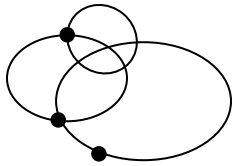


(Rescuing) Hegel's Magical Thinking



Angela Hume

Rescuing Hegel — and only rescue, not revival, is appropriate for him — means facing up to his philosophy where it is most painful and wresting truth from it where its untruth is obvious.

↗ Theodor W. Adorno,
“The Experiential Content of Hegel’s Philosophy”

Two years after the end of the Second World War, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno published their landmark essay “The Concept of Enlightenment” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, lambasting Enlightenment thinking and declaring “the wholly enlightened earth [to be] radiant with triumphant calamity.”¹ For Horkheimer and Adorno, Enlightenment’s program was “the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to...overthrow fantasy with knowledge.”² They argue that such power structures as the scientific method, technology, and the commodity are products of enlightened thinking, a thinking that — and this point is key for Horkheimer and Adorno — can be traced, in some form or another, all the way back to the early rationalizations inherent in mythical visions.³ They elaborate: “the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination, is that of myth itself.”⁴ In other words: Enlightenment claims it seeks to destroy myth but in doing so via acts of exposition and repetition, acts that “acknowledge nothing new under the sun,” submits ever more deeply to the logic of myth.⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno note how early rationalizing myths, “which sought to report, to name, to tell of origins...[and also] to narrate, record, explain,” displaced the earlier spirits and demons, the “incantatory practices of the magician.”⁶ In Enlightenment, deities were, and are, no longer identical with the elements; “being is split between *logos*...and the mass of things and creatures in the external world.”⁷ Ultimately: “the world is made subject to man.”⁸ With the end of magic — which involved relationships between spirits, demons, deities, and the elements — and the beginning of myth came manipulation and mastery of nature; the end of fluidity and multiplicity of identity; and the end of specificity, mimesis, and representation.⁹ Horkheimer and Adorno explain:

Magic implies specific representation. What is done to the spear, the hair, the name of the enemy, is also to befall his person; the sacrificial animal is slain in place of the god. The substitution which takes place in sacrifice marks a step toward discursive logic. But...the uniqueness of the chosen victim which coincides with its representative status, distinguishes it radically, makes it non-exchangeable even in the exchange. [Enlightenment] science puts an end to this. In it there is no specific representation: something which is a sacrificial animal cannot be a god. Representation gives way to universal fungibility. An atom is smashed not as a representative but as a specimen of matter, and the rabbit suffering the torment of the laboratory is seen not as a representative but, mistakenly, as a mere exemplar...The manifold affinities between existing things are supplanted by the single relationship between the subject who confers meaning and the meaningless object...Magic like science is concerned with ends, but it pursues them through mimesis, not through an increasing distance from the object.¹⁰

With reference to this key passage, I want to stress the following point: in the eyes of Horkheimer and Adorno, humanity's turn away from a magical sensibility and toward a mythical (rational) sensibility cannot be demarcated with a clean line. There was no single moment at which enchantment dissipated and disenchantment set in. Case in point: even “the substitution which takes place in sacrifice marks a step toward discursive logic.” Just as mythology always already contained enlightened thinking, magical practices, in some way, always already contained mythical thinking. What I am most interested in here, however, is the key distinction Horkheimer and Adorno do emphatically make between the magical and the mythical/enlightened: with the end of what I am calling “magical thinking” and the beginning of enlightened thinking came chasm and disparity between subject and object — the atom is rendered “specimen,” the rabbit is seen as “exemplar” — and, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the onset of barbarism.

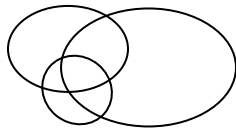
Adorno, in a series of essays published in 1963, heralds Hegel as the prophet of precisely this problematic subject-object disparity. And in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel himself speaks directly to the danger of failed recognition — failed subject-object realization — between two figures, a failure marked by “trial by death,” or a duel to the death:

[In death] there vanishes from [the] interplay [of two consciousnesses] the essential moment of splitting into extremes with opposite characteristics; and the middle term collapses into a lifeless unity...and the two do not reciprocally give and receive one another back from each other consciously, but leave each other free only indifferently, like things.¹¹

In trial by death, when two subject-objects do not mutually recognize one another as subject-objects — that is, as both subject *and* object — they leave each other “indifferently”; they reduce each other to things. Two centuries after Hegel, the posthumanist Donna Haraway echoes Hegel as well as Horkheimer and Adorno when she asserts the importance of subject-object recognition: “the animals in labs...just as we humans *are both subject and object all the time*...It is not killing that gets us into exterminism, but making beings killable.”¹² As we see in Hegel, in Horkheimer and Adorno, and now in Haraway, with the end of magical thinking — a thinking in which subject is always also object and object is always also subject; in which “each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other” (per Hegel)¹³ — and the beginning of enlightened thinking — “the distance of subject from object, the presupposition of abstraction” (per Horkheimer and Adorno)¹⁴ — comes thingification, universal fungibility, and exterminism. And these prophecies speak sharply and poignantly to a contemporary Western society so implicated in and by its entrenchment in capitalist economies and acts of violence against cultures and environments.

In this piece I will ask: how to rescue magical thinking (a notion I am inheriting from Horkheimer and Adorno) in and from Hegel (often via Adorno) and imagine its possibilities for posthuman society, ethics, and aesthetics?¹⁵ How are contemporary posthuman theorists and ecocritical artists inheriting Hegel's “magical” dialectic in their own work in order to recast subject-object relations in a time of ecological crisis? First,

through close readings of both Adorno and Hegel, I will show how magical thinking is deeply manifest in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Then I will discuss how Donna Haraway, following in the traditions of Hegel and Adorno, is magically thinking her way toward new models for relating more ethically (to borrow Haraway's own terminology) to human and other-than-human others in the twenty-first century.¹⁶ Finally, I will look at how such Hegelian models are being adapted in and by contemporary aesthetic practice — specifically in the experimental eco-poetics of Brenda Hillman. In the end, I will assert that contemporary posthumanisms and eco-poetics in fact need magical thinking in order to reimagine both the social and the ecological in a time of crisis and resuscitate a devastatingly enlightened world.



