

DEMYTHOLOGIZING DERRIDA

In a fragmentary manifesto of 1796 known as “The so-called ‘Oldest System Programme of German Idealism”, the three Tübingen seminarians Hölderlin, Hegel and Schelling, make the following plea for the creation of a “new mythology”:

First of all I shall speak here on an Idea which, as far as I know, has never occurred to anyone -- we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of the Ideas, it must become a mythology of reason.¹

While it can be argued that each of the authors of this manifesto developed their own response to this call, it certainly wasn’t until this century that a philosopher successfully meet this challenge of creating a new mythology. I am referring to Heidegger and his reading of ‘Western metaphysics’ that, unfortunately, he intentionally presents in the obscure language of the mythopoetic.² Heidegger’s central ‘myth’ proclaims that western metaphysics is nothing more than the history of the subjectivization of Being to essence, i.e., of the gradual transformation of Being into objectified characteristics capable of being re-presented and sublated in the *cogito* of the subject. Driven not by Providence, but by a Nietzschean will to domination, this process culminates in the reduction of nature to objects ‘present to hand,’ ready to be technologically manipulated

¹ The so-called ‘Oldest System Programme of German Idealism,’ trans. Andrew Bowie (Manchester: 1995) 266.

² Van Buren addresses Heidegger’s fascination with the mythopoetic in his monumental intellectual biography, *The Young Heidegger*, in the following passage: “From out of this primal history a region of problems must be uncoiled...namely, the mythic. The metaphysics of mythos must be understood out of this primal history.’ As Heidegger mentioned here, the point of transition between his Kantian transcendental model and this new mythopoetic model was Kant’s ‘doctrine of the transcendental productive imagination” (John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger* (Bloomington:1994) 371). For the most notable work among recent scholarship that specifically addresses the demythologizing of Heidegger, see John Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger: Aletheia and the History of Being* (Bloomington: 1993).

in order to satisfy the subject's lust for power.³ While there may be some truth to this account, it is equally clear that this mythic schema is just too simple to qualify as a *history* of "Western metaphysics."

As Adorno and Horkheimer point out in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, myth is dangerous because, as bad history, it provides a "false clarity" that encourages its carriers to "avoid the labor of conceptualization" indicative of emancipatory thinking.⁴ They attribute mythic consciousness' more debilitating effects to its confusion of the "animate with the inanimate" -- a confusion that can ultimately transfer human agency to inanimate forces and structures.⁵ This results, according to Lévi-Strauss, in a mythological thought process which he can only characterize as an "anonymous

³ The antagonist in Heidegger's mythic recounting of "Western metaphysics" is the self-reflective subject made absolute, i.e., the subject capable of thinking the identity of being and thought. Heidegger's archeological program is as elegant as it is naive: it begins with the original sin committed by Parmenides when he reduces the anonymous infinitive of Being -- τὸ εἶναι (*Sein*) -- to the present participle being -- τὸ ὄν (*Seiendes*) -- and posits this as the correlative of a thinking patterned on sensual perception (νοεῖν). This limiting of being to a perceptual thinking is then fixed in Plato's reified being qua εἶδος. The next reduction of being occurs in Descartes' idealization of the subject as an idea known in self-reflection. Finally, the origin of Western metaphysics -- Parmenides' identification of being and thought -- is sublated in the *Greater Logic* of Hegel, in his 'Doctrine of Being.' In the transition to essence, we find that what seemed to be 'Being' is really 'essence' thought through as a necessary moment in the dialectical self-relation of what ultimately is the 'idea.' The only way to overturn the subject's autocratic rule over Being is to carry out -- following the title of section §6 of *Being and Time* -- "The Task of Destroying the History of Ontology." Contrary to what this section title suggests, the destruction of ontology is actually an epistemological destruction of the Cartesian model of the reflective cogito. The romantic goal of all this is to remove the subject from its position of absolute power, in order to "arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being" (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: 1962) 44). Heidegger claims to have achieved this by deriving the subject's self-consciousness from the more originary existential structure of care: deprived of its unconditional status, consciousness becomes the *result* of a preexisting structure that is itself not conscious (cf. *Being and Time*, 175-76; cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: 1956) 73-74, where Sartre argues for the impossibility of deriving consciousness from something that itself is not conscious)

⁴ Max Horkheimer & Theodore Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York:1972) xiv.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

thinking”, in which the structures of “myths operate in men’s mind without their being aware of the fact.”⁶ I would like to suggest that it is this seductive effect of Heidegger’s mythic account of western metaphysics that has negatively determined the contours of much contemporary non-analytic philosophy, in that this myth facilitates the transference of the intentionality of consciousness to the non-conscious structures of language that then ‘speak us.’ This is perhaps most clearly seen in the work of Derrida, whose work bears the imprint of this mythic animation of language in his understanding of the derivative nature of self-consciousness as an epiphenomenon of the diacritical play of signs in a formal language.

⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man: An Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, vol. 4, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) 625.

In doing this Derrida demonstrates his participation in the linguistic turn that characterizes the general trajectory of philosophy over the past two hundred years. Initially announced by Schleiermacher -- and perfected by Saussure -- this turn charts the transfer of philosophical consciousness from the ideal world of noetic forms to the domain of the sign. The transcendental condition of possibility of meaning, signifying and reference, is thus no longer consciousness, but the *marque* of a *Langue*. But this inversion of the relation of dependence between consciousness and language fails to generate a framework in which the existential fact of self-consciousness and our capacity for meaning conferral can be accounted for. It fails at this most basic of requirements because, as Dieter Henrich has demonstrated, self-consciousness “can never be understood as the result of an activity.”⁷ Due to the logic of self-reference, the purchase of self-consciousness as the result of a process can only be made at the price of circularity. And as I hope to show in what follows, Henrich’s contention equally applies to Hegel’s efforts to establish self-consciousness as the *result* of an autonomous and immanent reflection, as well as Derrida’s attempt to determine self-consciousness and meaning as the result of the autonomous play of *différance*.

Both Hegel and Derrida attempt to derive self-consciousness from the self-relation of negation. As I will show, there is ample evidence to suggest that Derrida’s strategy in this follows the same operation Hegel employs in his *Logic*, namely that of

⁷ Dieter Henrich, “Selbstbewusstsein: Kritische Einleitung in eine Theorie,” *Hermeneutik und Dialektik*, ed. R. Bubner et al. (Tübingen: 1970) I, 271. Henrich provides a typically exhaustive and convincing analysis of the *petitio principii* involved in the reflective model of self-consciousness this conception of language entails.

