nicht ist es gut,
Seelos von sterblichen
Gedanken zu seyn. Doch gut
Ist ein Gespräch und zu sagen
Des Herzens Meinung, zu hören viel
Von Tagen der Lieb’,
Und Thaten, welche geschehen.

Wo aber sind die Freunde? Bellarmin
Mit dem Gefährten? Mancher
Trägt Scheue, an die Quelle zu gehn;
Es beginnet nämlich der Reichtum
Im Meere. Sie,
Wie Mahler, bringen zusammen
Das Schöne der Erd’ und verschmähn
Den geflügelten Krieg nicht, und
Zu wohnen einsam, jahrlang, unter
Dem entlaubten Mast, wo nicht die Nacht durchglänzen
Die Feiertage der Stadt,
Und Saitenspiel und eingeborener Tanz nicht.

Nun aber sind zu Indiern
Die Männer gegangen,
Dort an der luftigen Spiz’
An Traubenbergen, wo herab
Die Dordogne kommt,
Und zusammen mit der prächt’gen
Garonne meerbreit
Ausgehet der Strom. Es nehmet aber
Und giebt Gedächtniß die See
Und die Lieb’ auch heftet fleißig die Augen,
Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter.
(Friedrich Hölderlin, 1803–05)

“Andenken” is a wind poem. It initiates its own movement when it says in the first line that “the northeasterly blows” (Der Nordost wehet). Why the northeasterly? Why not any other wind? And precisely what direction does this northeasterly poem take? Most interpreters, among them most influentially Heidegger, take for granted that the act of “thinking-toward” (Andenken) follows the blowing of the wind from northeast to southwest. Yet the first signifier of the opening verse orients us toward northeast. Since the geographic coordinates included in the descriptor of a particular wind do not indicate into which direction the wind blows but rather from which direction it is blowing, the line “the northeasterly blows” locates the lyrical I (as well as the writer and the reader) in the southwest facing northeast and feeling the wind (of the poem) blow in her face. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, Hegel would consider it an act of friendship to move against this wind poem and to twist and turn its lines. But a slight fear of headwind blows most readers away from the source of this wind and turns them toward southwest. “Many a man / Is shy of going to the source” (Mancher / Trägt Scheue, an die Quelle zu gehn). Hölderlin tries to be among the few, a mancher, who carries the burden of moving against the wind instead of being carried away by it.
Hölderlin travels northeast from Bordeaux back to Frankfurt; he does so in real life, but also with the lines of this poem. In May 1802, Hölderlin sets out on his walk from Bordeaux, where he had assumed a position as tutor, to Frankfurt, the home of Susette Gontard. Drawn toward the impossible reunion with the forbidden love, this journey is marked by several detours and delays (in Paris, Stuttgart, Nürtingen, and again Stuttgart) until Hölderlin is struck by the news of Gontard’s death. Written between one and three years after this agonizing (non)-experience, “Andenken” forms an attempt to reenact the journey in a way that keeps Gontard alive for him.

Admittedly, “Go now, go and greet / The beautiful Garonne” (Geh aber nun und grüße / Die schöne Garonne) seems at first to unequivocally address a greeting to the river Garonne, which flows through Bordeaux. This address would affirm the idea that the poem’s Andenken turns from Germany to Bordeaux. But Baumann convincingly argues that the northeasterly is “of winds the dearest” (der liebste unter den Winden) because it tells “about the days of love” (von Tagen der Lieb’) and reminds Hölderlin of Gontard.24 During his stay in Bordeaux, Hölderlin receives the northeasterly with special ardor. As this wind is a rare phenomenon in the region of Bordeaux, Hölderlin treasures it because, coming from the direction in which Gontard lives, it makes him hot with its promise of fiery spirit, feurigen Geist . . . verheißet.25 If one understands the wind as a medium of communication between the lovers, the schöne Garonne, with its initials S.G., is to be read as an encoded evocation of Susette Gontard. With the line “Go now, go and greet / The beautiful Garonne,” Hölderlin invites the northeasterly to move northeast, from Bordeaux to Frankfurt, to greet S.G., Susette Gontard.26 He asks the wind to blow backward.

