


## Introduction: Idealism and its Rem(a)inders



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### I

Although there is now a long tradition of connecting current critical theory and nineteenth-century (especially romantic) literature, there is still relatively little sustained discussion of the relationship between contemporary and post-Enlightenment *theory*. This volume seeks to address that gap in the writing of intellectual history, and more generally to explore the reasons why it has come to exist in the first place. Certainly there are now studies (by Butler, Rajan, and Dews, among others)<sup>1</sup> that read figures from the past with and against certain contemporary counterparts, but these studies deal only with individual theorists or traditions and do not as yet construct “post-Enlightenment theory” as a discursive field in its own right. Moreover, revisionary discussions of these earlier writings frequently follow one of two patterns: they either examine them in relative isolation, or treat them teleologically as pre-texts for recent critical theory. Thus while Marshall Brown and Andrew Bowie<sup>2</sup> deal with earlier theory in ways that would have been impossible two decades ago, neither has as his principal aim the drawing of connections with the current theoretical scene. On the other hand, the works of Derrida and de Man (or of followers like Henry Sussman and Andrzej Warminski)<sup>3</sup> translate the thought of nineteenth-century philosophers—Nietzsche, Hegel, and, more recently, Schelling being the prominent examples—into terms that are largely those of contemporary theory.

The connection between recent theory and Nietzsche has been well developed, in no small part due to his wholesale appropriation by post-structuralism as its uncanny philosophical precursor. The nature and limits of that appropriation are the subject of Tilottama Rajan's essay in this volume. Current interpretations of Hegel and Schelling differ in that they exemplify the teleological revisioning of nineteenth-century philosophy through contemporary theory that characterizes practices of reading "against the grain." Hegel is treated as a systematizer whose philosophy of absolute knowledge is drawn vertiginously into problems that his system can neither contain nor evade, and that await the twentieth century for their fullest articulation. These problems include his theorization of desire, which, as reinterpreted by Kojève and Hyppolite in their discussions of the master-slave relationship in the *Phenomenology*, is widely recognized as seminal for Lacan. Likewise, recent deconstructive readings of Schelling recuperate him for contemporary theory by challenging the two roles that intellectual histories have attributed to him: either as the author of a comprehensive (if Protean) *Naturphilosophie* written in Hegel's shadow; or (as is certainly the case in the English-speaking world) as the philosophical source of the organicist aesthetic that underwrites an earlier phase in twentieth-century literary theory. But the essays collected in this volume do not simply use current critical models to colonize an earlier discourse. Rather we are interested in the *intersections* between two areas of theory, and with the ways in which each might cause us to reconsider the philosophical investments and discursive shape of the other.

The period that begins with the late eighteenth century is seminal in two ways. It not only marks a major site in the genealogy of "theory" as we now conceive it, but also initiates a rethinking of concepts like reading, influence, and tradition, and thus encourages theoretical intersections or "reframings" of one theory by another. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for instance, distinguishes between historical and divinatory readings of the intellectual tradition: that is, between a reading that treats a past text as a finished product, and one that is also concerned with its catalytic role in an ongoing process that requires an imaginative leap on the part of a reader to discern its direction. Godwin similarly opposes the "moral" or authorial intention of a text to its "tendency," characterizing the latter as the sum of the text's possible interpretations once it has been inserted into the discursive space of its present and future readers. These interpretive models<sup>4</sup> provide a justification for reconceiving nineteenth-century

philosophy in the light of the contemporary “theory” to whose development it has contributed. Nevertheless, one of the guiding assumptions of this volume is that it would be misleading merely to superimpose the distinctions by which theory is presently constituted—for instance, the distinction between phenomenology and deconstruction—onto post-Enlightenment theoretical discourse. Thus some of the essays included here (those by Bowie and Sallis, for instance) define an “intersection” between present and past in which difference is as important as connection. But several contributors explore relationships of a more intertextual nature. They are interested not simply in how an earlier theorist might differ from or might provide an “embryonic” version of a later approach, but also in how the present might be reread through a past that remains its condition of possibility.

Such reading, we need hardly emphasize, does not presume a meta-cultural synthesis of present and past. Nor does it imply a “return to the romantic” through a corrective privileging of the earlier at the expense of the later. Rather it creates a space in which we can continue to think through issues that are sometimes closed off by the more unilinear analyses generated by models of “origin” and “influence” or of “intersection.” Thus an intertextual reading that explores the multiple lines of influence or critical genealogies joining earlier theories to more than one contemporary approach can lead us to reconceive the relationships between those approaches. The fact that Hegel has been an important (if contested) presence in Marxist theory from Lukács to Althusser, combined with the fact that he also develops a phenomenology of modes in the *Aesthetics*, can lead us to ask whether phenomenology and cultural criticism are as antithetical as they are often thought to be.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in exploring how positions that have now become hypostatized as schools intertwine in the more fluid context of the past, we also have another aim. If conventional history of ideas criticism reads the present as developing from the past, the practice of reading against the grain is no less committed to a genetic logic, in that it makes contemporary theory the teleological completion of nineteenth-century philosophy. We hope to complicate and to contest this logic by supplementing these genetic models with other ways of writing intellectual history. “Intertextuality” and “genealogy” are but two ways of rethinking intellectual history in such a way as to qualify the more classical models of “continuity” and “revolution.”