“autonomous negation.”⁸ Given this “profound affinity” between their respective strategies, they both become subject to the critique Schelling first levels at Hegel in 1826.⁹ In brief, Schelling argues that while two reflexes that negate each other do indeed deny each other’s independent Being, this operation can never produce consciousness of the identity of the relata nor of its irrefutable Being. In other words, the self-relation of negation is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for accounting for the existential experience of the unity of self-consciousness and meaning conferral. Given the positive experience of our self-consciousness, Schelling insists that this positivity must derive from an experience prior to the reflective play of negations. Inverting Hegel’s order of progression, Schelling argues that we should begin not with the *rationes cognoscendi* of the concept, but with the *rationes essendi* of our experience of self-consciousness. Accusing Hegel of having ignored Kant’s proof that existence can never be the implication of a concept, Schelling argues that the certainty of experience must be grounded in a Being prior to negation and its dialectical hall of mirrors, a being transcendent to autonomous thinking that he calls “*das Unvordenkliche*.” In doing this Schelling by no means disputes the validity of Hegel’s brilliant demonstration of how a negative self-relation can generate a positive in the ideal and inanimate world of logic. His concern rather, is to show that such a procedure

⁸ Dieter Henrich, “Hegel’s Grundoperation: Eine Einleitung in die ‘Wissenschaft der Logik,’ *Der Idealismus und seine Gegenwart*, ed Ute Guzzoni et al. (Hamburg: 1976) 210.

⁹ These lectures were attended by Marx, Kierkegaard, Feuerbach and others. My translation of them should be appearing this year. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, All citations of Schelling’s works refer to the pagination of the *Sämtliche Werke* (14 vols. Stuttgart and Augsburg: J.G. Cotta’scher Verlag, 1856-61) IX, 352.

only provides the *rationes cognoscendi* for Being and not its *rationes essendi*.

As I noted above, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that mythic thinking derives the animate from inanimate -- or to use the metaphors of grounding -- mythic thinking grounds the animate in the inanimate. I want to apply Adorno and Horkheimer's insight to the scholastic distinction I just introduced between a *rationes cognoscendi* and a *rationes essendi*, and suggest that a form of mythic thinking manifests itself in philosophy when the attempt is made to derive the real from the ideal; that is, when one tries to make what is alive and real dependent on the ideal domain of thought. Consider the Ontological Argument that seeks to ground existence in the concept of a deity. This is a mythic thinking that makes the real world dependent on a concept. If we accept Kant's critique of this argument, we agree that existence is never implied by a concept. Or, put differently, real dependence can never be derived from an ideal dependence. As we have just seen, this is precisely the argument Schelling makes against Hegel's derivation of self-consciousness from negative self-relation. It is also the same argument Sartre makes against Heidegger's derivation of self-consciousness from the structures of care¹⁰, and it is an argument that I will apply in what follows to Derrida's derivation of self-consciousness from *différance* and the diacritical play of signs.

Derrida's first presentation of his idea of Difference occurs in a critical essay introducing Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, a fact that signals the importance of phenomenology as the foil against which he develops his system.¹¹ The critical opening Derrida pursues in this essay is the inability of Husserl's transcendental ego -- his transcendental condition of the possibility of evidence -- to know itself as evident (fully present) in the time flux of the reflexive cycle. Derrida designates two essential problems with Husserl's model of reflective consciousness, one logical, and the other diachronic. The logical aporia is generated by the circular dynamic of reflection: how does the self recognize itself as itself (how does it have consciousness *of* itself) in the

¹⁰ *Being and Nothingness*, 73-74.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, introduction to the *Origin of Geometry*, by Edmund Husserl (Lincoln: 1989).

process of coming to self-knowledge, if it doesn't have any knowledge of itself to begin with? The diachronic aporia is generated by the time flux itself that turns the attempts to explicate the consciousness *of* consciousness into an infinite regress, thereby ruling out the possibility of attaining the sought after evidence of full presence to self. On the last page of his introduction Derrida addresses these *aporias*, and attempts to resolve them by deriving consciousness not from full presence to self, but from a more "primordial ...Difference":

The impossibility of resting in the simple maintenance [nowness] of a Living Present, the sole and absolutely absolute origin of the De Facto *and* the De Jure, of Being *and* Sense, but always other in its self-identity; the inability to live enclosed in the innocent undividedness [*indivision*] of the primordial Absolute, because the Absolute is *present* only in being *deferred-delayed* [*différant*] without respite, this impotence and this impossibility are given in a primordial and pure consciousness of Difference. Such a *consciousness*, with its strange style of unity, must be able to be restored to its own light. Without such a consciousness, without its own proper dehiscence, nothing would appear.¹²

In this passage Derrida demonstrates the logical difficulties created by Husserl's claim to have thematized a consciousness *of* "innocent undividedness", and the diachronic aporia of the "impossibility" of having a consciousness *of* the now of a "Living Present." For according to Derrida the very nature of time itself -- particularly the elusive nature of the present -- guarantees that a sequential, reflective model of consciousness will never succeed in producing a fully reconstituted and cognizant unity of self in the *retrospective* direction of its doubling activity:

Following a pattern we have already experienced in the "entre", the quasi-"meaning" of dissemination is the impossible return to the rejoined, readjusted

¹² Ibid., 153.

unity of meaning, the impeded march of any such reflection.¹³

The march of reflection is impeded by its structure that, in the absence of any pre-reflective knowledge of myself, is incapable of supplying a criterion that I could use to assert the identity of myself with the image I see in a mirror. Since the reflective tain of a mirror itself does not introduce any new data into the process, the simple doubling of an image fails to qualify as knowing. Derrida never tires of using this particular metaphor to explore the ramifications that would follow if there were no tain in the mirror of philosophical reflection:

The truth that lifts the veil-screen...is already regulated according to a mirror, and in particular a tainless mirror, or at any rate a mirror whose tain lets "images" and persons" through, endowing them with a certain index of transformation and permutation... But this is an effect of the specular nature of philosophical reflection, philosophy being incapable of inscribing (comprehending) what is outside it otherwise than through the appropriating assimilation of a negative image of it, and dissemination is written on the back -- the tain -- of that mirror.¹⁴

In the absence of a functional tain -- of a criterion that could identify the two moments of reflection -- we cannot distinguish self-reference from reference to some other entity.

The images and representations returned by such a mirror are incapable of being clearly identified or distinguished from ourselves. The unity of self-consciousness becomes a decentered structure lacking the spontaneity of a lasting, and thus grounding, presence.¹⁵

¹³ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: 1981) 268.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 314, 33).