Geh aber nun then means something like: “You are the dearest among the winds to me because you give me fever, but now go back and greet S.G.; make her feel what I feel. . .” And, since Susette Gontard died of a pulmonary infection and, thus, literally had difficulties breathing, geh aber nun also suggests something like: “I love you because through you I get wind of the fever she suffers from, but now go and help her to get back her wind. . .” The movement of Andenken thus exceeds the word’s sense of remembrance or recollection. It combines the retrospective thought process with the forward-oriented and open-ended activity of thinking-of or of thinking-toward, that is, denken an.

The accumulation of f and s sounds in “liebste,” “feurigen,” “Geist,” “Fahrt,” “verheißet,” “Schiffern,” “grüße,” and “schöne” not only imitates the wind’s blowing, but also transmits the initials of the two lovers, Friedrich and Susette. With the wind, the lovers whisper each other’s names across time and space. Nevertheless, it is an overstatement when
Baumann writes that “the way Hölderlin takes it, the north-easterly is already conversation and exchange of ideas, that is to say, reciprocation” (Baumann 1997, 19). The northeasterly might be a medium for communication and a promise of mutuality between the lovers, but the realization of this “converse” (Gespräch) is far from being a given. It requires a constant battle against death.

As we have seen in our discussion of mutual acknowledging, Gespräch in its emphatic sense, as the double movement of mutual reflection between two free subjects, follows a logic that is hard to grasp and almost impossible to enable. The movement is constantly jeopardized by its arrest, and life is incessantly threatened by death. A Weh accompanies the wehen of “Andenken.” Gespräch, as the realization of mutuality in the back-and-forth movement of thinking-of and thinking-toward, proves to be difficult and dangerous. It requires to be struggled for without respite. Even though it might be sweet to drowse amid shadows, it is not good as we can see in the fourth stanza: süß / Wär’ unter Schatten der Schlummer / Nicht ist es gut. One might tire of the constant labor and yearn for a rest, but gut / Ist ein Gespräch. With the contrast that the poem establishes in the middle stanza between the sweetness of Schlummer and the value of Gespräch, it acknowledges the difficulty of keeping the conversation mutual. The work of love includes the almost impossible task of sending the wind in the other direction while the danger of losing the beloved lurks at the turn of every line.27

One-sidedness persistently threatens the conversation with arrest. Naturally, everything flows in one direction: the wind blows, the spirit is fiery, and the river Dordogne flows downward (wo herab/ die Dordogne kommt). Before long the movement is extinguished: ausgehet der Strom. Quickly, the poem gets effaced in its all too transparent message. When nothing is read between the lines, this nothing grinds the verses to sharp edges, scharfe Ufer, that speed up the reading and rush the water into the abyss where deep falls the brook, tief fällt der Bach.

But the words themselves fight against their death. Darüber hinschauet (look out above) stretches out its ambiguities allowing the “noble pair” (edel Paar) to overlook and look beyond the abyss, toward which the water races. Der Steg (footbridge) smooths out the sharp edge when it nonchalantly “trails along” the bank (trans. Chadwick, am scharfen Ufer / Hingehet), distracting from the other, more gloomy meaning of hingehet, namely “to pass away.”

The reader also contributes to the task of a loving conversation. She joins the lovers, thereby opening their potentially destructive tête-à-tête. The interpretation of the line geh aber nun is therefore not merely a question of right or wrong. For us to invest the aber with negating power
is to rescue the poem’s potential for love, its ability to move back and forth between the lovers. For us to understand this aber as initiating a turn of address between S.G. and F.H. means also to reverse the blowing of this wind poem that comes to us from the author, and to participate actively in the conversation that moves back and forth between author and reader. It amounts to giving the poem some of what it means to offer—responding with love and friendship to the love that it gives by interrupting its flow and twisting its perspective.

Our difficulties with receiving the poem as a love letter and Friedrich’s difficulties with receiving Susette’s greetings are, in both cases, tied up with a frustration about the evasive character of the beloved. She is unreliable. I do not know what I have in her. I do not even know where she is, from where she sends her love, and if she will keep sending it. True, there is a promise. “The north-easterly promises me fiery spirit” (Der Nordost verheißet feurigen Geist Mir). Yet, how long can I wait for the promise to come true? Even if the promise is “now” (nun) fulfilled, I remain in the position of awaiting its (continued) realization since I cannot bear the thought of her love ever ending. Already, empty words are creeping up on me, habitual turns, without an individual address. But who am I to force her to speak to me? Doesn’t the poem have the right to refuse to yield meaning if it needs to avoid the grasp of a reader who only pretends to be a lover?