In refiguring the relationship between contemporary and post-Enlightenment theory as intertextual *and* genetic, our intention is to

bring out ambivalences and complexities in both areas that might otherwise remain undiscussed. We begin with the assumption that what we presently call “theory,” as opposed to criticism or *literary* theory, emerges at the end of the eighteenth century partly as a response to Kant. Kant decisively transforms philosophy into a philosophy of the subject, and recasts the metaphysical preoccupations of his age into a critique of the conditions of the possibility of knowledge. Refocusing the terms and object of philosophy in this way, Kant argues that mental categories are regulative rather than constitutive: an argument that points forward to the contemporary awareness of the purely constructed nature of reality. But the German philosopher remains in some respects pretheoretical inasmuch as he neither historicizes the categories nor places them in a context attuned to the relationship between the apprehension of knowledge and what we now term “language” or “writing.” The tension, elided by Kant, between a sense of “reality” as constructed and a naturalizing emphasis on the knowing subject has powerful implications for the discursive shape of much of nineteenth-century philosophy, in which concepts like the subjective universal and absolute knowledge are exposed to the force of processes that are homologous to what is now called *écriture*. We can cite only two examples. For Hegel, history conceived as the medium of the disclosure of “Spirit” must negotiate with the emerging notion of a “language” of events. This negotiation is played out in the *Aesthetics* as a constant difference between “theme” and “execution,” a deferral of the “Idea” by its outward “shape” or expression. Similarly, for Schopenhauer the will conceived as the psychological and biological subversion of consciousness puts under erasure the distinction between reason and the realm of material automatism. This distinction had made possible Kant’s idealistic insistence on the assertion of mental categories against the world of necessity. Its deconstruction structurally anticipates the contemporary emphasis on the subversion of the subject by writing and the unconscious, even as Schopenhauer’s resistance to this deconstruction intimates a survival of idealism that is not without its ramifications for contemporary theory.

The discourses that result from these conflicting pressures have several implications for unpacking the relationship of post-Enlightenment to twentieth-century theory. Very briefly, we suggest that the two areas may be most similar at the points at which they seem most unlike. With the notable exceptions of Nietzsche and perhaps Kierkegaard, post-Kantian philosophers seem to want to protect metaphysics from semiotics

and psychology, but find ultimately that they are unable or unwilling to sustain this discrimination. Current theory serves to bring out that self-division both by separating out from the nineteenth century that which resembles or portends the twentieth, and by mounting a massive critique of the idealistic assumptions of its earlier counterpart. Indeed, contemporary theory could be said to have been constituted by a rigorous turn *away* from what it has characterized as the unreflective principles of nineteenth-century philosophy, especially German idealist thought. The materialist objectives of structuralism and, to a certain extent, poststructuralism displace the totalizing nineteenth-century attempts at developing what Schelling called “a system of transcendental idealism.” After Nietzsche, the subject conceived as a tissue of conflicting forces permanently supplants Hegel’s dream of a purely transparent self-consciousness. Affirmations of absolute knowledge give way to the negative knowledge of the mind’s derealization by figure. Yet the implicit historiographical notion that philosophical thought has thus moved from idealism to irony and from a philosophy of the subject to a philosophy of language should probably be recognized as a hermeneutical construction designed to authenticate the sophistication and originality of contemporary thought. Our contention is that by positioning itself as the demystified aftermath of the nineteenth century, current theory may simply have suppressed its covert connections to the philosophies it is said to supersede. Each period may, in fact, be the other’s uncanny double.

To begin with, there is a curious resemblance between the encyclopedic claims of both periods. Post-Kantian theory is overtly encyclopedic in attempting to totalize knowledge by encompassing areas as diverse as history, mythology, and aesthetics, not to mention precursive versions of psychoanalysis and semiotics. At the same time its inclusion of these various discourses means that it is constantly “reframing” and rereading itself. Indeed, it is the way in which Hegel’s *Logic* is reframed by his *Aesthetics*, and the way in which metaphysics for Schopenhauer is contaminated by psychology, that leads us to describe the period in question as one in which philosophy gives way to “theory.”

On the other hand, contemporary theory, with its replacement of Boeckh’s encyclopedia by Foucault’s archive, would seem to question all attempts at totalization. Yet despite an interdisciplinarity in which discourses are used to reframe each other, recent theory seems to make semiotics into a Saussurean *langue* that underlies and unifies the various disciplinary formations. Correspondingly, its confident pronouncements

about the death of the subject and the end of history may well reinscribe the absolute subject of nineteenth-century theory as the “heroically” meta-critical subject of the twentieth. Our project of rereading current theory through its covert links to an ambivalently idealistic past that it seeks to displace may thus have as a final consequence the exploration of how theory is involved in what Paul de Man calls “the resistance to theory.” If post-Kantian thought resists the reflexiveness of being “theoretical,” its encyclopedic claims are resisted by its own heteroglossia. On the other hand, if contemporary theory has such reflexiveness as its starting point, its totalizing pretensions (as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy have pointed out)<sup>6</sup> mark its own complicity in the resistance to theory. In recovering the philosophical idealism that contemporary theory rejects, but that is nevertheless dialogically present within it, we can begin to articulate both the desires and the evasions that inhabit that resistance.