What marks a magical sensibility as opposed to an enlightened sensibility? For Horkheimer and Adorno in “The Concept of Enlightenment,” the advent of Enlightenment stripped matter of all illusory powers and hidden properties.¹⁷ Prior to Enlightenment, a magical sensibility was open to the possibility of the interior life of any and every thing.¹⁸ With the Enlightenment, the gods were set apart from the substances of the world whereas for a magical sensibility, any creature could have been a god.¹⁹ Furthermore, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, he who practiced magic was not singular; he changed with the masks he wore, which represented the multiplicity of spirits.²⁰ So for the magical thinker, no subject or object was unified or closed; no one thing was at risk of being lost in or to all other things. Finally, magic involved specific representation.²¹ Therefore, in magic no one thing was exchangeable for any other thing. Interiority, the divinity of the daily, multiplicity, fluidity, irreducibility, and the subject-object status of every single thing — these were attributes of the magical (per Horkheimer and Adorno). And these values, even today, stand in stark contrast to those of Enlightenment: knowledge, calculability, unity, utility, exchangeability, abstraction, and the rending apart of subject and object.²²

Adorno, in his 1963 series of essays titled *Hegel: Three Studies*, aligns Hegel's sensibility with precisely the kind of magical sensibility that he and Horkheimer lay out in “The Concept of Enlightenment.” Adorno reads Hegel against the grain, arguing that Hegel's dialectical thinking actually works to subvert the enlightened thinking of his time. Recall Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that “magic like science is concerned with ends, but it pursues them through mimesis, not through an increasing distance from the object.” In his essay “Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy,” Adorno writes:

Thought that completely extirpated its mimetic impulse ... would end up in madness ... The speculative Hegelian concept rescues mimesis through spirit's self-reflection: truth is not *adaequatio* but affinity, and in the decline of idealism reason's mindfulness of its mimetic nature is revealed by Hegel to be its human right.²³

Here Adorno argues that Hegel's speculative method rescues mimesis — a mimesis, recall, that for Horkheimer and Adorno is markedly different from the abstraction of enlightened thinking — and reveals it to be essentially “human.” In other words, mimesis — which for Hegel is self-reflection in and affinity with the subject-object other — is what saves us from a decline into the dehumanizing cultures of Enlightenment science and exchange, those cultures that distance us from others around us and reduce them to objects. For Adorno, Hegel's magical “mimetic impulse” is fundamental to the subversion of Enlightenment thinking.

Adorno continues to align Hegel's thinking with a kind of magical thinking in his essay “The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy.” In this piece, Adorno argues that, for Hegel, “there is nothing between heaven and earth that is not ‘*vermittelt*’ [mediated], nothing, therefore, that does not contain ... a spiritual moment.”²⁴ Unlike other Enlightenment thinkers, Adorno explains, Hegel believes in the interior spiritual life of all things. Adorno continues: “[Hegel's] impulse to elevate spirit, however deluded, draws its strength from a resistance to dead knowledge.”²⁵ For Adorno, as “deluded” as Hegel's belief may be, its essential work is its resistance to enlightened science. Adorno goes on to point out that, in Hegel's dialectic, “Once the object has become subject in the absolute, the object is no longer inferior vis-à-vis the subject.”²⁶ Furthermore:

science establishes ... concepts and makes its judgments without regard for the fact that the life of the subject matter for which the concept is intended does not exhaust itself in conceptual specification. What furnishes the canon for Hegelian idealism is ... the need to grasp...what the matter at hand actually is and what essential and by no means mutually harmonious moments it contains ...²⁷

In other words: in and through Hegel's dialectic, subject and object — both subject-objects — stand on equal ground. In addition, dialectical thinking acknowledges the mysterious and not-yet-understood “life” of the subject-object — a “life” whose fullness is beyond the reach of conceptual science. Here again, Adorno illuminates how magical thinking is manifest in Hegel: no one subject-object — no one “life” — can be articulated and therefore abstracted and reduced (as in enlightened thinking); instead, every subject-object remains a mysterious, open, irreducible existence.²⁸

Finally, Adorno gestures toward the *critical* capacity of such magical thinking in Hegel when he writes:

When [Hegel's] philosophy is fully elaborated ... the difference between subject and object disappears...In that consciousness recalls, through self-reflection ... *how it has mutilated things* with its ordering concepts ... scientific consciousness comes face to face in Hegel with what a causal-mechanistic science, as a science of the domination of nature, has done to nature.²⁹

Adorno adds: “[This] self-reflection ... is actually society's dawning critical consciousness of itself.”³⁰ Again he emphasizes that, in and through the dialectic, any subject-object

dualism disappears. Additionally, he suggests that when (magical) thinking confronts scientific thinking, consciousness becomes capable of seeing how it has mutilated nature. For Adorno, this type of (magical) thinking is the beginning of a more critical consciousness. On my reading of Adorno reading Hegel, magical thinking is the precursor to any critical or reparative action. Magical thinking is the beginning of “critical theory” itself.

In his essay “Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel,” Adorno completes his alignment of Hegel’s thinking with magical thinking through a close reading of Hegel’s rhetoric, or form. To start, Adorno argues that the Cartesian, rationalist, enlightened “ideal of clarity” in form and content is beside the point in Hegel.³¹ More specifically:

Clarity can be demanded of all knowledge only when it has been determined that the objects under investigation are free of all dynamic qualities that would cause them to elude the gaze that tries to capture and hold them unambiguously ... rather, [in Hegel] the subject itself also moves, by virtue of its relationship to the object that is inherently in motion ... Faced with this, the simple demand for clarity and distinctness becomes obsolete.³²

In other words, for Adorno the “ideal of clarity” assumes the fixableness of all things. In “clarity,” things are frozen, pinned down, and made available to consciousness for scientific observation or exchange. In Hegel, on the other hand, all things are always already in dialectical motion. In this way, Hegel’s form resists the clarity so crucial to enlightened scientific thinking, and instead, perhaps, like he who “practiced magic ... not single or identical,” changes with the “cult masks which [represent] the multiplicity of spirits.”³³ For Adorno, subject-objects in Hegel are dynamic and multiple — magical.

I want to highlight two other important points that Adorno makes about Hegel’s form in “Skoteinos.” First, Adorno argues that Hegel’s work requires the reader’s imaginative participation: “No one can read any more out of Hegel than he puts in ... The content itself contains, as a law of its form, the expectation of productive imagination on the part of the one reading ... Understanding has to find a foothold in the gap between experience and concept.”³⁴ What Adorno is gesturing toward here has everything to do with the “afterlife of philosophical works, the unfolding of their substance,” which he describes shortly before the passage I just quoted.³⁵ For Adorno, the meaning of a philosophical work is realized in the space between the philosopher’s thought (or form) and the reader’s mediation of, or *thinking*, it. In Adorno’s own words: “intellectual experience can be expressed only by being reflected in its mediation — that is, actively thought.”³⁶ And so, in Adorno’s view, Hegel’s radically unfixed, fluid, wide-open text demands precisely this work of mediating, or thinking, the meaning of the work. In other words, Hegel’s form itself expects and exacts “productive imagination.” In this very Hegelian way, Adorno reads the act of reading Hegel as an entirely reciprocal process and project. Here Adorno again gestures toward traces of mimetic magic in Hegel: “manifold affinities between ... things” mark the magical relationship between text and reader — in contrast to the enlightened relationship, which consists of a “single relationship between [a] subject who confers meaning [on a] meaningless object.”³⁷

Unclarity, productive imagination ... Adorno then goes on to introduce another concept key to the process of reading Hegel: experimentation. For Adorno,

reading Hegel is an experimental procedure: one allows possible interpretations to come to mind, proposes them, and compares them with the text and with what has already been reliably interpreted ... Hegel provokes the experimental method...To read him experimentally is to judge him by his own criterion ... When it comes to Hegel, a particularly high degree of such interplay must be demanded.³⁸

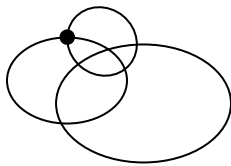
When reading Hegel, Adorno explains, one must approach the text openly, associatively, and comparatively. In short, the reader must perform a kind of experimental “interplay.” Here again Adorno points toward Hegel’s magical mimesis — the dynamic, heterogeneous relationship between two subject-objects (in this case, text and reader).