To accept the aber’s refusal to signify might be intended as an act of chivalry but it hardly preserves anybody’s freedom. Instead, it infects the poem with the reader’s own helplessness. Abandoned by the reader amidst the beauty of the Garonne, Friedrich feels a sharp pain am scharfen Ufer and, struggling not to slide into the abyss of solitude, he tries to make sure that Susette will remember to greet him: geh aber nun und Grüße. This might be an understandable desire, but the fact that he takes charge of the continuation of the loving discourse means that Friedrich stops to hear her voice in the wind. Susette disappears as an agent in the conversation. The imperative forms geh and Grüße neglect to acknowledge that the wind already blows, and fail to recognize that S.G. in fact sends her love. The redundant imperative spreads its impotence to overshadow the promise of the wind. It catches up with the wind by apostrophizing and enclosing it in a “now” (nun) that interrupts the wind’s movement, breaks the promise of verheißet, and acts as a brake on its futural drift. The imperative transforms the love for the wind into a suffocating clasp. It thrusts its will into the open flesh of the future and forecloses the adventing movement of futurity. In its final turn, this aber nun turns the loving conversation off.

Such a reading melancholically reenacts a loss of which the reader is barely aware: the immense and always frustrated desire to be smitten
and completely overcome by the other’s address. It projects onto the poem the reader’s own refusal to receive the poem in its precariousness and unreliability. The chivalrous attempt at indifference is not really motivated by the wish to preserve the beloved intact in her difference, but by the desire to protect the self from the beloved’s caprice. Within the parameters of this reading, loving and respecting the integrity of the other turns into a holding on to the other and anticipating her moves. The beloved thus loses the very qualities for which one loves her: her liveliness, her unforeseeability, or, in Hegelian terms, her negativity. We are left with no future, nothing that comes to us from the other. Nothing can move us. The result is stagnation, an empty repetition of nothing, an accumulation of a habitual aber that does not turn or move anything, but pitches the poem in a melancholy tone. The insistence of a meaningless aber as a marker of indifference and distrust isolates the reader and encloses the poem in a circle of non-understanding and loneliness from which, at best, one cry emerges: “But where are the friends?” (Wo aber sind die Freunde?).

In a truly mutual relation, as Hegel conceives it, acknowledging (reading the other, coming to know the other) is intertwined with killing the other—but killing the other is not an autonomous act, its agency is shared with the other, since “the object of self-consciousness is equally self-sufficient in this negativity of itself” (§ 176). “For that reason, [self-consciousness] can do nothing on its own about that object if that object does not do to itself what the first self-consciousness does to it” (§ 182, trans. modified). Killing the other is killing self-consciousness and acknowledging oneself while doing it. Hegel is far from imagining mutual love as a peaceful and stable relationship: the two subjects move in a vertiginous struggle, ceaselessly negating each other and themselves. These negations can be blissful if they manage to realize a form of death that is moving without ending the encounter in definite destruction.

Hölderlin’s poem models an ethics of reading that acknowledges this affirmative kind of negativity. “The north-easterly blows”; the poem speaks to us. But while Hölderlin writes this poem Susette is already dead, and when we read the poem the author is already dead. The wind may have come from the northeast, but by the time it hits Friedrich, Susette is somewhere else. Once we read the poem, we no longer know in what sense it was written. Even though Susette’s death is a historical fact, “An-denken” demonstrates that Hölderlin did not experience her death as a fact, but struggled to stay in communication with Diotima Susette Gontard. Her death figures as a trope for the experience of the negativity of the other. Because her freedom consists in being the subject of and subject to her own self-differentiality, the lover is always already somewhere else as soon as she presents herself for identification. In the very
act of sending a loving message, the sender herself changes. The source is gone, and it does not make sense to search for it at the point of its departure unless one wants to arrest the greeting.