## II

### BETWEEN IDEALISM AND DECONSTRUCTION

The essays in this volume are concerned with connections between specific philosophers or theories. The fact that earlier thinkers regularly surface as “figures” in the work of recent theory—Kant and Nietzsche in Deleuze, Schelling in Benjamin, Rousseau in de Man, to name only a few—represents the most obvious sign of the importance of these connections in the history of ideas from Kant to the present day. The essays forming the first section of this book demonstrate that these connections are also worth investigating in the context of larger issues, such as the limits and pretensions of contemporary theory, and the (in)compatibility (or, as Arkady Plotnitsky puts it, the “complementarity”) of idealism and deconstruction. Understood from this somewhat broader perspective—which is really the *intersection* of two perspectives—the idealistic remainder within deconstruction becomes as significant as the deconstructive pressures that trouble idealism. If “deconstruction”—read as a figure for the rupture with classical rationalism—brings out “the hidden articulations and fragmentations”<sup>7</sup> inhabiting nineteenth-century philosophy, the same philosophy is capable of casting a light on structurally homologous divisions within contemporary theory, now seen as equivocally—rather than fearlessly—committed to pursuing the end of the logocentric

epoch. In other words, the “space” between idealism and deconstruction is not only *historical*, marking the dialectically evolving and revisionary path of thinking joining the nineteenth to the twentieth century, but also *conceptual* and *discursive*, an interior distance that displaces idealism and deconstruction respectively from themselves.

Here we might recall Barbara Johnson’s useful deconstructive axiom: “[T]he differences *between* entities . . . are . . . based on a repression of differences *within* entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself.”<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this volume, the task of mapping the crossings and self-displacements of idealism and deconstruction begins by recognizing that the movement from Kant to Kierkegaard marks the process in which “philosophy” unfolds into “theory.” For it is Kierkegaard who, in his self-conscious use of both “aesthetic” and “religious” discourses as ways of reframing each other, most explicitly exemplifies our sense of what distinguishes “theory” from other forms of abstract discourse. Appropriately, he is the figure with which this volume begins. As Christopher Norris’s essay on Kierkegaard and de Man suggests, Kierkegaard’s entire pseudonymous production, with its shifting narrative strategies and voices, deconstitutes itself at every turn, as if to anticipate any “deconstructive” reading that contemporary readers might bring to it. But this process of self-transgression has a limit: as Norris points out, the ultimate goal of Kierkegaard’s quasi-fictional writings is to force an ethical decision on the part of the reader to turn from the vain graces of the aesthetic to the religious order of experience. Kierkegaard represents himself as exemplary in this regard, but it is there, in those representations, that Norris discerns displacements of sense that Kierkegaard can neither evade nor control. On the one hand, Kierkegaard assumes a panoptic mastery over his life, retrospectively describing it in *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* as always already anchored in a spiritual inwardness and knowledge. Norris maintains that Kierkegaard is Nietzschean insofar as he derides Hegel’s faith in system, but remains in the shadow of idealism for continuing to treat ethical truths as available to the properly disciplined thinker. On the other hand, Kierkegaard openly concedes that he is a “reader” of his own texts, and thus fully exposed to their rhetorical effects, duplicitous ironies, and conflicting points of view. Norris analyzes how Kierkegaard’s textual strategies of repetition and reduplication threaten his presumed mastery over their ethical intent. For example, Kierkegaard finds that he must rely on the support of illustrative metaphors at the precise moment that rhetorical indirection is decreed to be

an impediment in the path of “true seriousness.” Nowhere is the troublesome work of the supplement of figurality more evident, not to say more overdetermined, than in the case of the metaphor of “woman”: as Norris brings out, the “material” presence of Kierkegaard’s abandoned fiancée, Regine Olsen, returns to de-idealize the contrived reconstructions of his “ethical” treatment of her. Under the critical pressure of Norris’s hermeneutics of suspicion, Kierkegaard’s apologetic discourse shades indeterminately into fiction, as if the exhibitionist pleasures of excusing himself had contaminated his confessional desire simply to “come clean.”

The intelligibility of Kierkegaard’s project rests to a large degree on maintaining the distinction between the “aesthetic” and the “religious” orders of experience, yet this distinction proves almost impossible to maintain. Texts like *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* may well be cleft by what Norris calls—citing de Man—“the radical estrangement between the meaning and the performance of any text,”<sup>9</sup> but what is more compelling is that they do not therefore unravel into a mobile army of metaphors: notwithstanding the “self-deconstructive” pressures within Kierkegaard’s work, Norris concludes his essay by observing that he remains “the strongest, most resourceful challenge to” the “powers of textual demystification.” In other words, Kierkegaard demonstrates that “the end of the [philosophical/theological] book” is not the same thing as “the beginning of writing.”<sup>10</sup> This strategic refusal has complex implications for how we understand what Norris calls “the belated encounter” between Kierkegaard and de Man, idealism and deconstruction, for Kierkegaard remains one of the nineteenth century’s most vivid examples of how the rigorous questioning of metaphysics can be conducted without necessarily adopting the “discontinuous and irruptive” strategies that Derrida identifies with Nietzschean deconstruction. Rather, as Tilottama Rajan has also argued, Kierkegaard performs his critique from *within* a discernible hermeneutical tradition that it expands and challenges to the very limit.<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works frankly announce the death of the *author*, but precisely in order to reclaim a productive—if unavoidably unstable—place for the *reader*, whose negotiation with the text is unpredictable to the precise degree that it is made in earnest of apprehending meaningfulness of some kind—of making interpretive *choices*. Whether these choices have the sanction of a providential authority is precisely the challenge of “hermeneutic faith”—as Norris aptly puts it—that Kierkegaard’s writings frankly put to their readers. His “ethics of reading” therefore stands in direct contradiction to thinkers



like de Man, for whom no god is available to rescue us from our ironies. In Norris's hands, Kierkegaard is complexly ethical—self-subverting to be sure—yet capable of marshaling a moral idealism whose tenacity is all the more resourceful in the face of that subversion.