¹⁵ As Gasché maintains, the "the essential requirement of philosophical thought" for Derrida is the "notion of reflexivity" (Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: 1986) 5,6). The essence of the *aporia* of reflection is aptly expressed in the determining metaphor of the mirror: knowledge of the self occurs when it realizes "that the object reflected

This alterity in reference to the other is insurmountable and, unlike in Hegel's dialectics, *permanent*, since the possibility for a return to the origin has been destroyed by the disfigurement of the tain of the mirror. The promise of eventual unity and closure is replaced by the prospect of an infinite openness of thought.¹⁶ Moreover, the unity of Husserl's "living present" is itself present "only in its being deferred-delayed [*différant*] without respite", a condition that Derrida cites to justify the elevation of Difference to the rank of a transcendental principle: "this impotence and this impossibility [of self-presence] are given in a primordial and pure consciousness of Difference ... [such that] Difference would be transcendental."¹⁷

With this claim Derrida reveals his agenda of deconstruction: it is *not simply* the destruction of Husserl's attempts to consummate the program of "Transcendental Idealism"¹⁸, but rather its goal is to overcome Idealism's systematic inadequacies in order to *construct* a better, more productive transcendental system that will fulfill the aspirations of Husserl's program.¹⁹ This is a point that we must clearly understand: Derrida neither denies the phenomenon of self-consciousness nor its ability to provide

by the mirroring subject is not just any object but rather this subject's symmetric Other"(21). And as Gasché declares, what is "at stake" for Derrida in the possibility of reflexivity to ground our knowledge of the self is the possibility of "the enterprise of philosophy as such" (7).

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: 1978) 162.

¹⁷ Introduction to the *Origin of Geometry*, 153.

¹⁸ Edmund Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, trans. Peter Koestenbaum (The Hague: 1964) 33.

¹⁹ In many ways Derrida is striving to accomplish what Husserl didn't, namely, stop the spread of scientific objectivism in to the human sciences and ensure that philosophy was ever at the ready to combat historicism: "what I first learned about this critique [of historicism] from Husserl...seems to me to be valid in its argumentative scheme." Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (London:1981) 104-5.

the evidence required to “ground” a transcendental system.²⁰ What he denies is the viability of the traditional model of the grounding act of self-consciousness, that calls for a presence of self that is *fully transparent* to the knowing self. To employ the terms of Derrida’s vocabulary, what he denies is the ability of ‘logocentric metaphysics’ to ground intentional acts of meaning, signification and reference in the pre-semiological transparency of a unified subject fully present to itself -- a unitary cognition that logocentrism holds is the condition for the difference articulated by the chain of signifiers that is language. His aim then is to provide a different, more comprehensive and powerful model of self-consciousness that will avoid the indissoluble *aporias* generated by the traditional approach. Derrida himself says as much in a now infamous interview published in 1981 and entitled *Positions*.

“In effect, we must avoid having the indispensable critique of a certain naive relationship to the signified of the referent, to sense or meaning, remain fixed in a suspension, that is, a pure and simple suppression, of meaning or reference. I believe that I have taken precautions on this matter in the propositions that I have advanced. But it is true, and the proofs are not lacking, that this is never sufficient. What we need is to determine *otherwise*, according to a differential system, the effects of ideality, of signification, of meaning, and of reference.”²¹

The most important point here is Derrida’s statement of the need “to determine

²⁰ Derrida’s “ultra-transcendental” principle of *différance* serves a grounding function in his metaphysics. Although he may insist that it is “a ground that is not a ground” or a “grounding void,” *différance* nonetheless *functions* as a ground. As one can see, my reading of Derrida refuses to abide by what for some admirers of Derrida has become a dogma of faith, namely the tenet that Derrida can only be evaluated and judged on his own terms. I would counter: he can *only be understood* on his own, immanent terms, but to judge and evaluate necessitate an objective “otherness” or indeed “difference” of perspective. A similar habit is distinguishable among those who admire Adorno as well. See Bowie, “‘Non-Identity’: The German Romantics, Schelling and Adorno,” in *Intersections: Nineteenth-Century Philosophy and Contemporary Theory*, ed. T. Rajan and D.L. Clark (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 243-262.

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomenon and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* (Northwestern: 1973) 66.

otherwise.” That is, he is not content to remain standing in the critical moment of pure destruction, in which meaning and reference are simply *suppressed*. The intent of his “critique” is rather to unmask a certain “naive” understanding of the “relationship to the signified of the referent” (the representational model of language), in order to construct a more powerful and comprehensive explanatory model of meaning and reference. This he believes he provides in his “differential system” that, in assuming *différance* as its transcendental principle, determines “the effects of ideality, of signification, of meaning, and of reference” *otherwise*.

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida clearly presents his allegiance to the framework of transcendental philosophy when he claims to be able to “attain” by deconstruction the “ultimate foundation” of a system of “the totality of natural experience.”²² Following in the footsteps of transcendental idealism, this leads Derrida to the “field of transcendental experience” where “one asks the question of the transcendental origin of the system itself.”²³ True to his expressed need “to determine otherwise”, Derrida must go beyond the traditional understanding of such inquires, and plunge into “a beyond of transcendental criticism” that will yield the discovery of what he terms the “ultra-transcendental” principle of deconstruction that is *différance*.²⁴ (And it is in this sense

²² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore:1976) 60, 61.

²³ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 61. A system he defines in the essay ‘*Différance*’ as “a system of ciphers that is not dominated by truth value, which in this manner becomes an included, inscribed, circumscribed function” (*Speech and Phenomena*, 149) -- “a system which is no longer that of presence but that of *différance*.” Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomenon and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs* (Northwestern: 1973) 147.

that Levinas is certainly right when he declares that “the whole contemporary discourse of overcoming and reconstructing metaphysics is far more speculative in many respects than metaphysics itself.”²⁵)

But ‘what’ precisely is this new “ultra-transcendental” principle of *différance*? Clearly, it is not a subsisting difference that could be conceived as having any type of positive presence. Nor is it Hegel’s generative gap of alterity from which all determinations emerge, and into which all ultimately dissolve in the final moment of their sublation into a unity. What *différance* ‘is’ can only be understood when grasped as the offspring of Saussure’s structuralist critique of the representational model of language.

Traditional sign theory holds that the tonal articulation of a sign is the sensual re-presenting of a non-sensual idea (*παθηματά της ψυχης*). The spoken sign thus represents a positive, and ideally self-same meaning (recursivity). Saussure calls this naive understanding of how language works into question by demonstrating the dependence of a sign’s meaning on the chain of signs in which it is found; a structure in which the exchange or removal of a neighboring sign modifies the “value” of that sign without, however, altering that sign’s material expression. Thus the determination of the value of a term is achieved by contrasting it with what it is *not* (“*Omnis determinatio est negation*”: Spinoza). The positive determination of the meaning of a term is the result of a *negation*, of difference, of being “other than.” Consequently, negation generates the positive: it is the negative *differences* between terms that generates their *positive*

²⁵ “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, Manchester 1984, p. 69.

meaning. Language thus conceived is nothing substantial or positive, but is rather a structure of negative references between *formal* values:

Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*.²⁶

Saussure's characterization of language as a "play of differences" follows from this total absence of a positive term to ground or center language.²⁷ Determination of meaning is thus the effect of the differential relations between the signs of a structure. Since this diacritical structure is incapable of providing a positive center, the play of differential determinations is interminably open. The meaning of a term in a particular context can always be displaced, and thus changed in unforeseen ways through a new differentiation in a new context. Like standing waves in an electromagnetic field, meaning is a local and temporary identity negatively determined by surrounding non-identities or differential chains of *marques*. In this way Saussure's semiotics inverts the traditional ordering of metaphysical principles by deriving identity from the difference of the non-identical.