So far, I have read Adorno as reading in Hegel distinctly magical thinking — the kind of thinking that opposes enlightened paradigms, which continue to lead humanity, through calculation and commodification, down the road to barbarism. For Adorno, magical thinking in Hegel looks like this: it asserts and performs, first and foremost, the subject-object status of every single thing (“the construction of the subject-object [in Hegel] ... is in fact presupposed by every dialectical step”); mimetic relating; the irreducible, spiritual, not-yet-understood status of every subject-object; unclarity, which is always an unfixedness; productive imagination; and, finally, experimentalism and experimental interplay.³⁹ Next, I want to introduce yet another key aspect of Hegel’s magical thought and form. Then I will show how all of these aspects of Hegel’s magical thinking are reimaged by posthuman theory and art for the new century.

Integral to Hegel’s magical form — in addition to its radical unclarity, its openness to and dependence on reader imagination and experimentation (per Adorno’s reading) — is its unrelenting and incessant *repetition*. In calling Hegel’s form repetitive, I am positing a definition very different from the one laid out by Horkheimer and Adorno:

the more the illusion of magic vanishes, the more implacably repetition, in the guise of regularity, imprisons human beings in the cycle now objectified in the laws of nature, to which they believe they owe their security as free subjects. The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination, is that of myth itself ... Whatever might be different is made the same.⁴⁰

According to this definition, repetition is the mark of enlightened thinking in all of Enlightenment’s disenchantment, regularity, rationality, and closedness. The magical repetition in Hegel to which I am referring, on the other hand, has everything to do with ritual, dynamism, and performance. And now, I will table Adorno and turn to the magical leviathan himself.



One crucial aspect of magical repetition in Hegel is *ritualized repetition*. In Hegel, philosophy is kinetic. He insists that “we must ... exert ourselves to know the particulars”; philosophy is a “carrying out,” a “process,” and a “surrendering.”⁴¹ Already in these early characterizations, the nearness of Hegel’s dialectical thinking to ritual is apparent. Ritual, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is an “order of performing a ... devotional service” or a “series of actions...compulsively performed.”⁴² It is by definition ordered, devoted, compulsive, and performative. Importantly, some anthropologists argue that in ancient magic, the ordered performance of ritual was valued not for its apparent causation of certain phenomena but for its anticipation and completion of a course of events.⁴³ Here is Hegel, for whom “the real issue [of the philosophical work] is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about.”⁴⁴ The value of magical ritual is one’s participation in the order of its performance; the value of philosophy (for Hegel) is one’s participation in the ritual process through which it comes about.

Bound up with ritual, of course, is repetition. Think, for example, of seasonal or calendrical practices.⁴⁵ And recall the very definition of ritual: there is an aspect of compulsion to it. Here, even more importantly, is Hegel. From the first pages of the *Phenomenology* to the very last, Hegel articulates and rearticulates — with ritualistic compulsion — his dialectic, whose substance and product are, at once, always already the whole. In the Preface, Hegel offers one of his first articulations: “And experience is the name we give to just this movement, in which the immediate, the unexperienced ... becomes alienated from itself and then returns to itself from this alienation, and is only then revealed for the first time in its actuality and truth.”⁴⁶ Shortly before this moment, Hegel offers a briefer yet nonetheless bottomless articulation: “The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence perfecting itself through its development.”⁴⁷ In both passages, “truth” is active: in the first case, it is movement (a becoming, a return), and in the second, a perfecting, or development. In other words, truth for Hegel is ritual experience — experience in and through “the order of its performance.” Essentially for Hegel, truth is the whole; thus, truth is the shape of ritual experience itself, in all of its moments.⁴⁸ Notably, these two passages do not say the same thing with different words. In one, the truth of experience is alienation and subsequent return from alienation; in the other, truth is a perfecting *through*. Yet even at this early point in the book, Hegel is practicing ritualized repetition: not repetition of concepts necessarily but repetition of a formal gesture. In both passages, he works to evoke the essence of the shape of his dialectic — ebb and flow, departure and return, perfecting through — through his form. But not simply through the texture of his sentences in their gathering syntax, their lifts and dips. The text, in its centripetalism, homed in on performances of articulation and re-articulation, differentiation and collapse, effects the amoebic shape of Hegel’s “truth,” which is none other than the shape of ritual experience. Ritualized repetition of form mimics the pulsive, impulsive tendency of the dialectic itself.

A second key aspect of magical repetition in Hegel is *dynamic repetition*. At this point, I want to juxtapose a number of passages from the *Phenomenology*. In the following passages, one can see not only the ritualized repetition of Hegel’s form but also its

dynamic repetition. In using the phrase “dynamic repetition,” I mean to suggest that Hegel’s form, in and through its incessant and varied articulations and re-articulations of the dialectic, actively produces and re-produces its meaning. In this way, both form and dialectic (Hegel’s form arguably is never anything more than dialectic itself) are in motion. Importantly, magic is deeply dynamic. Recall that for Horkheimer and Adorno, in magic “manifold affinities” exist between things.⁴⁹ All relationships are varied and multiple. Furthermore, he who practices magic is never singular; he changes with the masks he wears.⁵⁰ The very essence of magic is its multiplicity and transitory nature — its dynamism.