Beyond Norris's essay, we might observe that Kierkegaard illuminates how de Man's work is itself preoccupied with the question of ethics, even if the locus of this concern has been transposed—in theory—from the realm of the subject to that of language. J. Hillis Miller has in fact argued that far from being "nihilistic" and "irresponsible," de Man's later work is everywhere ethically motivated, insisting as it does that readers "must take responsibility for [their readings] and for [the] consequences [of their readings] in the personal, social, and political world."<sup>12</sup> Kierkegaard could not help but agree. De Man would of course further contend that any "ethics of reading" is a structural effect of language rather than something willed by the "existential" subject; yet it is curious to note that Miller's own reading of de Man, although scrupulously observant of de Man's strict renunciation of the subject, remains residually "humanistic" in tone and rhetoric: even in Miller's hands, a mild "hermeneutic faith" springs up to haunt the barren heath of de Man's posthumanist project.<sup>13</sup> Under what circumstances, we might then ask, would reading *not* invoke not only the expectation of readability but also the possibility of an interpreting subject capable of making interpretive decisions? Reading Kierkegaard *after* de Man, "hermeneutic faith" can only be an expression of a deeply rooted aesthetic ideology that erroneously promises a truth beyond the unreliability of signs. But Miller's meliorism suggests that we might just as productively read de Man through Kierkegaard. From this reversed perspective, the "inhuman" imperatives and "radical estrangements" that de Man attributes to language are displaced figures for an irreducibly humanistic and existential predicament, the predicament of the reader reading.

In Hegel, Kierkegaard thought he saw the worst implications of German idealism, especially its reduction of existence to the bloodless logic of necessity. Hegel "was in the German sense a professor of philosophy on a large scale," Kierkegaard wryly remarks in *The Concept of Anxiety*, "because he at any price must explain all things."<sup>14</sup> As an extravagant figure of totalizing understanding against which Kierkegaard pits the perilous life of the wayfaring Christian, "Hegel" serves Kierkegaard's purposes all too well; but his is not the only, nor even the most complex, negotiation with the great "professor" that the nineteenth century

witnessed, and that our own age continues to witness. It is therefore no accident that Hegel is discussed by five contributors to this volume, and that in the process he too gets placed on both sides of the great divide between idealism and its deconstruction. If one were to attempt a psychotropology of the narratives used to construct and empower the current theoretical canon, Nietzsche would emerge as the “figure” most crucial to the self-legitimation of a contemporary theory that paradoxically craves a historical foundation for a variety of antifoundationalisms from Derrida and de Man to Deleuze and Foucault. Schelling would function more straightforwardly: as a philosopher once linked to Coleridge and now reread through Derrida, he serves as a paradigm for a relegitimation of the romantic that thereby recontains it within the contemporary. Hegel, however, focuses for us the highly overdetermined nature of the transition from past to present. If he is represented as a classical and totalizing thinker, there remain in his corpus areas that exceed that representation. Why one should wish to repress these intellectual surpluses (or to claim that Hegel repressed them), so as to write the past into a position of naïveté becomes a legitimate question. Alternatively, one can speculate that Hegel conceived of completion as an excuse to think its romantic deferral. But why one should wish to privilege only the subversive elements in Hegel then becomes an equally valid question. Reflecting on Hegel, but doing so reflexively, raises the symmetrical issue of whether we now theorize deferral precisely in order to think totality in the mode of nostalgia.

Hegel’s position as a figure for the openings created by the very closure of theory’s past is the subject of John Sallis’s essay on the role of mimesis in the (re)thinking of metaphysics. Mimesis is inevitably implicated in the question of metaphysics because it is concerned with the relation between image and original, and more particularly because the concept itself is the site of a slippage between the image as a disclosure of truth and the image as the absence of the original. Indeed this slippage, this difference between image and original, is the very condition for thinking the concept of imitation, which therefore turns out to have been from the beginning a folding in of Platonic mimesis and Derridean representation towards each other. Focusing on this slippage, Sallis traces two “axiomatics” unstably at work within the concept of mimesis: the positive power of the image to bring truth to presence and thus to complete metaphysics (by bringing it to its end or completion), and a negative value deriving from the inability of the copy to be its original, so that

art as the image or phantasm of truth is also the end (or undoing) of the metaphysical project. By thinking both values together, Hegel, he argues, surmounts the apparent polysemy of this end “in the direction of unity.”

By emphasizing that the tension between art as a completion of metaphysics and as its impossibility is paradoxically (re)covered in the notion of an “end,” Sallis reads Hegel as bringing to an end (or completion) the metaphysical tradition that begins with Plato. Pointing briefly to what is opened up by the Hegelian closure, Sallis nevertheless implies a narrative in which we move “beyond” Hegel to the rethinking of art by Nietzsche and Heidegger. It is possible, however, to position Hegel somewhat differently on the border we have been tracing, by reading the end of the *Aesthetics* not as *Aufhebung* but as overdetermination. The telescoping of two radically different “axiomatrics” into one signifier would then figure the difficulty of choosing between idealism and its deconstruction. This difficulty, which is not an obstacle (as in Derrida) but an opening, also opens up the overdetermination of the contemporary scene by a different but equally powerful double axiomatic. The intellectual economies of idealism and poststructuralism, in the term employed by Arkady Plotnitsky, become complementary rather than contradictory: each one functions as the unconscious of the other.