Derrida's principle of *différance* betrays this lineage when he advances it as the ground both of the identity (determination) and the non-identity (displacement) of the

²⁶ He continues: "Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it. Proof of this is that the value of a term may be modified without either its meaning or its sound being affected, solely because a neighboring term has been modified." Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: 1966) 120.

²⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: 1976) 27.

meaning of terms. Given Derrida's claim that he is not simply *suspending* "meaning and reference", but rather striving to determine them in a new way through his "differential system", it follows that the "ultra-transcendental" principle of this system must be the ground of not only negative, differential values, but also of positive, contextually determinate meaning. That is, *différance* must be the ground of both the identity and the non-identity of meaning and reference. And as the common ground of both identity and non-identity, the conclusion appears unavoidable that *différance* must somehow be the unity of identity and difference. Considered in this respect, this ultra-transcendental principle of *différance* begins to betray the hereditary traits of the system principle of the generation of "transcendental idealists" *before* Husserl, namely of Hegel and Schelling, and their respective conception of the Absolute.

As conceived by the early Schelling and Hegel, the Absolute was neither the subsumption of difference under the One, nor the opposition of difference vis-a-vis identity. Rather, the Absolute was conceived as the unity of identity and difference. In the *Würzberger Lectures* of 1804, Schelling presents the Absolute as the unity of the relata of identity and difference, in which each of these relata knows itself by means of the act through which it is present to itself as "a part of the whole", and thus as the indivisible Absolute itself.²⁸ This formulation of the Absolute attempts to think a unity posited *into* opposition, not *as opposed* to the opposition of identity and difference. Generally speaking, in Absolute Idealism all forms of relation are ultimately self-relation,

²⁸ SW I/6, 165.

and self-relation is nonrelative in so far as its relata are the affirming and the affirmed of themselves. The Absolute is thus the cognizant unity of these differential relations. If Derrida's "ultra-transcendental" principle of *différance* can be understood as the ground of the "unity of identity and difference", it would appear that his metaphysics is intimately related to the very "Western metaphysics" he claims to destroy. Derrida himself appears to invite this comparison when he speaks of the "profound affinities" between his *différance* and Hegel's "differentiating relations" (*differente Beziehungen*)²⁹:

"Writing "*différant*" or "*différance*" (with an a) would have had the advantage of making it possible to translate Hegel at that particular point -- which is also an absolutely decisive point in his discourse -- without further notes or specifications. And the translation would be, as it always must be, a transformation of one language by another. I contend, of course, that the word *différance* can also serve other purposes: first, because it marks not only the activity of "originary" difference, but also the temporizing detour of deferral; and above all because *différance* thus written, although maintaining relations of profound affinity with Hegelian discourse (such as it must be read), is also, up to a certain point, unable to break with that discourse (which has no kind of meaning or chance); but it can operate a kind of infinitesimal and radical displacement of it, whose space I attempt to delineate elsewhere but of which it would be difficult to speak briefly here" (Margins, 14).

Unfortunately, Derrida never "delineates elsewhere" what these "relations of profound affinities are with Hegelian discourse." Manfred Frank however, has suggested that the only possible candidate in Hegel's system that exhibits the same theory constitutive function as *différance* is his principle of what Henrich has called "autonomous

²⁹ Derrida is commenting on Alexander Koyrè's study of Hegel's earlier *Jena Logic*, "Hegel à l'ena," in *Etudes d'histoire de la pensée philosophique* (Paris: Armond Colin, 1961), pp. 153-54. Whereas Koyrè translates Hegel's *differente Beziehung*, as "different relation," Derrida chooses "differentiating relations" to give it an active, generative sense, so that the "profound affinities" between Hegel's idea and his *différance* (Margins 13-14).

negation”, and it is to this hypothesis we must now turn.³⁰

Hegel’s program as articulated in his *Greater Logic* is to derive identity and difference from one conceptual structure. The key player in this derivation is the category of reference: the Universal (unity) refers only to itself, while the particular (difference) refers to something other than itself. What refers only to itself has an immediate reference, whereas that which establishes a relation with something other than itself has a mediate reference. But since both references must be derived from the unity of one thought, Hegel must somehow show that the reference to something other than itself is truthfully a *self-reference*.

The single-phase relation of immediacy must therefore be exposed as identical to the two-phase reference of the differential relation, thereby proving the unity of immediacy and mediation. Henrich calls the operation employed to achieve this transition from the immediacy of the negative to that “which it is not” Hegel’s basic operation of “autonomous negation.”³¹ Henrich’s characterization of this operation of negation as “autonomous” follows from Hegel’s insistence that philosophy begin from a self-sufficient principle that presupposes nothing. The possibility of autonomous negation is further provided for by the capacity of negation to become self-referential,

³⁰ Manfred Frank, *Das Sagbare und das Unsagbare: Studien zur deutsch-französischen Hermeneutik und Texttheorie*, [Lecture 13], *Différance und autonome Negation. Derrida’s Hegel-Lektüre*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993) 446-470. In what follows I rely heavily on Frank’s and Henrich’s *Grundoperation*, both of which offer uncommonly lucid analyses of this abstruse operation that animates Hegel’s *Logic*.

³¹ GWF Hegel, *Science of Logic*, vol. II (London: 1961) 27. See also Henrich, *Grundoperation*, 215.

thereby circumventing the need for an independent or prior Other to be the object of negation. In classical logic a double negation begins with an initial position that is negated twice, in order to yield an affirmative result that is the same as the initial position. In contrast to this, since Hegel's double negation is autonomous, its result must be *different* from the nothingness of the initial condition. This variance of negation generates an immanent logical movement that animates the unfolding of his entire *Logic*.

In Hegel's operation of autonomous negation Henrich locates the clearest (because most extreme) case "of the logical problematic of all forms of self-reference"-- a problematic whose aporia "appears in the first steps" of Hegel's operation.³² The first mode of negation's being is the immediacy of a "positing reflection" (being), in which negation doubles itself. This is a nonreferential negation that implies only a reference to itself, having no reference to alterity. Yet in the same instant, this first mode of negation generates movement towards the second mode of negativity, which Hegel terms the mediation of "external reflection" (essence). This reflection mediates the self-reference between the mirrored negations: it makes negation the explicit reference of what negates to what is negated. This reflection permits the differential relation that preserves both modes of negation's being, in that there is no opposition between the immediacy (identity) of the mirrored negations, and the mediation of their respective positions (difference) within the negating of a negation. In a word, these two modes are

³² (L II, 216). Hegel's writes that "this self-relating negativity is, then, its own negation...Its substance therefore is that it is, and it is not, itself; and this in one unity" (L II, 26).

but two aspects of the same “negative self-relation”: mediation is the articulation of that relation negation enjoys with itself in its immediacy.