With these aspects of magic in mind, consider the following four passages from the *Phenomenology*:

- 1 The movement of a being that immediately is, consists partly in becoming an other than itself, and thus becoming its own immanent content ... In the former movement, *negativity* is the differentiating and positing of *existence*; in this return into self, it is the becoming of the *determinate simplicity*.⁵¹
- 2 [I]n it [the unconditioned universal, which results from awareness of the completely developed object], the unity of “being-for-self” and “being-for-another” is posited; in other words, the absolute antithesis is posited as a self-identical essence ... In general, to be for itself and to be in relation to an other constitutes the nature and essence of the content, whose truth consists in its being unconditionally universal; and the result is simply and solely universal.⁵²
- 3 [T]he “matters” [constituent moments] posited as independent directly pass over into their unity, and their unity directly unfolds its diversity, and this once again reduces itself to unity. But this movement is what is called *Force*.⁵³
- 4 Spirit is *this movement* of the Self which empties itself of itself and sinks itself into its substance, and also, as Subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it cancels this difference between objectivity and content.⁵⁴

In these passages, which represent various moments in the unfolding of the phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel articulates his dialectic in different ways. While the loose shape of the dialectic holds together in and through each passage, the terminology, details, and insights into its nature change. What is the shape of this dialectical movement? In the first passage, it is a “becoming ... other than itself, and thus becoming its own” — a departure and subsequent return, a going and coming, and, crucially, a drama implicating both object (the “other than itself”) and subject (“its own”). Hegel’s use of the *gerund* (“becoming”) lends emphasis to the immediacy of movement so key to the shape of the dialectic. Furthermore, Hegel repeatedly employs the verb “to be” to establish, undermine, and establish again equations and conflations: “*negativity is* the differentiating and positing of *existence*”; “it is the becoming of the *determinate simplicity*.”⁵⁵ The effect of this choice is a simultaneous distillation and collapse of specificity. Notably, the formal device here mimics the very nature of the dialectic itself. Recall Hegel’s assertion that “the whole is nothing other than the essence perfecting itself through its development.” In other words: the whole is at the same time its moments, and its

moments are at the same time the whole. In Passage 2, Hegel further articulates dialectical movement: “the unity of ‘being-for-self’ and ‘being-for-another’ ... the result is simply and solely universal.” Here again, as in the first passage, both subject and object inhabit and constitute the shape of the dialectic; however, the focus in Passage 2 is on the coming together of these two figures, a unification that is in itself a manifestation of the “universal.” Here Hegel also employs the *gerund*, but instead of “becoming,” there is simply “being,” further evoking the nearness of subject to object in the moment of “return,” or in the “universal.” While reproducing the dialectical shape evoked in the first passage, the second passage further realizes the nature of it through a slight shift in focus. In this nuanced shifting lies Hegel’s dynamism or dynamic repetition. Hegel takes the dialectic to yet another level in the third passage. Once again, there is roughly the same shape, this time articulated as an unfolding and subsequent reducing: “unity directly unfolds its diversity, and this once again reduces itself to unity.” But here, importantly, Hegel names the movement *Force*, further characterizing it. As we can see in this passage, with each act of dynamic repetition, Hegel complicates the dialectic, glimpsing new facets. In the fourth passage, which appears late in the *Phenomenology*, the shape of the dialectic is an emptying, or sinking, and subsequent going into. Notably here, the dialectical movement also called Force has now been further distilled as Spirit. In addition, by this point all distance between object and subject (“content”) has been “canceled.” Perhaps most significantly in this passage, Spirit is equivalent to, or embodiment of, agential self, a self whose substance is movement, Force, and Spirit; whose nature it is to “make” its substance into subject-object, i.e., to realize itself as both subject *and* object. Much has occurred by this moment in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Spirit, which began as simple “negation” and “existence” (first passage), is now an agential and complicated “making,” or process, the very process through which subject-objects are produced (fourth passage). While Hegel reproduces, or re-produces, loosely the same shape in each passage, the content of each passage is unstable, in flux. This is Hegel’s dynamic repetition. To return to the magical: in these passages, Hegel captures the “manifold affinities between ... things” — between words, between descriptions, between subjects and objects, or between subject-objects. Furthermore, each passage refuses singularity, in a way “changing with [its] masks.” A magical dynamic repetition, indeed.

A third aspect of Hegel’s magical repetition is its performative nature.

Performative repetition is bound up with both ritual and dynamism. Recall the definition of ritual: a “series of actions ... compulsively performed.” And recall how in ancient magic, the ordered performance of magical rituals was valued not so much for its apparent causality as for the steps involved. And recall Hegel: “the real issue is not exhausted by stating its aim, but by carrying it out.” In Hegel, as in magic, the means — the performance — is an end in itself.

What makes Hegel’s form performative and more specifically performatively repetitive? Certainly we see elements of performance in Hegel’s dynamism, as I have discussed: in rearticulating the dialectic in different ways, Hegel’s text embodies activity. It is absolutely in flux. To thoroughly address the question though, one might turn to the section of the *Phenomenology* entitled “Self-Consciousness.” In this section, Hegel’s

articulations are more relentlessly rendered than in preceding sections. His dialectic is articulated in almost every paragraph, sometimes more than once within a single paragraph, culminating with such new, more developed forms as the recognition process, the trial by death, and the lord and bondsman (master-slave) dynamic. I will discuss two of these new dialectical formations momentarily, but first I want to consider Judith Butler's theory of performative repetition, which in my view helps elucidate what I am calling performative repetition in Hegel.

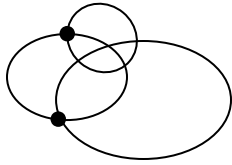
For Butler, the "being" of gender, or of any identity category, is an effect, a process, and an ongoing practice open to intervention and resignification.⁵⁶ For Butler, there are no "real" or "natural" identities; rather, identity is a "phantasmatic construction."⁵⁷ Identity is a performance, and realizing this fact enables us to transform practices of repetition — from practices limited by their mandate to reinstitute "natural" identity categories (e.g., gender binaries) to new practices of repetition that intervene and subvert these problematic "natural" identities.⁵⁸ It is this type of performative repetition that, for Butler, facilitates political and social change. Butler explains her position further: "My argument is that there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed ... It is precisely the discursively variable construction of each in and through the other that has interested me here."⁵⁹ In other words, there is no subject who constructs; there is only the constructing and the constructed, the process and the product. There are only "variable constructions" that occur in and through each other. And in these moments of "variable construction" — moments of deviation and subversion — agencies emerge.⁶⁰

Per Butler, how do we see Hegel practicing performative repetition, perhaps as a means for realizing new forms for and sites of agency? As I have said, for answers one might turn to Hegel's section "Self-Consciousness." I want to look in this section at what are some of the most performatively repetitive, or "variably constructive" (to recall Butler's language), moments in the *Phenomenology*: (1) the moment at which the dialectic, understood as a recognition process, is realized to be bound up with affective materiality, and (2) the moment at which the dialectic is realized as having a capacity for failure, or "trial by death."

