



Iowa Research Online  
The University of Iowa's Institutional Repository

---

Department of Communication Studies Publications

---

1-1-1997

# "The Root of Humanity": Hegel on Language and Communication

John Durham Peters  
*University of Iowa*

---

Author posting. Copyright © State University of New York, 1997. This is the author's version of the work. It is posted here by permission of State University of New York for personal use, not for redistribution.

The definitive version was published in *Figuring the self: subject, absolute, and others in classical German philosophy*, 1997, pp. 227-244.

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](http://Iowa Research Online). For more information please contact: [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).

## Chapter Eleven

### "The Root of Humanity": Hegel on Language and Communication \*

John Durham Peters

#### I

Freud tells the story of once seeing a disagreeable old man approaching him on a train--until he realized there was a full-length mirror at the other end of his compartment.<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt compares the self to the daimon in ancient Greek religion which constantly follows each of us around, looking over our shoulder so that we never see it but others do.<sup>2</sup> Hegel, in turn, wrote that one self requires another: the self only exists in its relation to another self. The self, then, is perplexing: we seem to know nothing more intimately, yet there can be nothing so strange. The self is, so to speak, at once selfsame and selfdifferent: it belongs to itself and yet it transcends itself into nature and the world of others. Like a Moebius strip, the self only has one surface, though at any given point along that surface, an opposite side can be found.

In this essay I argue that Hegel's understanding of the self and its relation to other selves gives us rich ways to refigure the concept of communication. As this concept is often formulated, the problem is this: How can my experiences--unique to me and regarding which I have a privileged access--be transferred through the shaky public medium of language to reach your own, very different, set of experiences? The conceptions of

experience and selfhood informing this question--conceptions which lie at the heart of the Anglo-American empiricist tradition--give rise to an apparent antinomy: the self must face either the threat of isolation (in its private meanings) or bondage (to public ones). The political fears of solipsism and tyranny, in other words, shape the outer limits of current thinking about communication.<sup>3</sup>

Hegel can help us dialectically resolve such notions. But even among those continental theorists whose thinking has been nourished by the Hegelian principle of the identity of identity and difference, views about communication often make only piecemeal use of Hegel's complete vision. At one extreme lies the sober ideal of distortion-free communicative action (Habermas); at the other, the frolicksome exposé of the endless mischief of discourse such that communication is at best a chimera (Derrida). Habermas underplays language's strangeness, Derrida its instrumentality. Moreover, when Habermas quests for the social, political, and historical conditions in which people can participate in forms and forums of undistorted communication, or when Derrida revels in the différance of non-identical signifiers in discourse, both are elaborating just aspects of Hegel's grander vision.

A rereading of Hegel would round out current debates and help us find an account of communication that neither erases the curious fact of otherness at its core nor the possibility of doing things with words. Language is resistant to our intent; nonetheless, it is also the most reliable practical means of persuasion we have. Though language is a dark

---

\*Published in Figuring the Self: Subject, Individual, and Spirit in German Idealism. Eds. David E. Klemm and Guenter Zoeller. Albany: SUNY Press, 1997. 227-244.

vessel and does not carry quite what I, as a speaking self, might think it does, it still manages to coordinate action between selves more often than not. This center position would be occupied by thinkers such as Gadamer and Ricoeur.

In this brief essay, my task is to outline Hegel's insights into what we today would call communication; current debates will only play distantly in the background. Hegel's treatment of recognition (Anerkennung) and of language (Sprache) as "the real existence of spirit" (Dasein des Geistes) in the Phenomenology of Spirit (1807) will be the core exhibits in my argument, as Hegel preserves both the uncanniness of language and the possibility of its working to build community life. In particular, Hegel argues that the self's inwardness is no automatic property of all human beings but precisely acquired through interaction with others: the self learns to know itself as a self only through participation in a public, spiritual (geistig) world. He makes communication not a psychological problem of two private minds touching but a political and historical problem of creating conditions in which the mutual recognition of self-conscious individuals is possible.