If Friedrich wants to communicate his love to Susette, it is not enough to simply reverse the direction of the greeting, and to give back what he received. Reciprocity does not realize mutuality. The wind would not reach the source even if it blew in the opposite direction. Friedrich has to speak without knowing where exactly to direct his words. He has to approach someone who is gone, dead, so to speak. Likewise, we have to communicate with the poem without knowing from where exactly it addresses us. To bear the embarrassment—*die Scheue zu tragen*—of articulating words against the wind, without any certainty as to where and how the other will receive the greeting, is the only way to recognize the other’s negativity without killing her.

The lack of orientation resulting from the inability to locate the position of the beloved, combined with the strain of moving against the wind, provokes a wish for quiet that has strong suicidal undertones:

But someone pass me
The fragrant cup
Full of dark light,
So that I may rest now; for sweet
It would be to drowse amid shadows.

*Es reiche aber,*  
*Des dunkeln Lichtes voll,*  
*Mir einer den duftenden Becher,*  
*Damit ich ruhen möge; denn süß*  
*Wär’ unter Schatten der Schlummer.*

The desire of the lover would be appeased—to put a different spin on *es reiche aber* (but it suffices)—if he could drink up her cup and rest in the beloved. Yet, since it is impossible to find quiet in S. who is alive with negativity, constantly moving and moved, F. wishes to rest with Susette’s nonexistence. To put an end to their missed encounters, he is ready to go where she is clearly not, if only to secure the certainty of her full absence. He is ready to die. Like the reader who is tempted to give in to the lure of nothingness that threatens to collapse the poem into the one meaning of non-communication, F. is tempted to give himself over to destruction.

According to Baumann, the next line, *Nicht ist es gut* (It is not good), forms the heart of the poem (Baumann 1997, 38). Located at the exact midpoint of the poem, it marks its turning point—the point at which Hölderlin resolves to tear himself away from the temptation of actively or passively dying. The struggle for recognition in Hegel’s *Phenomenology* initiates a similar turn when its protagonists realize that a dead opponent will not provide the desired recognition. Death is not good; so much might safely be said. But on which side are we to locate death: here or there, in this world or in the hereafter? The central line of the poem is so insignificant in its simplicity that we have to consult the neighboring
verses to give it more substance. Like the other pivot with which we have been concerned—the potentially void aber—Nicht ist es gut reads like an empty heart until we widen our focus and attend to the blood of words that will have crossed in it:

It would be to drowse amid shadows.  Wär’ unter Schatten der Schlummer.
It is not good  Nicht ist es gut,
To be soulless with mortal  Seellos von sterblichen

The preceding verse speaks of drowsing amid shadows. Shadows might refer to the underworld, the dominion of the dead and its shadowy inhabitants. Or, if we adhere to Platonic ideas, it might remind us of the fact that our empirical world consists of only shadows. Or the line might simply draw the picture of a nap in the shadows of the wooded homeland. The next line reads Seellos von sterblichen. To be soulless would mean to be dead. More precisely—since the dead are often considered to be nothing but souls—it means to dwell in a death that entertains no relation to life. Those who have a soul are mortal; they are able to die or to live; they are affected by death, divided between death and life. But to be soulless would mean to be without death or life, to rest in an absolute beyond or a total immediacy. The line break between sterblichen and Gedanken isolates the adjective sterblichen from the term it is adjected to, so that it establishes its own substantiality and asks to be read as a substantive. Read on its own as Seellos von Sterblchen (soulless from mortals), the line evokes a state of soullessness caused by mortals, or rather, caused by the denial of mutual acknowledging—the refusal to acknowledge that F. shares the status of mortals, which consists in being with soul, or in being alive and affected by death, subject of and subject to one’s negativity. He walks around on earth like a dead man amid shadows. The central line, Nicht ist es gut, is a light heart that flutters between the line before and the line after, which themselves are ambiguous in their relation to this world and the hereafter. Nicht ist es gut is itself one of the mortal thoughts (sterblichen Gedanken) that are interrupted by the line break and divided in themselves between life and death. The verse exchanges blood containing oxygen for blood that carries carbon dioxide and lightheartedly escapes identification as one or the other.

Lulling Breezes and Swaying Bridges

For Hegel, we will remember, coming to know is truly an ac-knowledging, something that subjects do together—not in loving peace and harmony,
but wrangling with each other to keep the movement of thinking, grasping, penetrating, and embracing from fizzling out in mere negation or being stifled in mere affirmation. It is a struggle for mutuality that keeps changing the subject. Since subject/s are always beyond themselves, always subject to their own objectification, alienation, appropriation, and dissolution, they cannot be located or identified for very long. There is no *Wiederfinden* à la Goethe in Hölderlin’s poem or in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*: no recovery of the lost object, no reunion with an old lover, and no re-cognition even, that *trennt uns nicht zum zweitenmal*. Thinking one another (rather than thinking of one another), subject/s change.