Recognition in Hegel is a manifestation of the dialectic, in which two self-consciousnesses ultimately "*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another."⁶¹ In recognition, each consciousness sees itself in the other and desires to supersede this other in order to become more certain of itself.⁶² The act of supersession is "an ambiguous return *into itself*"; however, it is also a "giving back" or "letting go" of the other.⁶³ Key to this "movement" is reciprocity and, furthermore, the attainment of subject-object status by each consciousness: "Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other."⁶⁴ Each is to the other both subject ("for itself") and object ("for the other"). At this point, Hegel has articulated the dialectic in its greatest detail and depth thus far. The key moment of performative repetition occurs when Hegel writes: "through the supersession...the other self-consciousness equally gives it back again to itself [the other], for it saw itself in the other."⁶⁵ While following the familiar shape of the dialectic, Hegel here trips upon

something quite new: while “return” into self is key to realization of the dialectic, so is “receiving back” self from the other — both letting go and *being let go* are necessary. In other words: recognition here becomes not only mimetic but also directly relational, affective. For the first time, Hegel’s language gestures toward the materiality of dialectical movement in space (“the other ... equally gives it back again”); he has touched on the experience of embodiment in the world, in all of its grasping and releasing, its holding on and letting go. For Hegel, the movement of self-consciousness is always a “double movement”: “both its own action and the action of the other as well.”⁶⁶ Here again is a language of affective materiality, in which two self-consciousnesses perform *actions*, implicating one another in the process. Hegel continues, “The first does not have the object before it merely as it exists primarily for desire, but as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it.”⁶⁷ Two self-consciousnesses, akin here to bodies, must resist the desire and drive to make *use* of each other. How is Hegel able to achieve this breakthrough? In my view, it is the result of his performative repetition. In constructing and reconstructing the dialectic, Hegel remains open to “the possibility of a variation on that repetition” (to return to Butler). For Hegel, creative agency lies in the act, or process, of construction and reconstruction, of performative repetition itself.⁶⁸

It is Hegel’s breakthrough via performative repetition that enables him to realize the implications of the material affect so bound up with the recognition process and eventually articulate what he names the “trial by death.”⁶⁹ In the midst of the recognition process, at the moment in which consciousness “goes out” of itself, it must present itself as not attached to common existence, or life.⁷⁰ With this new sense of affective materiality, Hegel sees for the first time that recognition has the capacity to go terribly awry: “This presentation [i.e., going out of self] is a twofold action: action on the part of the other and action on its own part. In so far as it is the action of the *other*, each seeks the death of the other.”⁷¹ When two self-consciousnesses go out of their selves in order to approach each other, each necessarily fights to preserve its own life, and this compulsion to preserve leads to a life-and-death struggle.⁷² Hegel, through performative repetition — in writing through the dialectic yet again — has arrived upon new territory: the realm of the volatile and ephemeral material world, in which recognition can fail and beings can die. And it is at this point that Hegel begins to map an ethics. Recall how failed recognition — the failure of each self-consciousness to realize and achieve the status of both subject and object — causes beings to “leave each other ... indifferently, like things.”⁷³ Without recognition, the world to self-consciousness is comprised of expendable things. And recall Horkheimer and Adorno’s claim, which is also Haraway’s claim, that it is precisely this type of thinking that leads humanity down the road to universal fungibility and exterminism. An essential breakthrough for Hegel, indeed — one that was only possible through magical performative repetition.



I have shown how Hegel's magical thinking works to subvert the paradigms of Enlightenment science and the commodity, ultimately imparting the need for the subject-object status of every single thing and realizing new formal possibilities for resisting thingification, fungibility, and exterminism. Now I want to show how the kind of magical thinking Hegel performs in his *Phenomenology* is precisely the type of thinking that some posthuman thinkers are exploring today as they begin to imagine new paradigms for relating more ethically in and to the material world. I will highlight aspects of Donna Haraway's theory to show what magical thinking can look like in the twenty-first century. Then I will look at the experimental ecopoetry of Brenda Hillman to show how Hegel's magical thinking is manifest in contemporary aesthetic practice.

In Donna Haraway's book *When Species Meet* (2008), she poses the questions: "(1) Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog? and (2) How is 'becoming with' a practice of becoming worldly?"⁷⁴ To answer these questions, Haraway discusses a digital image a friend had captured and sent to her of a redwood stump covered in mosses and lichens, bearing a striking resemblance to a dog ("Jim's dog"). She argues that in "touching" the dog via digital photography, one touches all of the technological and biological histories that constitute this moment, our moment of contact.⁷⁵ Haraway explains: "[In 'touching' the dog] we are inside the histories of IT engineering, electronic product assembly-line labor, mining and IT waste disposal, plastics research and manufacturing...The people and the things are in mutually constituting, intra-active touch."⁷⁶ When we acknowledge all of the histories, power relationships, humans, non-humans, and things we "touch" when we make contact with such "other" beings as Jim's dog — when we recognize the intra-active and intersectional nature of all matter — we begin the practice of "becoming worldly." And in becoming worldly, "the clean lines between traditional and modern, organic and technological, human and nonhuman give way."⁷⁷ Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly: "Jim's dog is a provocation to curiosity...one of the first obligations...of worldly companion species."⁷⁸ Becoming curious, too, is fundamental to becoming worldly.

For Haraway, becoming worldly is always political. In acknowledging those beings categorized as "other" — "gods, machines, animals ... and noncitizens in general" — we undermine the (often anthropocentric) sciences, philosophies, and power structures that institute these "other" categories in the first place.⁷⁹ Notably, Haraway draws a sharp distinction between the "High Science" — which, for her, is interested in genius, progress, beauty, power, and money — and the more progressive sciences that she argues have played leading roles in displacing the human in models for understanding the universe.⁸⁰ In Haraway's view, it is precisely the curiosity inherent in practices of becoming worldly

that enables us to remake the sciences, or, to use Haraway's words, "reweave the fibers of the scientist's being."⁸¹

What Haraway calls the "High Science" is essentially the Enlightenment science Horkheimer and Adorno assail in "Critique of Enlightenment," and to which Adorno situates Hegel in opposition. Recall that, for Horkheimer and Adorno, Enlightenment (science) "[acknowledges] nothing new under the sun." Haraway imagines an alternative: a science that "[makes] it possible for something unexpected to happen."⁸² She illustrates what this alternative science might look like by telling the story of the scientist Barbara Smuts, who studied baboons in Kenya. When Smuts began her research, she behaved neutrally around the baboons. But the more Smuts ignored them, the more agitated the animals seemed. It wasn't until Smuts changed her behavior, taking cues from the baboons, that they became comfortable in her presence. Also, the baboons began treating her like a subject with whom they could communicate as opposed to like an object.⁸³ Haraway argues that the story of Smuts and the baboons serves as an example of a "natureculture" in which "all the actors become who they are *in the dance of relating* [and] all the dancers are redone through the patterns they enact."⁸⁴ Becoming worldly, for Haraway, is a practice always open to the unexpected, to redoing and being redone. Furthermore, it involves "*respecere* ... the act of respect. To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally... To knot companion and species together in encounter, in regard and respect is to enter the world of becoming with."⁸⁵ Becoming worldly, which (as Haraway shows) is always also science — or science, which is always also becoming worldly — involves "touch" (recall Jim's dog), curiosity, an openness to the unexpected and to redoing and being redone, and respect.