Hegel interpretation is, admittedly, a notoriously vexed business: the same thinker who inspired the young Marx and Dewey with his dynamism has long been seen by others as an overweening systematizer. As Vittorio Hösle argues, Hegel's thought is a watershed between the modern philosophy of subjectivity and the post-Hegelian focus on intersubjectivity, so that it is difficult to know whether to read Hegel as the last great thinker of the cogito or the first thinker of "the other." It is Hösle's thesis that a fault-line runs in Hegel's system between the Logic, which culminates in absolute subjectivity, and his

"Realphilosophie" (philosophy of nature and spirit), which is motivated by insights into intersubjectivity, however unevenly they are integrated into the system as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis usefully explains the conflict of interpretations around Hegel, since the choice of textual focus has much to do with the understanding of Hegel one comes away with, and explains my own choice of focus. A price Hegel paid for his ultimate systematic coherence, argues Höslle, was the suppression of intersubjectivity; hence the Phenomenology is far richer than the Encyclopaedia on this topic.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, much recent scholarship on intersubjectivity in Hegel focuses on the Phenomenology and his Jena work.<sup>6</sup> This essay only examines the Phenomenology, acknowledging that a full treatment would need to consider Hegel's early writings (e.g. the Frankfurt fragment on love),<sup>7</sup> his Jena lectures, his Philosophy of Right,<sup>8</sup> and his system as a whole.

## II

Hegel referred to self-consciousness as the terra firma of modern philosophy, the principle that made it distinctly modern.<sup>9</sup> The trouble is that self-consciousness is also the quicksand of modern thought, at least of German idealism. J. G. Fichte made a discovery about the self that Manfred Frank calls the experience of a whole generation.<sup>10</sup> It was that the attempt of the self to know itself must fail, since the self is not an object to be known but rather the active subject which in fact does the knowing. When in thought I go looking for my self and seek to know it, I am not merely looking for how it appears as an object, but what it really is as a subject. When I reflect on my inner self, all I can grasp is an energy of positing, the mighty whirlwind of the world-constituting self as it rushes by. Yet I do

recognize it as myself, not as something or someone else, which suggests that I must have made the acquaintance of myself before I started to philosophize about it.<sup>11</sup> Otherwise I'd not recognize as me what I find. Hence the self is an undivided activity that turns back on itself, a unity of two parts. As Fichte said in an 1802 note added to his Wissenschaftslehre: "the self is a necessary identity of subject and object: a subject-object; and is so absolutely, without further mediation."<sup>12</sup>

That the self is an immediate unity with itself, a Moebius- like entity, was an insight taken in several directions by thinkers after Fichte. Novalis, for example, saw that to be a self is to be engaged in self-deferral--a fact he dubbed the "sophistry of the self."<sup>13</sup> The self chases itself in successive phases: but since the self is fundamentally one, it strives for reunification in the future. In reflection, we see only our past self: in the present, we see only the self escaping itself.<sup>14</sup> As Novalis wrote, to say that the self exists (ek-sists) is to say that "it finds itself beside itself" [Es findet sich, ausser sich].<sup>15</sup> The self confronts itself in the uncanny situation of being its own double. Romantic topoi such as nostalgia, longing for postponed unity, and the sweetly painful sense of the vanishing moment clearly originate, for Novalis at least, in philosophical reflection on the temporal structure of self-consciousness.

Much could be said about the ramifications of the discovery of the Doppelgänger self in subsequent European literature (e.g. Hoffmann, Poe, Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky, Freud, Borges) but the Phenomenology itself offers a classic treatment of self-doubling and -deferral. Its opening arguments already take up the theme of the vanishing present: what is most richly present to me here and now--this daylight, this moment--will inevitably pass

away.<sup>16</sup> The contents of my thought, taken as sensuous certainty, are self-depleting. Even when immersed in the blooming, buzzing confusion of the senses, one must face "this endless paradox of consciousness, this eternal flight of myself from myself."<sup>17</sup> I cannot know what I now am, only what I was: but what I now am is only what I will later become. "We get self-possession, self-apprehension, self-knowledge, only through endlessly fleeing from ourselves, and then turning back to look at what we were."<sup>18</sup> The otherness of the self to itself is the founding motive of the Phenomenology and its method: consciousness must pass through the tribulations of the dialectic in order to know itself later through a process of recollection [Er-innerung].<sup>19</sup> Hegel's pun suggests that inwardness is a telos, not an arche. As Royce puts Hegel's basic insight: "I know myself only in so far as I am known or may be known by another than my present or momentary self."<sup>20</sup>