If Sallis’s essay closes by opening onto a space between idealism and deconstruction, that space is precisely the subject of the essays by Rajan and Clark. Clark’s paper traces the conflicting strata of awareness and self-contesting rhetoric characterizing Friedrich Schelling’s last major published work, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*. The *Freedom* essay marks an ambivalently signaled turn for its author, after which he will harshly criticize Hegelian philosophy, including his own Hegelianism, for confining itself only to questions of form, essence, and idea. Anticipating Kierkegaard, Schelling insists instead on considering reality more complexly as “existence,” as the encounter with the irreducible there-ness of things, even evil and accidental things. The paradox is that precisely this turn to a *positive* philosophy—as he eventually characterized it—leads him to confront the complicity of existence with all forms of the inconceivable and the unforeseen, with chance, contingency, and irrationality: in short, to facing that which resists and *negates* performatively all pretensions to systematic—not to say idealistic—thought.

Ironically, as Clark points out, Schelling addresses the pervasiveness of the irrational (or of the other-than-rational), while at the same time

seeking to establish a *rational* ground for human freedom. Simply put, human freedom is real—uncaptured by necessity—because it has its origin in a more primordial act of freedom, namely God’s self-originating struggle to become a determinate being out of his darkly elemental ground. For Schelling, as for Jacob Böhme (to whom he silently adverts at crucial moments in the essay), humankind’s difference from God, and thus its exposure to the contingent, reproduces God’s primordial difference from himself. As Clark observes, the fact that the origin is characterized by a root duplicity leads Schelling to a deeper and a more troubling question: how is that the “light” and the “dark,” God’s freedom and his necessity, can come to be opposed *in the first place*? To think the infrastructure of the origin, Schelling evokes Böhme’s obscure notion of the *Ungrund* or non-ground, not to abandon rationality for mysticism but to reframe his own idealistic discourse in order to obtain an “ir-rational” point of leverage on the negative foundations of the Absolute.

The sudden influx of an apophatic rhetoric—more usually associated with negative theology—into Schelling’s otherwise scrupulously dialectical thinking opens up two radically opposed possibilities for this “tropic of negativity.”<sup>15</sup> Like the Platonic *khora*, as Derrida describes it in his account of the intersections between deconstruction and negative theology, the *Ungrund* is “immediately” and inevitably subject to onto-theological appropriation: the *beyond*-being of the *Ungrund* translates into a *being*-beyond, which is partly what happens in Heidegger’s lectures on the *Freedom* essay.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the *Ungrund* augurs a wholly Other “place,” though one about which Derrida would say “nothing, or almost nothing, can be said.”<sup>17</sup> For Schelling, the *Ungrund* is closely related to a “Longing,” co-original with the “Word” or “*Logos*” of that longing: following Schelling’s own linguistic philosophemes, Clark argues that the *Ungrund* is comparable to the *saying* of that which is said by God, a pure linguistic act or archperformative, utterly meaningless in itself. Contemporary articulations of Schelling’s *Ungrund* would thus include quasi-transcendentals like Derrida’s *différance* and de Man’s concept of the “positional power of language,” which is to say, the blank, insignificant or in-determinate opening of signification. Where God “starts,” he can—before deflecting attention from this beginning—be understood as an act of positing, linguistic positing. This archperformative is not derived; it is a sudden, catachrestic imposition whose senselessness *marks*—de Man will say *disfigures*—in advance all subsequent figurations and representations .

For the Word to be spoken, it must be possible to speak. Here language, or, at least, the trace of language, “has started without us, in us, and before us.” “This,” Derrida writes, “is what theology calls God.”<sup>18</sup> For Schelling, similarly, the opening of the Word occurs, and the Word means, but no dialectical power will ever enable us to hear this Word occurring or to comprehend its emergence from the radical nothingness of the *Ungrund*, since by becoming audible the Word performs the erasure of its having taken place. This root quality of “thrownness” or of “not Being-the-basis-for-itself” Manfred Frank usefully identifies with “post-Hegelian philosophy in its entirety,” and it marks a point of intersection between neostructuralism and German idealism’s self-critique in the texts of Fichte, Schleiermacher, and, of course, Schelling.<sup>19</sup> Schelling’s self-contested idealism might well be used as a way to bring out the *differences* between de Man’s and Derrida’s treatment of the asymmetrical and aporetic structure that binds and promises us to the trace. Derrida readily concedes that the trace is “radically non-human and atheological,” and that even to say that it “gives something” already “too vividly announces or recalls the dispensation of God, of man, or even that of the Being of which certain texts by Heidegger speak.”<sup>20</sup> Yet Derrida would seem much closer to Heidegger insofar as he insists that the inescapable tardiness of the subject vis-à-vis language “presents no limit to its freedom.” If the existent cannot come “back behind its own thrownness,” as Frank points out, this does not mean that “it is not the basis for the possibilities through which it relates to its thrownness and to its future.”<sup>21</sup> De Man also evokes the fundamentally nonhuman character of language whose in-determinate nature forces us to read—which is to say, to seek *shelter from self-erasure* within the humane space of legible language. Yet the self’s not-Being-the-basis-for-itself is felt to be somewhat different than in Derrida: like Wordsworth’s mountain climbers in the *Prelude*, the knowledge of the subject’s structural anachronism is not only always in arrears vis-à-vis the inhuman event of language, as it is in Derrida, but, more important, it is consistently *felt* or luridly described as a rectification, a reproach, or, as is often the case, as the threat of extinction and dismemberment at the hands of the monstrous.