This change has the advantage that the subjects multiply. In Hegel’s text, we are treated to the panoply of different shapes of self-reflective life. Each shape emerges from a transformative act of acknowledging. Acknowledging entangles subjects in one another. It is an act of converse that exchanges and even confuses identities. Constitutively shared, the subjects or figures of spirit are thus not strictly separated from one another; they are not even always clearly distinguishable. Rather, they are imperfectly drawn into one another—figuring and standing in for one another while overlapping.

Again, Hölderlin’s poem lends itself to elucidate the logic of this relation. Here as well, the couples keep multiplying. In the following, I will discuss how the human lovers are interlaced with the poem’s several pairs of trees. A *Gespräch* emerges—not only in words, but also among words—a converse in the form of asymmetrical chiasms: of unfinished, non-reciprocal but nevertheless mutual exchanges.

The first stanza of “Andenken” names “a noble pair of oaks and white poplars [*ein edel Paar / Von Eichen und Silberpappeln]*.” The lovers in this pair are quite different. White poplars are known to be fickle. They like to grow near the water so the liquid can flow in abundance through their supple stems. With the help of the water they grow silvery leaves that flicker in the wind. Oscillating between their two faces, these leaves enrapture with the music they sing in the breeze. The oak, on the other hand, is ancient and unfaltering. It was Jupiter’s tree and gave honey to the Golden Age. In the imagination of Hölderlin’s time, in texts of German Romanticism and Idealism, it figures as the German tree. Big and steady, oaks lend themselves to mediate between gods and humans, or, as Hölderlin phrases it in another poem, to “stand beneath God’s thunder-storms / To grasp the Father’s ray . . . / And . . . offer it to the people” wrapped in the song of falling acorns. Solitary, free, and wild, they attract the lightning, like Semele, and are likely to be burnt for their love.

The obvious difference between these lovers could be a source of misunderstanding and death. But a certain shyness or shame earns the pair its attribute of ethical nobility (*ein edel Paar*). They do not address
each other directly. Their gaze is twice diverted. Overseeing together the
gardens of Bordeaux, the river Garonne with its sharp bank, the falling
brook, and the footbridge, they glance at each other across the entire
world of their surroundings. But even this world is not the direct object
of their gaze; they hinschauet darüber with a squinting look that looks at
and looks beyond at the same time.36 Acknowledging negativity, their
gaze is attentive without identifying its object.

Hegel understands shame among lovers, quite counterintuitively,
as a force against separation. To him, Scham is not a feeling that leads
lovers to restore propriety and property, but he rather takes it as the ex-
pression of an aversion against the proper. In his 1797–98 fragment on
love, Hegel writes: “Love is indignant over any remaining separation and
property; this anger of love at individuality is called shame [Scham].” Re-
versing the common values of decency, he regards the messy entangle-
ment of two bodies in love as an example of purity, whereas lovers who
resist their intimacy trying to preserve some proper independence pre-
sent to him an image of indecency: “A pure heart [Gemüt] is not ashamed
of love; but it is ashamed of the fact that this love is not consummate
[vollkommen]” (Hegel 1971, 306). Striving to overcome the obstacles that
hinder love’s culmination, shame is thus an agent in the service of love.