Knowing self by another is at the core of the process of recognition, described in one of the most famous passages in the Phenomenology.<sup>21</sup> Hegel starts his discussion of the emergence of self-consciousness from the key datum that human beings are desiring beings. Desire is the most elementary form of self-consciousness which humans share with animals; its usual modus operandi is the utter assimilation of the object. Desire has a fundamentally negative relationship to its object: for example, the apple ceases to exist as an apple when I eat it; my continuing life is dependent on the constant cancellation or negation of other objects and their assimilation into my body. As creatures of desire, then, we humans find ourselves both dependent on objects that have no lasting reality and entrapped in a circle of desire and assimilation that is neither human nor free. For Hegel desire is an

early form of self-consciousness, but it is radically self-enclosed and not able to be introduced into an "objective," public, shared, social domain.

How, for Hegel, can the desiring human animal jump off the wheel of desire and prove itself to be a human and not a beast? Since the human layer of the desiring creature has no positive content yet, it must negate its animal nature: desire must be directed to other humans, recognized by them, and must discover objects whose satisfactions are not merely transitory. As Hegel puts it, "Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness."<sup>22</sup> Desire is still a relentless striving for fulfillment though it finds a new "object," one that it cannot simply cancel or assimilate: i.e. another subject. And here, in this rendezvous of two selves, we first encounter, as Hegel notes, the concept of Spirit or Geist--which he defines as the experience of the simultaneous diversity and unity of self-consciousnesses, of an "I that is We and We that is I."<sup>23</sup>

### III

The fight for recognition is the transition from self-consciousness to Spirit. Recognition, as Robert R. Williams argues, is for Hegel the genesis of Spirit.<sup>24</sup> "This situation of reciprocal recognition is one of communicative freedom, which Hegel describes as being at home with self in another."<sup>25</sup> Unlike Fichte and Schelling, who used the formula of "I = I" to express the starting point of their systems, Hegel insists on the experience of Spirit within a community, "I = We."<sup>26</sup>

Self-consciousness, in the opening words of the master-slave section, can exist for itself only as it exists for another self-consciousness: it exists only as it is recognized.<sup>27</sup> Leo



Rauch suggests the Berkeleysque phrase for Hegel: esse est agnoscere, to be is to be recognized.<sup>28</sup> For Hegel, human realities exist only insofar as they appear in the daylight of mutual recognition and collective life. The higher accomplishments of Spirit--law, the state, art, poetry, religion, and philosophy--do exist for Hegel in material form (e.g. in texts, cities, stone, paint, language, etc.). But they do not exist as Spirit without being recognized as having a significance that transcends their embodiment. An animal might see a sculpture, say, as a piece of stone useful for shelter or other purposes, but could not recognize it as "sculpture," i.e. as possessing a meaning not exhausted by its animal uses and as belonging to a given moment in the history of the human species. To recognize the statue as a work of art or human expression is to be a member of a collective world in which the sculpture has meaning and to be capable of practices of interpretation and participation. For Hegel, Spirit, though it cannot be identified solely with the material forms it takes, is not some mystical entity: it exists precisely in the commerce of the "I" and the "We," in the communicative practices of a community. Spirit is, as I will argue below, fundamentally a matter of interpretation.

Now this "I = We" is not so easily achieved. The discovery that I am not the only self in the universe, is treated by Hegel as painful: as Royce puts it, we are all, pragmatically speaking, idealists in the sense that we each cannot help but live in a universe in which our self is the founding principle.<sup>29</sup> A self accustomed to the workings of desire is frustrated in its attempt to consume the other. Strange things start to happen when one self confronts another: the self either seems a foreign being, or the other seems nothing but a mirror of the self.<sup>30</sup> The act of one self is the identical act of the other: it is a concerted action of two

which seems to each to be only the action of one.<sup>31</sup> (Hegel's description has comic potentials, as the confusion of identity is one of the great devices of comedy from antiquity to the present; one thinks of the scene in the film Duck Soup in which the two, identically-dressed Marx brothers come to a doorway which they each think is a mirror and mimic each other until they discover they are really two people).