Yet, just as above, this second mode of negation generates movement toward the third and most difficult mode of negation’s being, that of pure affirmation. The previous self-referential negation -- a double negation -- yields a result that is a “determining reflection” in which negation generates negation’s *“Nichtsein.”*³³ Thus in this third mode of negation’s being we are faced with the relation of negation to the *absence of negation*. That is, of a relation of negation to something that is not negation, that as such is its Other, and thus really different from it. Negation thus functions here as the *“Not of difference between irreconcilable states.”*³⁴ But how can negation establish a relation with something that, although it is its result, is nonetheless the Other of itself? In Hegel’s word’s, how can negation be “reflected into its Other, its Non-Being”?³⁵

If autonomous negation is to remain autonomous, it must be capable of expressing its opposite -- its Other -- as being the same as negation itself in its essence. This should be possible due to the fact that negative relations have produced this Other, thereby stamping it with the mark of a relation: as the non-being of negation, the Other, in essence, still bears the negative reference of nonreferential negation to self-negation.³⁶ Consequently, “the thought of the relation of the Other [must be] taken up

³³ L II, 29.

³⁴ Henrich, *Grundoperation*, 218. My emphasis.

³⁵ L II, 34.

³⁶ Offspring always bear a likeness to their creator: at the very minimum a relation of likeness

into the thought of pure self-relation.”³⁷ Otherness would thereby reveal itself to be a result of the “*Not of difference*” that distinguishes self-negation from simple negation. Moreover, if positivity emerges, it can do so only as the result of Hegel’s logical process, and can therefore never become the object of a double negation. Autonomous negation thus has a reference to an Other, but a resultant and dependent Other that *has no independent status*. The movement of Hegel’s autonomous negation however, does not have as its telos the simple production of Otherness *qua* “difference.” It must move forward through “opposition” to the self-sublation that occurs in “contradiction”, in order to dissolve all difference *qua* opposition (*zu Grunde gehen*) into the next cycle of the *Logic*, the Ground.

To move beyond difference the entire relation of negation to its Non-Being must be doubled once again, so that its structure can be identified with itself: the structure of negation’s self-wrought cancellation (“intro-Reflection”) must be identified with the structure of negation relating to its Other (“reflection upon the Other of itself”). Hegel describes this twofold (doubled) structure as

...first, that which is presupposed, or that intro-Reflection which is the immediate; and secondly, it is Reflection which, as negative, refers itself to itself; it refers itself to itself as to that other which is its not-being [*Nichtsein*].³⁸

The first synthesis is the reflected double of negation in its immediacy. The second synthesis is one of mediation that doubles and negates the first synthesis. In the resulting sublation what was posited as an immediacy independent of reflection *now*

qua participation.

³⁷ Henrich, *Grundoperation*, 218.

³⁸ L II, 29.

shows itself to be a reflection. With this it undermines its independence from the Other of the opposing reflection, and becomes the other related moment, while the opposing related moment does the same in reverse. Through this exchange of roles the thought of an autonomous, twice-duplicated negation proves itself to be an actual *self-*determination. In the second synthesis autonomous negation posits, negates and determines itself as the presupposition that it is in the first synthesis. Negative reflection thus appears to be completely autonomous. In its doubling it deals only with itself, resulting in a complete transparency to itself in its self-determination. Following the logic of contradiction, immediacy and mediacy -- identity and difference -- have brought each other “to the ground” in order to articulate the higher unity of their “grounding identity.” In the re-integration of its reference to its Other it demonstrates the determinateness of its reflection as “the relation to its other-being in itself.”³⁹ Or as Henrich puts it: “the Absolute is only with itself in its Otherness.”⁴⁰

Just as Derrida had suggested, there are many “profound affinities” between Hegel’s autonomous negation and Derrida’s *différance*. Both are purely formal in the sense that Saussure’s speaks in the *Cours* of language as a pure form: if either were founded on a substance, they would then be heteronomous, and thus no longer autonomous. As strictly autonomous they are the presuppositionless condition of possibility of their respective systems. Consequently, they must each be capable of

³⁹ L II, 34.

⁴⁰ Henrich, *Grundoperation*, 219.

generating “the elements” that they then determine as system principles; that is, they must be capable of producing a relational system of *positive* elements.⁴¹ And both are the transcategorical principle from which all categories are derived, including for Derrida those of meaning, consciousness, and the subject:

[Différance makes] “the movement of signification possible.....[It separates] the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language every being, and singularly substance or the subject.”⁴²

In this passage Derrida presents *différance*'s diacritical activity as a type of negative referencing, or relating of what in the *past* and in the *present* is thought in the language of metaphysics. As we have seen, it was Husserl's treatment of internal time consciousness that provided Derrida with the opening for his idea of “Difference” in 1962. But it was not until 1968 that Derrida finally developed exactly what he meant by this term, and settled on the neologism “*différance*” to name his “ultra-transcendental” principle. He does this in the appropriately titled essay *Différance* -- the same essay in which we have found a textual basis for comparing these “profound affinities” that exist between the “differentiating relation” of Hegel's autonomous negation and Derrida's

⁴¹ In the case of *différance*, Derrida characterizes this process as a “playing movement that “produces” -- by means of something that is not simply an activity -- these differences, these effects of difference.” Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago:1982) 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

différance:

Writing “*différant*” or “*différance*” (with an a) would have had the advantage of making it possible to translate Hegel at that particular point -- which is also an absolutely decisive point in his discourse -- without further notes or specifications.⁴³

“That particular point” where Derrida believes that it may be possible to “translate Hegel” occurs in the *Jena Logic*, when Hegel uses the Latinate *differente* to treat the relation between “time and the present”, between the simplicity of “the infinite” and the “absolutely negative simplicity” of the “the now”:⁴⁴

...The limit or moment of the present, the absolute ‘this’ of time, or of the now, is of an absolutely negative simplicity...it is not whole or a quantum which would be extended in itself (and) which, in itself, would also have a undetermined moment, a diversity which, as indifferent or exterior in itself, would be related to an other, but in this is a relation absolutely different from the simple (*sondern es ist absolute differente Beziehung*)⁴⁵

In this passage Hegel articulates an “absolutely differentiating relation” whose relata are

1) the absolute “now” of time determined as “an absolutely negative simplicity” (Identity), and **2)** an “undetermined moment” of temporal “diversity” (Difference).

Hegel’s “absolutely differentiating relation” that Derrida embraces here, bears striking similarities to the beginning moments of “Determining Reflection” in Hegel’s *Logic*. As we have seen, this moment is the result of an “absolutely negative simplicity” moving out of its immediacy, in order to realize itself as a relation to the Other of negation. This

⁴³ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 13. Derrida is commenting on Alexander Koyrè’s study of Hegel’s earlier *Jena Logic*, “Hegel à Jena,” in *Etudes d’histoire de la pensée philosophique* (Paris: Armond Colin, 1961), pp. 153-54. Whereas Koyrè translates Hegel’s *differente Beziehung*, as “different relation,” Derrida chooses “differentiating relations” to give it an active, generative sense, so that the “profound affinities” between Hegel’s idea and his *différance* (*Margins* 13-14).