Haraway's paradigm (or science) of becoming worldly is both deeply Hegelian and deeply magical. I want to suggest that what Haraway offers us is a model for *magically thinking science*. It is not difficult to see the Hegel (and not to mention the Adorno) in Haraway. One has only to juxtapose the two thinkers' articulations of the "shape" of "life" itself to see the affinity of their thought. For Hegel, "the 'matters' [constituent moments] posited as independent directly pass over into their unity, and their unity directly unfolds its diversity, and this once again reduces itself to unity."⁸⁶ Furthermore: "Thus the simple substance of Life is the splitting up of itself into shapes and at the same time the dissolution of these existent differences."⁸⁷ And for Haraway:

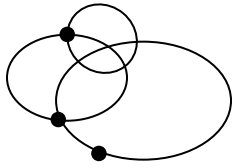
the shape and temporality of life on earth are more like a liquid-crystal consortium folding on itself again and again than a well-branched tree. Ordinary identities emerge and are rightly cherished, but they remain always a relational web opening to non-Euclidean pasts, presents, and futures. The ordinary is a multipartner mud-dance issuing from and in entangled species.⁸⁸

For both Hegel and Haraway, in "life," "shapes" "unfold," "split up," or "emerge" but always return to or remain "a unity" or "web" (Hegel : dialectic :: Haraway : "multipartner mud-dance"). The diction in both Hegel and Haraway evokes the tactile material world; in it, there is "matter," "substance," "shape," "liquid," "mud," and more. In the end, Hegel and Haraway are both interested in relationships and affect in and between material forms — a dialectical science indeed.

Furthermore, Haraway, in the spirit of both Hegel and Adorno, demonstrates how one might begin to magically think science. Recall aspects of the magical: interiority, multiplicity, fluidity, specificity, and the subject-object status of every single thing. Here is Haraway. For her, any (scientific) encounter with any companion species or thing has a depth, multiplicity, fluidity, and specificity uniquely its own. The event of Jim's dog, for example, is made possible by "mutually constituting, intra-active touch." Furthermore, for Haraway, knots of companion species and things must be encountered in all of their movement and dynamism — their "emergence," "folding," and "webbing." And of course, "the animals in labs ... just as we humans are both subject and object all the time." Haraway also utilizes (forms of Hegel's forms of) ritualized, dynamic, and performative repetition. For her, "becoming with" and "becoming worldly" are always ritual and dynamic practices. The "multipartner mud-dance issuing from and in entangled species" — the shape of life itself — is, at base, ritualized, dynamic repetition. Haraway advocates forms of performative repetition (or, per Butler, "variable constructions") too. Her advocacy is perhaps most apparent in her assertion that "We are, constitutively, companion species. We make each other up."⁸⁹ The double meaning of this claim is striking and essential: species and things "make each other," meaning not only that they materially shape one another — mixing cells, microbes, and molecules in every moment of contact — but that they also "make each other up"; at every turn, they *imagine* one another and ways *toward* one another. All touch between companion species is imaginative "touch across difference."⁹⁰

How to map this "magical" ethics — the ethics of magical thinking — as we have seen it at work in and across the critical theories of Hegel, Adorno, and Haraway? First, in the ethics of magical thinking, subject is always also object and object is always also subject. As I have shown, this subject-object premise works foundationally in the theories of Hegel, Adorno, and Haraway. In addition, magical thinking values and entails interiority, multiplicity, fluidity, and specificity, and as I have discussed these attributes are foregrounded by such posthumanisms as Haraway's. Adorno, in his writings on Hegel, shows that magical thinking also involves mimesis, an openness to what is not-yet-understood, *unclarity* (i.e., unfixity), imagination, and experimentation. And as I have illustrated, these values, too, are central to Haraway's paradigm. Furthermore, magical thinking, per Hegel, exacts ritualized, dynamic, and performative forms of repetition — forms that are always open to the unexpected, to redoing and being redone. And Haraway, following Hegel and Adorno (regardless of whether she realizes it), further complicates magical thinking for the twenty-first century by introducing such new, or newly realized, magical concepts as curiosity, respect, and touch.

Magical thinking sets out to subvert Enlightenment science, the cult of the commodity, and the anthropocentrism that make beings killable and preclude imaginative acts of ethical relating. How do we see magical thinking at work in contemporary aesthetic practice, too? How are experimental artists exploring magical posthumanisms and reimagining subject-object relations? To begin to address these questions, I will turn now to the ecopoetics of Brenda Hillman.



In a pair of short poems from 2011, titled “Two Summer Aubades, After John Clare,” Brenda Hillman mobilizes the lyric as a means of imagining her way toward the other-than-human world and critiquing human environmental degradation.⁹¹ In homage to the Romantic poet John Clare, Hillman performs what she calls “spoken-bird poetry.”⁹² While Hillman is being playful, her comment prompts a useful question: what type of thinking might “speaking bird” entail? What kind of thinking renders “spoken-bird poetry” even imaginable? I will show how in these poems, Hillman practices distinctly magical thinking, per Hegel, Adorno, and Haraway, ultimately staging a posthuman environmental ethics. In the first poem, Hillman writes:

towhee [*Pipilo crissalis*] wakes a human

pp cp cp cp chp chp
 pppppppppppp
 cppppcpp cpp cpp
 (a woman tosses)
 Gulf disaster ster sister
 aster aster as asp
 ppp cp cp p bp bp BP BP
 scree sreeeeem we
 we we didn't
 neee needed to move so fast⁹³

Here Hillman imagines an interspecies exchange, exploring the sound, language, and expression that are the result of this contact — to use Haraway’s words, “mutually constituting ... touch.” The poem itself is an act of close listening. In it, very little action occurs: a woman wakes, tosses, and listens to towhee morning vocalizations, perhaps outside of her window. At first, the bird vocalizations are simply ambient. The towhee’s repetitive, shrill “chp” is evocative of a familiar dawn soundscape:

pp cp cp cp chp chp

At the outset, the bird call is pure, spontaneous sound, evolving subtly, almost imperceptibly, with the unfurling of the line that contains it: “cp cp” becomes “chp chp.” In line three, however, the bird’s call breaks into song: “pppppppppppp.”⁹⁴ Here the written line vibrates with the towhee’s trill, demanding the reader’s heightened attention. Notably, Hillman allows for the towhee’s song to comprise three consecutive lines of the

poem's ten; she insists that time and space be given to that which is unpredictable and other to human ears. In foregrounding the bird, Hillman acknowledges the mysterious and irreducible life of the animal, both calling, singing subject and audible, readable object. In this way also, Hillman de-centers the human figure – both the woman in the poem and the poem's reader – a conspicuous refusal of anthropocentrism.