To each individual self-consciousness in Hegel's tableau, the other is a nullity at first, but the other cannot just be wished away or consumed or treated as a mere common object. Each is sure of self but not of the other, which amounts to being unsure of self as a human being.<sup>32</sup> Each desires to be recognized by the other as more than an animal immersed in life, and does so by being willing to sacrifice life for the sake of being hailed by the other to the human world, where a sign can count as more than life itself.<sup>33</sup> As an incipient human who knows that the other can memorialize the courage that brought my death I may be willing to sacrifice my life in battle for the sake of proving myself unattached to mere life. Should I fail to do so, I will remain a slave, that is to say, subhuman, and the whole process of making a public world in which two "I"s recognize each other as a "We" will have been undermined: since recognition which is not mutual must fail like a sign that only has a private interpretation. This part of the Phenomenology is all about what makes a being human, and it is tied to a sign-process of public recognition. Only in proving to another that one is more than an animal can one prove it to oneself: becoming human is an intersubjective accomplishment.

In this, Hegel attacks a core assumption of commonsense views of communication. For Hegel the self has no "inside"--its self- discovery goes on in the daylight of common life

in the threatening or loving company of others. That the self's "interior" is largely hidden from others grounds worries about the (im)possibility of communication. That you do not know what I really think or feel "inside" is the privilege I may claim (but to do so is, for Hegel, an affront to "the root of humanity," the mandate to achieve commonality in consciousness.)<sup>34</sup> The process of recognition, in contrast, suggests that the self's outside is just as hidden from itself as its inside is from others. For Hegel self-interiority and exteriority are temporal rather than spatial: one is an sich or "implicit" when he or she has not yet achieved recognition by another. Just as you cannot know the details of what remains unexpressed in my inwardness, so I cannot know what of my inner life is available to others and in what way. I do not know in detail how I appear in public, how others take me, how my actions redound in the world, even what my quirks and mannerisms are.<sup>35</sup> My self, so plainly revealed to others, is largely opaque to me and I can recognize it only as it is interpreted to me in public signs that I can recognize. My private self is obscure to you, but my public self is obscure to me. My private self, therefore, is also obscure to me, since it is made out of public materials. I have to rely on others for self-knowledge: I have no secret passageway to the holy of holies.

The self thus stands in the same position to itself as it stands with regard to others. As Peirce says, "The recognition by one person of another's personality takes place by means to some extent identical with the means by which he is conscious of his own personality."<sup>36</sup> Royce makes a similar point: "one discovers one's own mind through a process of inference analogous to the very modes of inference which guide us in a social effort to interpret our neighbors' minds. . . . Although you are indeed placed in the 'interior'

of yourself, you can never so far retire into your own inmost recesses of intuition as merely to find the true self presented to an inner sense."<sup>37</sup>

For Hegel the self has no privileged access to itself: it can only find itself afterwards when the tangible ex-pressions have been made, or in another self, who has recognized it as a self. Self and other intuit themselves in the same objective, public stuff--in Geist, which consists precisely in this in-betweenness.<sup>38</sup> The problem here, in Hegel's account, is that the medium of recognition is unequal and asymmetrical. The master succeeds in doing what was previously impossible in the realm of desire: he lives a life of pure pleasure, unmediated by contact with any transient thing (save the slave himself); he is a pure consumer, living in a world without resistance.<sup>39</sup> The slave, in contrast, must daily groan against the hard stuff of matter, transforming his ephemeral being into solidity through work. This leads Hegel's dialectic out of the impasse that arose in the relation of master and slave: the master ends up being recognized not by a fellow master, but by a slave. The master ultimately must fade away, lacking any element of permanence, while work becomes the medium of the slave's self-expression: the work is "desire held in check, fleetingness staved off" [gehemmte Begierde, aufgehaltenes Verschwinden].<sup>40</sup> The budding self-consciousness of the slave exists precisely in the objects he produces, which serve as signs in which he can recognize himself as he is recognized by others.<sup>41</sup>