⁴⁵ Cited in *Margins*, 14.

is negation generating its own “*Nichtsein*”, a relation of negation to the *absence of negation*. That is, of a relation of negation to something that is not negation, that as such is its Other, and thus really different from it. Negation here is the “*Not of difference* between irreconcilable states.”⁴⁶ And it is this “Not of difference” that characterizes Derrida’s creative translation of Hegel’s *absolute differente Beziehung* as a “differentiating relation.” For the “Not of difference” between states is a difference that precludes the possibility of re-establishing identity. Pure negation has become self-referential as a *divided identity* that, from this point on, is an absolutely different relation than the previous relation of self-reference. There is now an active “*Not of difference relation*” between negation and its *Nichtsein*, a negative relation that clearly manifests “striking affinities” to Derrida’s *différance*.

But as Derrida has pointed out, his autonomous *différance*, “although maintaining relations of profound affinity with Hegelian discourse”, does so only “up to a certain point.” And it is at that point which we have just arrived, namely, that point in the Hegelian discourse where Derrida refuses to proceed any further. Indeed, his refusal to go any further is necessitated by his transcendental principle of “autonomous *différance*.” Hegel’s autonomous negation is compelled by its immanent movement to realize its terminal identity. This logical movement must push through Derrida’s stopping-off point of “Difference”, in order to self-sublate in “Contradiction” that *dissolves* all oppositional differences (*zu Grunde gehen*).⁴⁷ Obviously, for a system such as

⁴⁶ Henrich, *Grundoperation*, 218. My emphasis.

⁴⁷ L II, *Doctrine of Essence*, p.43-70.

Derrida's -- animated by *différance* -- to continue to this terminus is out of the question. Accordingly, Derrida follows the stages of Hegel's "Doctrine of Essence" only as far as he needs to, namely up to "Opposition", which is the last, most pronounced stage of "Difference."⁴⁸ And in an obscure footnote in *La Dissémination*, Derrida elaborates on why he cannot proceed any further:

The movement by which Hegel determines difference as contradiction ("*Der Unterschied überhaupt ist schon der Widerspruch an sich*", *The Science of Logic II*, chap. 2 [p. 58]) is designed precisely to make possible the ultimate (onto-theo-teleo-logical) sublation [*la relève*] of difference. *Différance* -- which is thus by no means dialectical contradiction in this Hegelian sense -- marks the critical limit of the idealizing powers of relief [*la relève*] wherever they are able, directly or indirectly, to operate. *Différance* inscribes contradiction, or rather, since it remains irreducibly differentiating and disseminating, contradictions. In marking the "productive" (in the sense of general economy and in accordance with the loss of presence) and differentiating movement, the economic "concept" of difference does not reduce all contradictions to the homogeneity of a single model. It is the opposite that is likely to happen when Hegel makes difference into a moment within general contradiction. The latter is always ontotheoteleological in its foundation. As is the reduction of the complex general economy of difference to difference.⁴⁹

The critique Hegel receives here clearly demonstrates that "the point" at which Derrida parts ways with the Hegelian dialectic must be before the "ultimate" sublation of contradiction that dissolves all difference. The systematic grounds for this follow directly from Derrida's critique of Husserl's attempts to ground self-consciousness in the reflective act of re-presenting the self to its self. Husserl's inability to overcome the differentiating effects of internal time consciousness resulted in his inability to set the successive moments of reflection into a singular unified act of internal perception. Due

⁴⁸ L II, 58.

⁴⁹ *Dissemination* 6-7.

to the flux of time, each intentional moment of consciousness *slips out of phase* with its reflexive other, thereby generating an infinite chain of slightly asymmetrical reflections. This variance in phasing displaces its ability to reflect, producing “a mirror whose tain lets “images” and persons” through, endowing them with a certain index of transformation and permutation.”⁵⁰ The “transformation and permutation” of “images” is the result of the flux of the tain that upsets the rectilinear symmetries of a perfectly phased (instantaneous) reflection. This in turn generates a *slippage* within the sequence of reflections that precludes the possibility of eventual closure. Consequently, Derrida’s philosophical reflection operates not with the orthogonal contradictions of symmetrically opposed determinations, but rather with differentiating relations that are “determined otherwise”; determinations that instead of opposing each other “head on” at 180 degrees, come into contact at varying angles. Derrida alludes to this methodological trait of *différance* in the following passage:

Consequently, to luxate the philosophical ear, to set the *luxo*’s in the logos to work, is to avoid frontal and symmetrical protest, opposition in all the forms of *anti-*, or in any case to inscribe *antism* and overturning, domestic denegation, in an entirely other form of ambush, of *lokhos*, of textual maneuvers.⁵¹

The question we must now consider is whether Derrida’s “autonomous *différance*” and Hegel’s “autonomous negation” can provide a convincing account of our experience of self-consciousness.

⁵⁰ *Dissemination* 314.

⁵¹ *Margins*, xv

Due to the reflexive form of these autonomous principles, both are committed to the reflective model of self-consciousness.⁵² Thus before we even begin to subject Derrida and Hegel's use of these models to critical scrutiny, we first need to consider whether the *model itself* is in principle capable of accounting for what we experience as self-consciousness. Put most succinctly: is simple self-relation synonymous with *cognizant* self-relation? In a variation on the myth of Narcissus, does he actually know, is he really *cognizant*, that it is his smile that the water reflects? If it is the first time that Narcissus has ever seen his reflection it would seem doubtful that he does, since he has no criterion that would enable him to recognize the image reflected in the water as *his*. This inability to recognize one's own reflection in the absence of a criterion, illustrates the limitations of a strictly dyadic conception of reflective self-consciousness. Simple self-relation can occur between just two elements; for example, a tree perfectly reflected by a tinted window. In this relation there is no immanent possibility provided for their identification as a self-relation. Thus while this simple, internal self-relation may be a necessary condition for identification of these two elements as a unity, it is certainly not a sufficient condition for this identification. For this condition to be fulfilled, a third element external (transcendent) to the relation would have to also be included.

Let us first consider Hegel's autonomous negation that, duplicating itself in its final stage, establishes an immanent self-relation in which it perfectly mirrors itself. Clearly, this configuration does not satisfy the sufficient structural condition for

⁵² Strangely enough, even after having brilliantly illuminated the shortcomings of this model of consciousness, Derrida refuses to let go of it, basing his entire metaphysics on its flawed, reflective structure.

consciousness of this self-relation, since it provides only a dyadic structure that is just the *necessary* condition for consciousness of such a self-relation. To be cognizant of this self-relation requires a third element external to this internal referencing, that would provide a criterion whereby the unity of these two structures could be identified. In the absence of this third element it is meaningless to describe this self-relation as a case of cognizant self-reflection, since an account of self-consciousness that does not provide for a triadic structure cannot account for our experience of self-consciousness.