Hölderlin rephrases the role of Scham as Scheue (shyness). In his
poem, shyness does the work of preserving dynamic differences within
the pair. The stimulation of difference against the idea of an unqualifi-
ced union is also part of Hegel’s account of shame. Hamacher highlights
the ambiguity of the work of shame in Hegel.37 He shows that shame
splits up the unity that it has produced in order to work toward a more
inclusive unity. Shame relentlessly takes offense at the results of its own
efforts because no union is radical enough to be absolutely pure.38 The
work of shame is unending. Its infinity can be frustrating when merely
numerical, that is, when we presume separate countable entities. If we
presuppose a clear-cut distinction between identity and difference, every
newly achieved unity opposes the difference which it resolved and there-
fore adds to the series of terms to be reconciled. But a different logic
gives rise to a pleasurable infinity. Such is the case when the lovers pre-
vent their union from collapsing into an exclusive unity and make a love
in which “the separate still exist, but not as separate, rather as united
[Einiges]” (Hegel 1971, 305).39 Then, like Hölderlin’s noble pair, those
who are ashamed of the fact that they are separated also take pleasure in
letting more and more obstacles come between them. Rubbing against
these hurdles, they actively enjoy their love: “This wealth of life love ac-
quires . . . for it seeks out differences and devises unifications ad infini-
tum; it turns to the whole manifold of nature in order to drink love out
of every life” (Hegel 1971, 307). The infinite work of shame opens the closed relationship between two individuals, their potentially violent tête-à-tête, and allows for more and more interference from the manifold riches of the outside world or, in Hölderlin’s words, of the gardens of Bordeaux. As Hamacher puts it: “For shame being is given—its own not excepted—only in the plural” (Hamacher 1998, 89).

Indeed, the seemingly exclusive couple has always been a play of multiplicities in Hölderlin’s poem: the pair does not consist of one oak and one white poplar, but oaks and white poplars in the plural: “A noble pair of oaks / and white poplars” (ein edel Paar / Von Eichen und Silberpappeln). The couple has also always been interlaced with other pairs. Oaks and poplars are crossed with other trees. Indeed, the poem abounds with exchange, with Gespräch, with care, with confusion, with mutation, and with mutuality. There is care in the elm wood that protectively “bends its broad tops over the mill” (Chadwick; neiget die breiten Gipfel . . . über die Mühl’). The house takes the “fig tree” (Feigenbaum) into its courtyard and shelters it from storm and weather. Der feige Baum, the cowardly tree, needs protection. Yet, by its involvement in another pair, the fig gains a divine power to keep the house safe in return. When Hölderlin translates Euripides’ Bacchants, he confuses fig tree (Greek: sykon) with sanctum (Greek: saekon). The fig now offers protection precisely because it is der Feigen Baum, the holy tree of the cowards. In the context of love, cowardice turns into a special courage. It becomes the strength of not being afraid to let shyness show (Scheue zu tragen).

Hegel asserts that love “has no fear of its fear, but led by its fear, it relieves [hebt auf] separations” (Hegel 1971, 306–7, trans. modified). The lover bears (trägt) the brave timorousness of the fig tree in the same way that she wears (trägt) a fig leaf. The fig leaf “cancels separation” by denying the difference between lovers. Since neither of them can be sure that their love can tolerate their separation, they prefer to wear their shame. But the coy fig leaf also highlights the difference between them, if only as something that is impossible to pinpoint. The excessively shy love of the noble pair keeps differences moving.

The second stanza presents the movement of differences across the multiple interlacing pairs that form a noble pair. It begins with “there . . . / The brown women walk / On silken ground” (Die braunen Frauen daselbst / Auf seidnen Boden). The adjective seidnen is here used in the plural and is thus grammatically aligned with Frauen rather than Boden. But it would not exactly make sense to exchange the adjectives and to say: Die seidnen Frauen daselbst auf braunem Boden (The silken women there on brown ground). The exchange is not reversible; there is no identifiable point of origin. The daselbst functions as the eccentric pivot for an asymmetrically
chiasmic exchange that never fully lines up and therefore never comes to rest.\textsuperscript{42} Both sides are imperfectly drawn into the other so that both can neither be separated nor unified. Around the disempowered identity (Selbigkeit) of the daselbst, as the light heart of the chiasm, the verses keep insisting on the plural.

We find a similar structure in: “And over slow footbridges, / Heavy with golden dreams, / Lulling breezes drift” (Und über langsamen Stegen, / Von goldenen Träumen schwer, / Einwiegende Lüfte ziehen). Here, the converse explicitly engages more than two terms. The Gespräch moves in a round. Light and heavy at the same time, it is a slow dance over the abyss where deep down the river rages: Über langsamen Stegen (over slow footbridges)? One is tempted to correct this peculiar expression into über einwiegenden Stegen (over footbridges that give), and this sets the dance in motion: von goldenen Träumen schwer, Lüfte ziehen langsam, langsam einwiegende Stege, Träume ziehen schwer, schwer einwiegende Lüfte ziehen langsam Stege, wiegen ein in goldene Träume, träumen goldene Stege . . . (heavy with golden dreams, breezes drift slowly, slowly giving footbridges, dreams drift heavily, heavy swaying breezes slowly draw bridges, lull into golden dreams, dream golden bridges . . .).