As the bird's song becomes more insistent and complex in the course of poem, the woman is moved to enter into a collaboration with the bird and her environment — a kind of “mimetic relating,” self-reflection in and affinity with the subject-object other (reminiscent of Adorno on Hegel). Surprisingly to the reader, she hears:

Gulf disaster ster sister
 aster aster as asp

This language refers not only to the human world but to the other-than-human world as well — not only “Gulf disaster” but “aster,” a genus of flowering plants. What is the source of this mimetic language and sound? Does it emerge from the breezy caesuras between towhee vocalizations? After all, the wispy “a” and “s” sounds here are very different from the sharp, metallic *chp*'s of previous lines. Is it a culmination of the morning din, bird song and breeze combined? The reader cannot know, and the poem itself facilitates this sense of ambiguity and simultaneity. Then:

ppp cp cp p bp bp BP BP
 scree sreeeeem we

By this point, the bird's song and the woman's own meditations have come together as collaborative expression. Through this imagined collaboration — in repeating the “pp” and “cp” sounds while also allowing for variation, a kind of dynamic repetition — the poem arrives at “BP,” and then at an exasperated “scree sreeeeem,” one that is conceived of as belonging not to the woman or bird alone but to both at once: “we.” Here is Hegelian magical thinking at work in contemporary ecolytic. Through openness to and acknowledgement of the not-yet-understood other-than-human other; mimesis and experimentation, a kind of “experimental interplay”; and dynamic repetition: something entirely unexpected — between human and bird — is imagined. Magical thinking in lyric practice enables Hillman to conceive of new possible forms for relating to the towhee and also to the fact of contemporary environmental devastation; response to the 2010 BP blowout in the Gulf of Mexico, or “disaster,” has become by the end of the poem a collective gesture, a collective “scree sreeeeem.” Here also is Haraway's “becoming worldly” — woman and bird are conceived of as “making each other *up*” as the poem progresses, a manifestation of “touch across difference.”

Importantly, readers are invited to participate in the poem's experimental relating as well. As readers encounter and mimic the towhee's “chp chp,” making the sounds with their own tongues, teeth, and lips, they enter into and engage with the poem's environment in a material, embodied way. Recall Adorno on Hegel: “The content itself contains, as a law of its form, the expectation of productive imagination on the part

of the one reading.” Like Hegel’s, Hillman’s text, too, exacts the imaginative participation of readers.

In the second poem of “Two Summer Aubades, After John Clare,” Hillman writes:

woman in red sweater to hummingbird

 ssssssss we sssssss weee
no i'm not not sweet not
sweeeeetie i'm not
something to eeeeeeat⁹⁵

Here, playfully, Hillman imagines a woman communicating with a hummingbird in a hybrid language.


 ssssssss we sssssss weee

Meaning is imagined as occurring somewhere between the woman’s understanding of “red” (a sweater) and the bird’s (something sweet to eat). The woman in the poem responds to the bird’s curiosity with a language she imagines to be nearer to its own embodied experience of the world. The poem, a flutter in all of its lightness, space (caesura), spontaneous indentation, and repetition of airy “s” and “e” sounds, mimics the sudden presence of a darting, flitting hummingbird. Here a hybrid language provides the woman in the poem with new access to the hummingbird’s material presence in their shared world. Amidst so much uncertainty and un-fixity, there is imagined “interplay” between two consciousnesses, reciprocal giving and receiving back from each other. As with the first poem, the reader here, too, is a collaborator; experiencing the rhythms and breaks of the poem becomes for the reader a creative act of relating to the animal other.

Together, these two lyrics instantiate a ritual poetic practice. Recall aspects of ritualized repetition in Hegel: the value of philosophy, or dialectical thought, is “the order of its performance,” the shape of the ritual performance itself, in all of its moments. Again, in Hegel’s words: “the real issue [of the philosophical work] is not exhausted by stating it as an aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about.”⁹⁶ In Hillman, we see an emphasis on the process of imagining all of the possible layered, hybrid languages and communicative forms that may exist in the interstices, between subject-objects (in these poems, between woman and bird). Each poem performs for readers this ritual imagining, or “making up” of the other, taking time to acknowledge and listen to that which is other than human. Note how in both poems, entire lines are comprised of bird calls and songs — irreducible sound. For Hillman, the act of listening is ritual collaboration with the animal other, and the value of this collaboration is its gradual, unpredictable, and dynamic process.

Hillman’s ecopoetics imagines and performs a uniquely magical posthumanism, a demonstration of how contemporary experimental poets might and do draw from a tradition of magical thinking in order to begin mapping an environmental ethics. When

we read Hegel through Adorno and therefore insist on an inheritance of such notions as mimetic relating, experimental interplay, and the subject-object status of every single thing; and when we are attentive to the forms and functions of Hegelian repetition in all of its ritual, dynamism, and performativity, we begin to see how aspects of Hegelian magical thinking have the capacity to inform and enrich posthuman theory and aesthetics for the new century.

That said, and to follow Adorno once again: there can be for posthumanism no revival of Hegel; only rescue. Even an inheritance via Adorno, one critical of Hegel's "deluded" impulse to elevate spirit, must remain circumspect — situated as we are today on a radically degraded earth, only beginning to grasp the damage that our capitalist economies and cultures of consumption have inflicted upon the planet, and yet seduced as ever by a dominant environmentalist rhetoric that repeatedly and often uncritically falls back on such concepts as "connection" and "unity." As Adorno observed, perhaps most essentially: "The force of the whole ... is not a mere fantasy on the part of spirit; it is the force of the real web of illusion in which all individual existence remains trapped."⁹⁷ Arguably, many contemporary ecological paradigms — notions of a webbed existence in which every being is implicated and subsumed — betray an all-too-orthodox Hegelianism that continues to permeate the Western psyche to its very core. The shape of the dialectic is perhaps as dangerous as it is promising for posthuman thought. 

Notes

- 1 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Concept of Enlightenment," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., 3.
- 4 Ibid., 8.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid., 5.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid., 5-6.
- 10 Ibid., 6-7.
- 11 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 114.
- 12 Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 76, 80, my emphasis.
- 13 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 112.
- 14 Horkheimer and Adorno, "Concept," 9.
- 15 In his essay "The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy," Adorno writes: "rescuing Hegel — and only rescue, not revival, is appropriate for him — means facing up to his philosophy where it is most painful and wresting truth from it where its untruth is obvious." Following Adorno, I employ the verb "rescue" here with regard to inheriting Hegel. See Theodor W. Adorno, "The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy," *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber NicholSEN (Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1993), 83.
- 16 Donna J. Haraway, "Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms," *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008,) 157-187.
- 17 Horkheimer and Adorno, "Concept," 3.
- 18 I want to underscore that here I am working specifically with Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of magic as they develop it in "Concept of Enlightenment." For more on ancient magic and how it relates to religious and rational paradigms, see Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- 19 Ibid., 5.
- 20 Ibid., 6.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., 3-6.
- 23 Theodor W. Adorno, "Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy," *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber NicholSEN (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1993), 40-41.
- 24 Adorno, "Experiential Content," 57.
- 25 Ibid., 61-62.
- 26 Ibid., 69.