For both Derrida and de Man, it could be argued, the theoretical task turns on the difficulty of thinking the “play” of language as something truly serious and in any case inevitable in a genuinely historical, future-oriented way. Yet human freedom as the contingent exposure to this absolute risk remains figured in revealingly divergent terms. Whereas

Derrida positively affirms *différance* for its liberatory power to unsettle the metaphysics of presence, de Man attends to the formal materiality of the sign, stressing the hidden threat that its radical senselessness inescapably poses for reading and for cognition. For Derrida, as Spivak points out, the trace figures the “lure of the abyss as freedom.”<sup>22</sup> Thus when he calls for a “rediscovery of the trace, still unique, in . . . other languages, bodies, negativities,”<sup>23</sup> there is a sense that German idealism’s operative distinction between necessity and freedom has been strangely repeated in contemporary theory in terms of an opposition between the abiding closure of Western metaphysics and the thinker who claims to possess the freedom to make it tremble: for Schelling, as for Derrida, philosophical speculation is itself taken to be an exemplary performance of this freedom. Whether or to what degree the same could be said for de Man is unclear, since for him inquiries into the nature of human freedom more consistently point to the subject’s entrapment in the determined indeterminacy of a “language machine” that demands meaningfulness to the precise extent that it exposes “the exigent contingency”<sup>24</sup> of its functioning. Knowledge of this madness does not make you sane, de Man suggests, since in disfiguring the figuration *whose error we are* only reinscribes the same error. If this vertiginous spiral is the mark and movement of human freedom, it has attached to it a mood of absurdity that is overstated in de Man even as it is understated in Derrida.

Whereas Clark’s essay uses Schelling to articulate an overlap between de Man and Derrida, Tilottama Rajan’s essay attempts an intertextual reading of deconstruction through Nietzsche, who provides an “origin” both for the poststructuralism of de Man and the very different “semiotic materialism” of Kristeva. In doing so, Rajan presses for a new philosophical history of post-Enlightenment thought that would disentangle “deconstruction” from a “poststructuralism” committed to an almost ascetic emphasis on language. As she has argued elsewhere, “[T]he existence of nineteenth-century ancestors for deconstruction reminds us that poststructuralism is simply one form taken by the deconstructive impulse, and that deconstruction itself is a historically more extensive movement: one that may still be in the process of evolving.”<sup>25</sup> Among those ancestors, arguably no one is more significant than Nietzsche, whose critique of being and representation seems to lay the basis for recent theory’s dismantling of the metaphysics of presence. But the critical power that contemporary theory has invested in Nietzsche is partly the result of a certain *Nachträglichkeit*: as Rajan points out, “Nietzsche” is

to some extent a figure that Derrida and de Man have constructed, a nineteenth-century mirror in which they (re)cognize recent theory's "newest insights" as "those we always already possessed." As such, this recognition is also necessarily a *misrecognition*, whose "asymmetrical" features Rajan brings out by exploring the ways in which Nietzsche's work resists rather than simply prefigures and facilitates the work of poststructuralism. Thus while Derrida locates *différance* in the nonmaterial processes of "writing" and the "trace," Nietzsche finds it in music, and then, more complexly, in the body, which he treats as a figure for a heterogeneity in excess of linguistic or conceptual representation.

The differences between Nietzschean deconstruction and its post-structuralist legacy bring out analogous divergences *within* that legacy. Returning to Nietzsche as a way of distinguishing Kristeva from Derrida and Lacan, Rajan suggests that he provides a pre-text for Kristeva's work by locating *différance* in the organic and nonlinguistic media of music and the body, while disaffiliating these figures from any association with unity and presence. Crucial to both Nietzsche and Kristeva is the permeability of the bounded ego, constructed within the Apollonian order of the Symbolic, to the inchoate play of differences generated within the Dionysian chorus: a space analogous to Kristeva's semiotic *chora*, which Nietzsche represents through figures linked less to language than to mat(t)er. As important is the centrality accorded to art in a theoretical discourse that is not so much aestheticist as, in David Carroll's words, "paraesthetic." Rajan's contribution, however, is not just a tracing of Nietzsche's "influence" on Kristeva. Rather this influence causes us to rethink the relationship that exists in contemporary theory between deconstruction and a phenomenology seen as part of the idealist succession. Where Derrida has made the opposition between these two discourses virtually canonical, Kristeva's intersection with Nietzsche becomes a space in which we can explore their possible complementarity. Complementarity, however, should not become a way of totalizing the differing conceptual investments of these discourses. Moving beyond Rajan's essay, which deals only with their theoretical symbiosis in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, we can suggest that Kristeva's later work constitutes a nontotalizable practice in which the reader can experience (in the gaps between philosophy, art, and psychoanalysis) the ways in which the theoretical drives of deconstruction and phenomenology differ from and defer each other.