What Hölderlin’s poem discovers—a chiasmic exchange so eccentric and incomplete that it opens onto a round of different combinations and configurations itself inviting more and more transformations—is obviously very different from the model presented in Goethe’s poem. There, we found mirror relations on several different yet neatly organized levels: between the two lovers, between the human and the cosmic couple, (more abstractly) between individuality and universality, and finally between the substance and the form of the poem. All of these mirroring worked to substantiate the autonomy of the lyrical “I,” thus granting the lyrical “I” recognition. This kind of recognition disallowed for any disturbing difference and prohibited multiplication, dispersal, and confusion. The result was a perfect poem, a poem satisfied with itself, as it were.

But it is Hölderlin’s model that we encounter in the Phenomenology, as well. In the Phenomenology, we find no closed circuit of mirror images. Because of the imperfect entanglement of plural subject/s as they co-emerge in mutual acknowledging, the ostensible pair of the trope of mutual acknowledging has always already opened onto the multitude of the Phenomenology’s shapes of consciousness and shapes of spirit. All of the figures that the phenomenological narrative relates—from sense certainty to absolute knowing—share in this one movement of mutual acknowledging. Each presents another figuration of the subject/s that keep changing. But even the text as a whole is not closed. It needs us, the readers. The Phenomenology needs our acknowledging for any of these
figures to come to life as acknowledged and thus to be transformed. It needs us to join the struggle for mutuality.

Toward

I have relied on Hegel’s signifier of “acknowledging”—with the prefix “ac” communicating a sense of togetherness—to support my argument for mutuality. I have argued that the acknowledgement of self-consciousness can only take place in the plural and is constitutively and structurally mutual. Nevertheless, this mutuality has to be struggled for because self-consciousness tends to want to settle for something less than mutual acknowledging, namely recognition, because recognition promises self-sufficiency and absorption. Hölderlin’s lighthearted jumbling of grammar and predication suggests that the best strategy in the struggle for mutuality is often to abandon the struggle against it.

Before I draw my discussion of “mutual acknowledging” to a conclusion, we must consider another valence of the prefix ac. So far, I have read “ac” as the residue of “accord,” which itself assimilates the Latin ad to the Latin cor (heart). It is the prefix ad (at, to, till) that will concern me now—especially since, while somewhat hidden in the English version of the signifier, it is in plain view on the surface of the German Anerkennen. As the prefix of a verb, an communicates the direction of the action that the verb expresses. Examples are ansehen (look at), anschreien (shout at), anhören (listen to), ankleben (glue on), or anlehnen (lean against). While most of the time the action is directed at an object, in some cases an marks a movement toward the action itself, as in andiskutieren (discuss briefly), anblättern (leaf through a little), anlesen (start reading), or andeuten (to incompletely explain or adumbrate). It then expresses the movement toward the action indicated by the verb; it suggests the incipience of this action and means “a little,” “briefly,” “incompletely,” or “tentatively.”

Hegel exploits this meaning of an in his discussion of the “unhappy consciousness”:

The unhappy consciousness does not conduct itself towards its object in a thinking manner. Rather, since it is just in itself pure thinking individuality, and since its object is itself precisely this pure thought, and since pure thought is not itself the relation of each to the other, it, so to speak, merely launches itself in the direction of thought [geht es, so zu sagen, nur an das Denken hin] and on that path it becomes devotion [Andacht]. (§ 217)
The unhappy consciousness moves toward thinking, but stops short of actually carrying it through. Hegel calls this figure of consciousness not Denken (thinking) and not even Andenken (remembrance, literally: “thinking at” or “incipient thinking”) but Andacht (devotion). He does so because this figure of emerging thought skips the actual activity of thinking and jumps right away to a submissive devotion to ready-made thoughts, that is to say, to the posture of not needing to think anymore. Before it has even begun (An-), the thinking has already passed (dacht is the past tense of denken) and thus is Andacht.