27 Ibid.

28 Here Adorno gestures toward what is perhaps his central thesis in *Negative Dialectics* (1966), and also toward what he perceives to be his essential departure from Hegel. For Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*, a concept can never exhaust a subject-object (as Adorno asserts in “Experiential Content” as well). As a result, “the more restlessly our identitarian thinking besets its object, the farther will it take us from the identity of the object.” To counter “identitarian” thinking, Adorno imagines the nonidentical in and as the identical — what he at one point suggests to be that which “[lives] in the cavities between what things claim to be and what they are.” Notably, Adorno credits Hegel with performing precisely this type of thinking: “The most enduring result of Hegelian logic is that the individual is not flatly for himself. In himself, he is his otherness.” For Adorno, Hegel realized that “the nonidentical [is] the thing’s own identity against its identifications. The innermost core of the object proves to be simultaneously extraneous to it.” But also for Adorno, what Hegel was not able to see was that absolute Spirit — “totality” — in the end denies its own nonidentity. Therefore, Adorno’s “negative dialectics” — which takes Hegelian dialectics one step farther — seeks to “convict” totality of the nonidentical within it. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York and London: Continuum, 1973), 147-150, 161.

29 Adorno, “Experiential Content,” 72, my emphasis.

30 Ibid., 75.

31 Theodor W. Adorno, “Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel,” *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1993), 98-99.

32 Ibid.

33 Horkheimer and Adorno, “Concept,” 6.

34 Adorno, “Skoteinos,” 139.

35 Ibid., 138.

36 Ibid.

37 Horkheimer and Adorno, “Concept,” 7.

38 Adorno, “Skoteinos,” 144-145.

39 Ibid., 92.

40 Horkheimer and Adorno, “Concept,” 8.

41 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 1-3.

42 “Ritual, adj. and n.” OED Online, 2011 (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1 September 2001.

43 Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 54.

44 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 2.

45 Tambiah, *Magic*, 54.

46 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 21.

47 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 11. Trans. Gerhard Richter, Lecture, “Inheriting Hegel,” University of California, Davis, CA (winter 2010).

48 For Adorno, on the other hand, “the whole is the untrue” — and here again is Adorno’s essential departure from Hegel. For Adorno, Hegel’s “whole” is the very image of the “principle of domination,” the “superior coercive force,” that marks and traps contemporary existence. In other words, perhaps: the domination of science, technology, and capital. “This is the truth in Hegel’s untruth,” concludes Adorno. See Adorno, “Experiential Content,” 87.

49 Horkheimer and Adorno, "Concept," 6-7.

50 Ibid., 6.

51 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 32.

52 Ibid., 80.

53 Ibid., 81.

54 Ibid., 490.

55 My double emphasis on "is."

56 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 32.

57 Ibid., 146.

58 Ibid., 148-149.

59 Ibid., 142.

60 Ironically, Butler situates her argument precisely in opposition to what she calls "the Hegelian model": "The Hegelian model of self-recognition...presupposes a potential adequation between the 'I' that confronts its world...as an object, and the 'I' that finds itself as an object in that world. But the subject/object dichotomy, which here belongs to the tradition of Western epistemology, conditions the very problematic of identity that it seeks to solve." (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 144.) For Butler, Hegel presupposes an "I" and an "other" who stand in opposition to one another, neglecting to acknowledge that the "I" and the "other" are always already effects of signifying practices and discourse. But what Butler does not acknowledge in Hegel is that the figures "I" and "other" do not preexist the dialectic. Hegel's dialectic begins and ends with the universal, or whole, and "I" and "other" occur only as moments of this universal. Recall Adorno's claim that the very project of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is to problematize any subject-object disparity. If "I" and "other" stand in opposition, then recognition has failed and the dialectic breaks down. The culmination of the dialectic is when "I" and "other" exist instead as "I-other" (both "I" and "other"), or as subject-object. What I want to suggest is that we align Butler with Hegel. Recall Hegel: "[Meaning] is not exhausted by stating its aim, but by carrying it out, nor is the result the actual whole, but rather the result together with the process through which it came about." In Hegel, as in Butler, self, agency, or "Truth" reside in the process and the product, the "result together with the process" of the movement or performance. In short, the shape of Butler's performative repetition is essentially that of Hegel's dialectic: the "carrying out" is the site of meaning. Butler, too, is a magical thinker; in Butler's paradigm, as in the magical act, the means is the end. See Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 2.

61 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 112.

62 Ibid., 111.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., 112.

65 Ibid., 111.

66 Ibid., 112.

67 Ibid.

68 One might read Hegel as speaking only figuratively in the passages I have just cited, and not about actual material embodiment. While one cannot know with certainty what Hegel intends here, it is worth noting that Hegel continues to suggest the material nature of dialectical movement throughout the section "Self-Consciousness." In the paragraphs that follow, Hegel goes

- on to discuss the “fear” felt by the self-consciousness facing its own death, one that causes it to “[tremble] in every fibre of its being.” Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 117.
- 69 Ibid., 114.
- 70 Ibid., 113.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid., 114.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 3.
- 75 Ibid., 5-6.
- 76 Ibid., 6. According to Haraway, “intra-active” is Karen Barad’s term.
- 77 Ibid., 8.
- 78 Ibid., 7.
- 79 Ibid., 10.
- 80 Ibid., 7, 11.
- 81 Ibid., 21-23.
- 82 Ibid., 34.
- 83 Ibid., 23-25.
- 84 Ibid., 25.
- 85 Ibid., 19.
- 86 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 81.
- 87 Ibid., 108.
- 88 Haraway, *Species*, 31-32.
- 89 Ibid., 16.
- 90 Ibid., 14.
- 91 Brenda Hillman, “Two Summer Aubades, After John Clare,” *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (spring/summer 2011): 23-24.
- 92 Brenda Hillman, “Two Summer Aubades, After John Clare” (Squaw Valley Community of Writers Poetry Reading Benefit, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA, July 15, 2011).
- 93 Brenda Hillman, “Two Summer Aubades, After John Clare.” *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (spring/summer 2011), 23.
- 94 For more information about towhee calls and songs, see “Bird Vocalizations: California Towhee,” *California Academy of Sciences*, 22 April 2009, www.calacademy.org.
- 95 Ibid., 24.
- 96 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 2.
- 97 Adorno, “Experiential Content,” 87.

References

- Adorno, Theodor W. *Hegel: Three Studies*. Trans. Shierry Weber NicholSEN. Cambridge and London: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Press, 1993.
- . *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E.B. Ashton. New York and London: Continuum, 1973.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge Classics, 1990.
- Haraway, Donna J. "Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms." *Material Feminisms*. Ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. 157-187.
- . *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Hillman, Brenda. "Two Summer Aubades, After John Clare." *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (spring/summer 2011): 23-24.
- Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W. "The Concept of Enlightenment." *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. 1-34.
- "Ritual, adj. and n." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2011. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1 September 2011.
- Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraja. *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.