As Rajan demonstrates, Nietzsche's presence in the texts of Kristeva

must also cause us to rethink contemporary theory's curiously Hegelian promotion of a linguistic absolute. For the semiotic, linked as it is to nontextual categories like "body" and "voice," is a sub-version of Derridean *écriture* that compels poststructuralism to reflect upon its own absent body. The figure of the body reinscribes a concern with the subject, though the body—for both Nietzsche and Kristeva—is the site of the subject's (dis)embodiment rather than of a naïve, prereflective immediacy. In other words, the notion of a semiotic materialism allows Kristeva to locate the infrastructure of *différance* in the experience of the subject-in-process, an experience that poststructuralism had elided in opposing itself to phenomenological thinking. Recovering a phenomenological resistance to poststructuralist theory, then, Kristeva's work throws into relief the ways in which this critical elision is never complete: for instance, the "body" stubbornly remains in de Man's anxiously visceral rhetoric of "disfiguration" and "defacement," haunting his "ultra textualism"<sup>26</sup> much as de Man himself says Shelley's corpse haunts romantic criticism.

#### RETHINKING THE SUBJECT

Among the most influential paragraphs of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, those describing the dialectic of master and slave stand out, not only for arguing that the subject's true liberation lies in suffering the vicissitudes of servitude, but also for placing work at the center of self-realization. As Charles Taylor has suggested, however, Marxist appropriations of the "Lordship and Bondage" section of Hegel's text have tended to ignore "the role of the fear of death" in the emergence of the subject at the conclusion of this section and in the subsequent account of the "unhappy consciousness."<sup>27</sup> Judith Butler's essay returns us to this evocative transition in Hegel's text, rereading it not positively as a phenomenology of spirit, but critically as a genealogy of morals in which the subject shelters itself from existential dread through the reflexive application of ethical principles and religious ideals.

Butler's account of the salient features of this "logic of subjection" is worth briefly rehearsing here. As Hegel describes them at the end of his discussion of lordship and bondage, the origins of the unhappy consciousness lie in what he calls sheer "stubbornness" [*Eigensinnigkeit*], the slave's blind attachment to itself as it recoils defensively from the threat



of annihilation at the hands of the “Absolute Master,” namely death. From this flinching and self-preserving *reflex*, as it were, the first glimmerings of reflexivity in the servile consciousness are born, and the difficult path toward authentic freedom begun. Through a kind of psychic mitosis, the “subject” anxiously divides from itself, or, more precisely, emerges as the phantasmic effect of this splitting: the self simultaneously denies death and fearfully stakes its claim to “freedom” from physical negation by becoming lord and master over that which seems most mortal about itself—the body. If the slave’s coming-into-awareness of his determinate thingness is the inaugural moment of his liberation from his master, however, it is also his initiation into increasingly subtle strategies of self-enslavement predicated on the refusal of bodily life. Kojève’s evocative term for these strategies of subjection is “slave ideologies”.<sup>28</sup> read from Butler’s Foucauldian perspective, these “ideologies” in effect describe the simultaneous creation and regulation of the subject through successive (self-)disciplinary regimes.

Perhaps it is no accident, therefore, that Sir James Baillie translates Hegel’s term for the formative influence that a culture has on the production of the subject—i.e., *Bildung*—as “the *discipline of culture*” (emphasis ours).<sup>29</sup> Paradoxically, as Butler observes, the particular discipline of the renunciation of bodily experience serves only to mark the irreducibility of that subject’s connection to the body it renounces. The subject’s freedom is thereby constrained by the very process by which that freedom is achieved: to put it another way, there is no overcoming the subject’s resistance to itself, because the subject is itself this resistance. Butler demonstrates, however, that Hegel avoids the most radical implications of his critique of the subject’s (dis)embodiment, and treats the section on the unhappy consciousness not as a deconstruction of the self but as a transitional moment in the movement from insufficiently rational forms of self-consciousness towards the rule of Reason and true autonomy. Powerful in its insistence that the subject cannot fully renounce life *while it remains within life*, Hegel’s text nevertheless finds itself practically pursuing the fleshless freedom of Reason that it has had to renounce theoretically. The disruptive significance of Hegel’s work thus awaits both Nietzsche’s critique of the origins of Christian virtue and the will-to-nothingness in resentment, and Freud’s retheorization of the logic of subjection in terms of the psyche’s libidinal economy. Butler describes how the unhappy consciousness’s uncontrolled attachment to the bodily life that it seeks to control strikingly prefigures Freud’s

conclusion that the repression of libido is itself libidinally invested, and that the prohibition of desire is therefore also a displaced site of that desire's reassertion. (The abyssal nature of this self-perpetuating economy, in which the renunciation of desire becomes the object of desire, is a subject that Ned Lukacher addresses in his essay on the history of conscience in Freud and Nietzsche.)

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the attachment of the subject to itself is originally *stubborn*, a minimal autonomy born of sheer wilfulness, as Hegel's pun on *Eigensinnigkeit* suggests. But what is for Hegel a tenacious impediment/stepping-stone to the realization of *full* self-consciousness is for Foucault the condition of the possibility of resistance. For Foucault, subjection not only produces desire, as Freud had argued, but also reproduces "bodies," vigorously multiplying the sites at which subjects may be formed and regulated. If Foucault's work can be said to contain any liberationist promise, Butler suggests, it lies in the crowded midst of this propagation of bodies, whose very unpredictability exposes regulatory regimes to (potential) disruption. Like a breeder reactor generating fissionable material, the carceral operates in a tense condition of barely controlled uncontrollability. Reading beyond Foucault, Butler speculates that this proliferation may be possible because of the very excess or surplus that troubled Hegel at the end of the "Lordship and Bondage" section, the stubborn desire to desire that, as desire, necessarily exceeds all possible disciplinary regimes because it forms their structural unconscious.