Like the common reader of philosophical books, who enjoys reading the summaries of arguments in reviews or prefaces more than actually reading the books themselves, Andacht loves “having thought(s)” more than it loves to actually think. Yet Hegel’s phenomenological philosophy insists that thinking (denken) and coming-to-know or realizing (erkennen) are movements that need to be carried out, journeyed through, or experienced even though they cause embarrassment and shame.

He famously claims that the task of phenomenology is “to bring [philosophy] nearer to the goal where it can lay aside the title of ‘love of knowledge’ and be actual knowledge” (§ 5). The operative distinction in this claim is not one between love and knowledge, but between the mere inclination toward an activity and the actualization of that activity. Actual thinking (Denken or Erkennen) is mutual acknowledging: a reflexive movement of physical, intellectual, and emotional interchange of plural subjects who struggle with each other to acknowledge their freedom as well as their interdependence and vulnerability. When Hegel professes that “scientific cognition requires that [formal understanding] give itself over to the life of the object [sich dem Leben des Gegenstandes zu übergeben],” he clearly suggests that the philosopher must acknowledge that his so-called object is indeed, on a profound level, a self-reflective, free, and living subject, and he must acknowledge his interdependence with this subject if he is to actually think scientifically (§ 53). As the mutual embrace and mutual penetration of subjects in the plural, “actual knowing” is a form of love.

At the same time, the actualization of knowledge in experience does precisely not mean that absolute knowledge can be completed. Our discussion of Hölderlin’s poem “Andenken” has shown the need for the struggle for mutuality. It is a struggle against the trap of self-sufficiency and against the rush to the finish line expressed in the word Andacht. In Hölderlin’s poem, we find this rush in a series of signifiers that figure Andenken in the rapid movements of going, running, blowing, and falling. “To think at” or “to think toward” is one of the first senses of an-denken that Hölderlin’s poem suggests when he places an in the company of
other directional prefixes, like *hin* in *hingehet* (go toward, go away) and *hinschauet* (look at), *herab* in *herabkommt* (come down), and *aus* in *ausgehet* (go out). Because the non-reflexive *Andenken* presses too fast and too decidedly in one direction, it overshoots the mark and kills the sense for the other direction. Because it rushes to the end this “thinking toward” remains incomplete.

While Hegel, like Hölderlin, certainly shows a predilection for slowness—even for viscosity—Hegel is not one to argue for infinite deferral. Instead, it is through closure (through definite but temporary accomplishments) that he opens “actual knowledge” to the advent of an unknown future. The movement of *Anerkennen* might—and indeed must repeatedly—be actualized in the form of a judgment—be it an epistemological judgment (in the mode of *Wiedererkennen*) or a value judgment (in the mode of *Anerkennung* or recognition)—but any such judgment will be called into question by precisely the reality that it actualizes. Neither the self nor the other is a stable thing in itself that could be known or recognized without that knowledge or recognition having a transformative effect on both. Knowledge—as a reified result of the movement of the concept—is of course possible, even required, but Hegel’s journeys of thinking never end there. They always begin with knowledge (or certainty) and show how it disintegrates.44 Similarly, everyone will at times ask to be recognized as something (or feel compelled to recognize others as something), but this very recognition will change the identity thus recognized.45 Any act of recognition must therefore come to be viewed as misrecognition and will be outdated and updated by a new recognition. The completion of *Anerkennen* is itself transient. The process of acknowledging (and thus of thinking, of comprehending, of reading) is constitutively incipient, provisional, and unending.

With Hölderlin, we can extend Hegel’s critique of *Andacht* to *Anerkennen*. *Anerkennen* also—and especially when it carries through the movement of *Erkennen*—remains constitutively incipient and incomplete. Yet, in this case, the incipience is the condition of possibility for mutuality. For both a deep understanding of Hegel’s thought and a profound appreciation of ethical emotionality, it is of crucial importance, then, to keep in view the reflexive sense of incipience that is communicated by the prefix *An* and thus to read mutual *Anerkennen* as an unending process. In the ambiguous and ecstatic circulation of *Anerkennen*, we experience others across our frequent appropriations of them as not fully assimilable, and ourselves across our repeated insights as not completely intelligible. As the interminably repeated incipience of *Erkennen*, *Anerkennen* remains impossible to accomplish in a definitive way because it keeps changing the subject.