This is precisely the criticism that Schelling levels at Hegel and his efforts to establish self-consciousness as the *result* of an autonomous and immanent reflection. Lacking any way of supplying knowledge of the identity of the related elements, Hegel can claim success only at the cost of presupposing the very identity he is attempting to generate. Being, conceived as “the relation of its Other to itself”, is identified with the relation of negative self-reflection. As we have seen, the transition to the mediate, second relation of reflection, discloses itself as the unfolding of a self-relation that Hegel, however, can only *presuppose* as residing in immediate Being. The circularity of this argument is for Schelling nothing more than a *petitio principii*.

But there are other problems: the relation of negative self-relation can never account for the *identity* of Being and essence that Hegel is attempting to prove. As early as 1804 Schelling argues that self-consciousness can never be generated as the result of the interplay of two reflexes.⁵³ The synthesis that is self-consciousness is not the *ratio essendi* for our knowledge of the I, since none of the elements that make up

⁵³ SW I/4, 358; I/6, 185.

the self-reflexive model betray the characteristic of being identical to any of the other elements. Schelling's point is brutally simple: the self-relation of negation is the necessary but not the sufficient condition for accounting for the existential experience of self-consciousness. Two reflective structures combined in the mirror act of self-reference can neither generate a consciousness of the logical identity of these elements, nor can they generate the immediately certain consciousness of our existence. Inverting Hegel's order of progression, Schelling begins not with the *rationes cognoscendi* of the concept, but with the *rationes essendi* of the unity and facticity of our experience of self-consciousness. Accusing Hegel of having ignored Kant's proof that existence can never be the implication of a concept, Schelling argues that this certainty of experience must be grounded in a being prior to negation and its dialectical hall of mirrors (a being transcendent to autonomous thinking he terms "*das Unvordenkliche*"). In doing this Schelling by no means disputes the validity of Hegel's brilliant demonstration of how a negative self-relation can generate a positive in the ideal and inanimate world of logic. His concern rather, is to show that such a procedure has only provided the *rationes cognoscendi* for being, and not the *rationes essendi*. The real ground -- a transreflexive *unvordenkliches* Being that Schelling designates as transcendent -- must precede consciousness and can therefore never be generated as the result of a logical operation. The negative proof of this is found in the repeated failures of metaphysical attempts at an autonomous and thus immanent self-grounding of reason within itself.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Because of the flawless, reflexive architecture of Hegel's logic -- a logic in which substance is

In comparison to Hegel, Derrida presents us with quite a different challenge when we turn to his account of self-consciousness, for the disappointing reason that he has never advanced a positive account of this experience.⁵⁵ What is clear however, is that he does not want to simply “suspend” the phenomenon of self-consciousness, meaning and reference, but rather to determine them “otherwise.” That is, he seeks to

transfigured into the subject -- we can also apply the formal structure of Schelling's criticism of Hegel's extraction of self-consciousness to his derivation of existence: just as reflection is the ideal ground of self-consciousness, so too is essence the *rationis cognoscendi* of being. The *rationes essendi* for essence is transreflexive being, just as self-consciousness finds its real ground in a transreflexive familiarity with self. Thus as soon as either essence or self-consciousness *is reflexively*, it has had to *have already been factually* (Schelling's *faktische*). Transreflexive being and consciousness are therefore the heterogeneous carriers of essence and self-consciousness; both essence and self-consciousness are dependent on this being that transcends the immanent reflexivity of reason within itself. Remove the presence of this being and the abyss of human reason will devour the strictly theoretical mind in the black hole of infinite regress *qua* reflexivity. To preserve this positive facticity of our experience, Schelling calls for a “positive philosophy” that begins with Being that is *not* the Other of itself, but with Being that is truly Other, that is, with transcendent being: “We can produce everything that occurs in our experience, a **priori**, in mere thought, but as such it exists of course *only* in thought. If we wanted to transform this into an objective proposition -- say, that everything in itself likewise exists only in thought, then we would have to return to the standpoint of a Fichteian idealism. If we want anything that exists outside of thought, then we *must* proceed from a being which is absolutely independent of all thought, which precedes all thought. Of this being the Hegelian philosophy knows nothing, it has no place for this concept. Kant incidentally has in mind that which necessarily exists, to the extent that it is at the same time *God*; at the beginning of the positive philosophy we must still disregard this, and seizing it as that which just exists we discard the concept of *God*, precisely because it is a contradiction to posit on the one hand that which just exists, and yet also to posit it as *something* with a *concept*. For either the concept must come first, and being must be the result of the concept, so that it would then no longer be the unconditional being; or the concept is the result of being, and we must then start from being, devoid of the concept, and precisely this is what we want to do in the positive philosophy. But in *God* it is precisely *that*, by virtue of which he is what groundlessly exists, which Kant calls the abyss of human reason; what is this other than that before which reason stands motionless, by which reason is devoured, in the face of which it is momentarily nothing, capable of nothing?” (SW XI, 100). The autonomous engine of reflexivity -- the defining feature of what Schelling calls “negative philosophy”-- is an immanent thinking that denies the heteronomous possibility of “transcendence” *qua* positive, transreflexive Being. Its first and most strategic move towards its desired autonomy demonstrates a self-forgetting, a forgetting of the groundless positivity of existence, and results in a subjectless form of speculative thinking whose carrier absolves itself from *its own* existence, by reducing the ecstatic and “absolutely transcendent being” of existence to a determination of essence.

⁵⁵ This last assertion is an inference. As a negative (Hegelian) theologian, Derrida rarely offers any positive position on any philosophical idea or concept. Indeed, this is one of his most damning shortcomings, and is the kernel of the present criticism of his concept of self-consciousness -- a “concept” that is only negatively determined by what Derrida denies that it is. For the most positive treatment of this question of Derrida's status as a negative theologian, see his “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. H Coward and T. Foshay (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) 73-142.

determine them differently than metaphysics has in the past, namely as the epiphenomenon of the differential relations between the infinite *marques* of language. Due to Derrida's conception of the infinite capacity of language to generate new meanings, there can be no conclusive self-identity of a term, and correlatively, no conclusive identity of the self with itself.