To think of self-consciousness as existing, quite literally beside itself, in outer, material forms opens the door to unhappy consciousness, alienation, and the rest of the Phenomenology--a "gallery of images" of distorted forms of intersubjectivity (indeed intersubjectivity is not always a happy union of equals, but is protean in expression).<sup>42</sup>

Locating self and self-consciousness, like Spirit or Geist, in the precarious world of material things and mortal others is, admittedly, risky. But then, as Hegel makes so clear, Spirit is rarely realized without tragedy.<sup>43</sup>

#### IV

Hegel's conception of Spirit, like that of Sittlichkeit or ethical life, is fundamentally about the forms of collective life in which we find ourselves conjoined in a common history with others.<sup>44</sup> In several passages in the Phenomenology Hegel connects Geist directly with the medium of community, language [Sprache].<sup>45</sup> Language "is the existence [Dasein] of the self, as self; in language, self-consciousness, qua independent separate individuality, comes as such into existence, so that it exists for others."<sup>46</sup> Language, like work for the slave, is the medium for the exteriorization of the otherwise hitherto self-enclosed self. Other expressive means do not do justice to the self as a conscious being: action, gesture, facial expression all leave the self immersed in itself, partly hidden and obscured. "Language, however, contains the self in its purity--it alone expresses the I, the I itself."<sup>47</sup>

Several concepts from Hegel's description of the slave's coming to self-consciousness recur in his discussion of language as the medium of Spirit. In speech the self acquires objectivity [Gegenständlichkeit], just as the slave does through work. The slave's fear must be cultivated through service and "formative activity" [Bilden], otherwise it remains internal and speechless [innerlich und stumm].<sup>48</sup> The slave's coming-to-consciousness is a kind of coming to language and speech, a finding of his voice. For Hegel

"a being, for which self-consciousness is possible, is necessarily endowed with a voice, and further with speech, and must be recognized and recognizing . . ." <sup>49</sup>

But just as the slave is not yet free, speech offers a peculiar kind of objectivity, since it instantly vanishes: as soon as the "I" speaks as "I", it disappears, like the sound that carries the utterance, leaving only the perception of that self among those who heard it. Hegel uses the metaphor of infection [Ansteckung] to describe how the "I" is contagiously perceived [vernommen] by those who hear its speech.<sup>50</sup> But the self does not somehow disappear in its hearers: the disappearance of the sounds lets the self return to itself as universal: "This vanishing is thus itself immediately its abiding; it is its own knowing of itself, and its knowing itself as a self that has passed over into another self that has been perceived and is universal."<sup>51</sup> Self-knowledge, again, comes from alienation now, reincorporation later, and here Hegel makes speaking to another--communication--part of the odyssey of Spirit. The voice, as Simon argues, represents for Hegel the principle of the negation of the body to allow expression of Spirit in time.<sup>52</sup>

In the next paragraph, Hegel brilliantly discusses the kind of alienation from language that has undergirded and undermined most communication theory. Though Spirit obtains in the "in-between" of the self-consciousnesses, the unity of the entire situation of communication--at minimum, speaker, utterance, and hearer--gets broken into refractory sides (the speakers), leaving the unity behind as a floating, disconnected entity--the content or "message": "Their unity is broken up into two rigid, unyielding sides, each of which is for the other an actual object excluded from it. Consequently, the unity appears as a middle term [Mitte] . . ." <sup>53</sup> Hegel could be referring to traditional communication theory here, in

which "the message" is often thought as something passed back and forth like a frisbee between speakers independent of, and without any constitutive power on, them. But Hegel is insistent that the in-between is the chief form in which self-consciousness can find itself as such. "The spiritual substance [geistige Substanz]" needs two distinct self-conscious beings for it to enter into existence. And these in turn "are also immediately aware they they are such actual existences only through alienated mediation" [entfremdete Vermittlung]. For Hegel the whole situation of discourse is the forum for Spirit.