The irreducible and implicitly disruptive presence of the desiring body that underwrites the logic of subjection from Hegel to Foucault throws into relief the curious tendency of other contemporary theories (also written in the shadow of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*) that either refuse the body or reintroduce it in anxiously revealing ways. Paul de Man's early work, for example, affirms the ascetic denial of desire as the sign of authenticity, as Stanley Corngold's essay points out, while his later work, evoking as it does luridly threatening images of dismemberment, disfigurement, and self-erasure, negatively reinscribes the body as a visceral figure for cognition's absolute vulnerability to "the uncontrollable power of the letter as inscription."<sup>30</sup> Hegel's slave faced with the shattering recognition of his own potential destruction here prefigures de Man's "reader," always and everywhere exposed to the radically inhuman "materiality of language," "whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence."<sup>31</sup> Derridean poststructuralism

could also be said suffer a certain disembodied tendency, replacing the putative materiality of lived experience with a highly attenuated world of traces of traces. Seen from the critical perspective that Hegel provides in “The Unhappy Consciousness,” poststructuralism’s claim that nothing lies outside of the text would then amount to the last expression of the slave ideology: as the triumph of a certain “intellectualism” (to cite a recent description by Drew Leder),<sup>32</sup> Saussurian characterizations of the sign as “both material thing and self transcending intention”<sup>33</sup> effectively renounce bodily experience by absorbing it into a deathless world of language.

Schelling’s speculative work on knowledge’s inability to grasp its own origin and on the irreducibility of the irrational leads him not only to recognize the intrinsic place of otherness within reality, but also, more consequently for the twentieth century, to affirm the subject’s unsublatable indebtedness to that otherness. Heidegger, who declared that he found in Schelling “a new beginning” for philosophy,<sup>34</sup> will famously identify this obligation to the unhidden with the “call of conscience.”<sup>35</sup> But what can conscientiousness mean in such a context? To what and in what way are we *ultimately* responsible? For Heidegger, conscience is strictly the concern of *Dasein*, at once near to hand but quite beyond the residual anthropomorphisms of the philosophical subject. For Nietzsche and Freud, on the other hand, the recognition of human obligation to an absolute Other, though Heideggerian in its implications, is more closely tied to a reevaluation of conscience as it articulates the psychological subject. As Ned Lukacher argues in his essay on the history of conscience, Nietzsche and Freud conduct their projects in surprisingly similar ways: both attempt to write a history (or perhaps an archaeology) of the Judeo-Christian conscience and its secular derivations, de-idealizing human dutifulness by pointing to its instinctual origins; both imagine primal scenes, not unlike the one Butler discusses in Hegel, in which the subject’s coming-into-consciousness coincides with its coming-into-conscientiousness under the force of moral law; and both seek to alleviate the ravages of “bad conscience” by reinventing the subject’s relationship to the “interior” Other. Yet as Lukacher points out, the two projects do not remain entirely aligned: at the end of Freud’s life, on the eve of European civilization’s most horrendous abrogations of conscience, Freud will swerve from his otherwise “Nietzschean” critique of self-beratement by characterizing the momentous advent of Mosaic law not as the catastrophic error that violated the authentic “promise” of human being, but as the

triumph of intellectuality over sensuality, culture over nature. At this overdetermined point of intersection between the two projects, Judaism functions like a *pharmakon*, for what is *poison* for Nietzsche must be, in the final (psycho)analysis, *cure* for Freud.

Notwithstanding this important difference, however, the two thinkers remain committed to the task of radically divesting consciousness of its self-certainty. In this regard, Gadamer is helpful: "The self that we are," he writes, "does not possess itself; one could say that it 'happens'."<sup>36</sup> That the subject "happens" at all, in addition to the anonymous logic of this strange "occurrence," is perhaps the deepest source of astonishment driving the work of Freud and Nietzsche. In probing the interminably peculiar fact that "spirit is the life that itself cuts into life,"<sup>37</sup> they evoke a deeper incision, one marking the trace of the inorganic other as it withdraws from life in order to set life on its perilous way. The critique of conscience, Lukacher argues, thereby becomes a means by which Nietzsche and Freud open the question of the fate of the subject out on to the largest possible vistas: Why is there life, much less "human" life and freedom, rather than endlessly recurring subjectless inorganicity? It is a question that absorbed German idealism before the "Freudo-Nietzschean" critique of the subject, even as it engaged Heidegger, and then Derrida after him. For Lukacher, these thinkers persistently summon us to the knowledge that human beings are ineluctably promised to and derivative of something Other than themselves, whether we call that Other "materiality," "the trace," "Being," "the unconscious," or "the will to power." Though this lifeless Other leaves barely anything of itself in life, it calls us to the same fundamental question: what is "our *ethos* or dwelling-place as human beings?"<sup>38</sup>

If Lukacher addresses the notion of conscience in a radicalized psychoanalytic and finally ontological context, showing how that context dictates the limits of the philosophy of the (rational) subject, Thomas Pfau approaches a similar problematic from a quite different perspective, one that points to the survival (or perhaps revival) of a certain Enlightenment commitment to providing a rational framework for human conduct. For him, the focus is not the subject's "not-Being-the-basis-for-itself" (i.e., its "thrownness"),<sup>39</sup> but the theoretical and historical links joining nineteenth-century reflection on the subject's ineluctably social, ethical life to more recent forms of cultural criticism, historicism, pragmatism, and contextualism. To borrow Jürgen Habermas's language, Pfau implies that "subject-centered reason" is not simply to be displaced