As we have seen, autonomous *différance* is a differentiating relation that, Derrida claims, negatively generates the relational structures of language, and the local identity of terms. But given the negative and immanent environment in which we only have a configuration of related elements, it follows that Schelling's objection once again applies, namely, that there is nothing within this field of elements that could itself identify *sameness* between them. We must conclude that a configuration of interrelated elements is, of itself, incapable of disclosing their sameness or identity to each other, and incapable of becoming actually aware of this as well. We are therefore faced again with the an explanatory model whose negative self-referential structure is incapable of accounting for the positivity of self-consciousness, and thus cannot explain how it is that even local identities and meanings could be generated as the result of the interaction of these signs. And once again, we encounter an explanatory model that claims to provide us with the *rationes essendi* of self-consciousness, but in fact only delivers a *rationes cognoscendi*. These elements, while a necessary condition for the generation of self-consciousness and meaning conferral, are by no means sufficient. The real ground of self-consciousness and meaning, according to the *official version* of the Saussure's Cours, is the individual person who speaks words:

....The vocal sound is not a word except to the exact, constant extent that a meaning is attached to it.....

Thought is what delimits units; sound itself does not delimit them in advance: there is always a relation to thought....⁵⁶

Through its inability to step forth as a sufficient condition of self-consciousness, language has shown itself to be incapable of grounding and mediating all regions of self-consciousness. Indeed, if Schelling's arguments successfully blunt the credibility of deconstruction to account for the experience of self-consciousness, then there remains other areas in Derrida's system that require demythologizing -- for example, his inversion of writing over speech.

Contrary to Derrida's best efforts to present deconstruction as a radical break with "Western metaphysics", his clear and "profound affinities" with the Hegelian dialectic demonstrate the difficulty of attempting to make such a radical break with one's past. The extent to which autonomous negation and autonomous *différance* betray such strong similarities reveals the extent to which Derrida is still plowing the fields of "Transcendental Idealism." A structuralist analysis comparing the formal, system architecture of Derrida's deconstruction with other transcendental projects of the tradition would no doubt uncover many more "metaphysical" resemblances his system shares with the oppressive tradition he appears to perceive as somehow fatally flawed.

⁵⁶ *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 15 [1957], 8, 68. Derrida admittedly based his readings on the vulgate version of Saussure's *Cours*, a collection of lecture notes edited and published by Bally and Sechehaye in 1915. The role and importance of the thinking and speaking subject hardly even appears in this corrupt version of Saussure's semiology. In the quote above, taken from a much more reliable text, the significance of a meaning conferring consciousness clearly emerges. Derrida has been challenged to correct his readings of Saussure in light of the fact that this more authoritative text has been available since 1957, i.e., since before Derrida began developing his system of deconstruction. To date he has never responded. See Ludwig Jäger, "F. De Saussures historisch-hermeneutische Idee der Sprache: Ein Plädoyer für die Rekonstruktion des Saussureschen Denkens in seiner authentischen Gestalt," *Linguistik und Didaktik*, 27 (1976), pp. 210-44.

Indeed, his seemingly blind commitment to the reflexive model of self-consciousness, and his placing the entire fate of philosophy as such on the viability of *this* one model of self-consciousness is questionable to say the least.⁵⁷

Finally, our consideration of Schelling's critique of the Hegel's Ontological Argument for the fact of self-consciousness can also be extended to Habermas' communicative theory of praxis, and its position that the *rationes essendi* for the individual's consciousness is located in the "intersubjective." Following the reflexive dynamic of Hegel's system, we can see why Habermas must posit the knowledge of self as derived from a recognition we see in an Other. The only problem with this is precisely the same question of priority we considered above, namely that intersubjective experience is a necessary but insufficient condition for recognition. Conversely, just because something is not possible without intersubjective conditions (i.e., recognition of another self), it does not necessarily follow that this phenomenon is completely accounted for through intersubjectivity. Accepting that existence precedes essence, I can only determine another ego as an ego if I am already, to some extent, familiar with my own subjectivity.⁵⁸

It is imperative that we get beyond the truncated mythic history of "Western metaphysics" and show how other philosophers have successfully addressed the legitimate issues raised by Derrida regarding self-consciousness. In his "Rethinking the History of the Subject: Jacobi, Schelling and Heidegger", Bowie attempts to do just this,

⁵⁷ His reasoning seems to be if he can demonstrate that this reflexive model of the cogito is incapable of generating the foundational certainty of self-knowledge, then he demonstrates the futility of a philosophy allegedly grounded in such indubitable self-evidence.

⁵⁸ See Jürgen Habermas, "Über Moralität und Sittlichkeit -- Was macht eine Lebensform 'rational'?", in Herbert Schnädelbach, ed., *Rationalität* (Frankfurt: 1985) 218-235.

directing his research at earlier efforts to thematize a conception of the subject that would overcome the *aporias* of the reflective model of self-consciousness.⁵⁹ He turns to Jacobi and Schelling because “They propose related non-Cartesian models of subjectivity of the kind which Heidegger [and Derrida] effectively claims do not exist in Western metaphysics.”⁶⁰ This omission or ignorance of historical precedents and ideas is characteristic of the type of mythologizing engaged in by Derrida, and Bowie is certainly right to insist that we “must begin to consider historical manifestations of the question [of the subject]: otherwise we will end up repeating moves which have already been made in very sophisticated ways in the traditions” that have preceded us.⁶¹ For example Hölderlin, in his critique of Kant’s strictly reflexive construction of self-consciousness, advanced a *transreflexive model* in which the transcendental condition of possibility of reflection is an athetic consciousness that, as the foundational unity of consciousness, cannot itself be thematized in reflective judgment (*Ur-teil*).⁶² Accepting such a transreflexive model allows us to account for the intentionality of self-consciousness, while also qualifying the Cartesian claim to ground all knowledge in the absolute certainty of self-evidence. Hölderlin’s strategy suggests a model of self-consciousness capable of preserving the ultimate agency of the subject, while incorporating the legitimate criticisms made by Derrida against the totalizing claims of absolute knowledge. If mythic thinking is a timeless and subjectless thinking, then demythologizing must result in an historically grounded thinking that can deliver an

⁵⁹ Andrew Bowie, “Rethinking the History of the Subject: Jacobi, Schelling and Heidegger,” in *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, ed. S. Critchley and P. Dews (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 105-126.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶² D. Henrich, “Hölderlin über Urteil und Sein,” *Hölderlin-Jb.*, 14. Bruno Dialogue., 1965/6, 73-96.

account of the subject that will be true to the lived phenomenon of self-consciousness.

Then perhaps, Adorno's words will lose their haunting ring when he writes:

To the subject which has no genuine relation to the thing; which recoils from its strangeness and coldness, everything which it says about it becomes, both for itself and in itself, mere opinion, something reproduced and registered, which could also be otherwise. The subjectivist reduction to the arbitrariness of individual consciousness fits in precisely with submissive respect for an objectivity which such consciousness leaves standing uncontested, and which it reveres even in the assertion that whatever it thinks is non-binding in the face of its power; according to its measure, reason is nothing.⁶³

⁶³ Theodor Adorno, "Meinung, Wahn, Gesellschaft," in *Eingriffe: Neun kritische Modelle*, (Frankfurt: 1963) 169.