Language for Hegel is "the real existence [Dasein] of Spirit. Language is self-consciousness existing for others, self-consciousness which as such is immediately present [vorhanden], and as this self-consciousness is universal."<sup>54</sup> Self-consciousness is owes to the human capacity for speech, which implies an other, not just the possession of a brain. "A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it."<sup>55</sup> As language, self-consciousness is not private or enclosed by the experiences of the individual: indeed, Hegel supposes a direct communion of consciousnesses via language. In language "I = I", but also I = other: in language's objectivity the self [Selbst] is both distinct and "coalesces directly with other selves and is their self-consciousness. It perceives itself just as [ebenso] it is perceived by others . . ."<sup>56</sup> Hegel seems unconcerned about the odds against the successful "coalescence" [zusammenfließen] of selves, so public is language for him. The common presence of people to audible and intelligible signs seems sufficient here to link distinct self-consciousnesses--certainly a view remote from the

twentieth-century sensitivity to the possibility of breakdown in all situations of communication.

Hegel's fullest treatment of language in the Phenomenology comes in his discussion of Greek religion, which is basically an analysis of the carrying capacity of various media for the spirit. Greek religion is superior to the Egyptian for Hegel inasmuch as it has discovered interiority--and ways to embody it. Language offers itself as the highest element for the work of art--taking different forms, to be sure, in hymn, oracle, epic, tragedy, and comedy, all of which Hegel would later class under "community" in his lectures on art.<sup>57</sup> Hegel again calls language "an outer reality [Dasein] that is also immediately self-conscious existence. Just as the individual self-consciousness is immediately present in language, so it is also immediately present as a universal infection; the complete separation [vollkommene Besonderung] into individual selves is at the same time the fluidity and the universally communicated unity of the many selves [die allgemein mitgeteilte Einheit der vielen Selbst]; language is the soul existing as soul."<sup>58</sup>

In the singing of a hymn, in which all singers participate in praise of the god (or rather, are all inspired by the god), spirit possesses "the being-for-others and the being-for-self of the individuals in one unity."<sup>59</sup> Such celebration is both public and inwardly felt: it is no private pining, as in the case of "the beautiful soul,"<sup>60</sup> but an activity that fuses singularity and universality. "Devotion, ignited [angezündet] in all, is the spiritual stream which in the multiplicity of self-consciousness is conscious of itself as the act of all alike and as single being . . ."<sup>61</sup> Many voices, one song; differences preserved within unity: here we have the simultaneous "I" and "We" that is Geist.



A different kind of language among the Greeks is that of the oracle, which is not a kind of general self-consciousness. It is, in contrast, the language of a foreign self-consciousness, content only to speak in darkness and in riddles.<sup>62</sup> The true locale for spirit is not found here, but in the linguistic work of art, whose curious objectivity Hegel also contrasts with that of the statue, whose being is outer and thing-like.<sup>63</sup> Other forms of community art fail for a variety of reasons: in Bacchanalian revels, the self is beside itself [ausser sich] and utters only ecstatic glossolalia; in the physical beauty of the statue or the athlete, the self is submerged in corporeality, not its genuine element either. The language of the oracle is too contingent, that of the hymn sung only to a single god and not the the universe, and that of Bacchus is mere babbling. The integrity of a mythology is needed: "The perfect element in which inwardness is just as external as externality is inward is once again language . . ." <sup>64</sup>

For Hegel there is no inside and outside to language. Though it is used by particular speakers, that use operates in a system of signs that, like time, are materially fleeting, but nonetheless objective in that they contain self-consciousness in public form. Hence in language the artist finds finally his own Gestalt, and it turns out also to be the shape of his people, since the art work serves the inspiration or Begeisterung of the people.<sup>65</sup> Homer's achievement in Hegel's view is nothing less than having made "a pantheon whose element and habitation is language," a "collective heaven" [Gesamthimmel] to go together with a "collective people" [Gesamtvolk].<sup>66</sup> In language the self-consciousness of a free people can be formed. Here we find the love of the old mythology in one who earlier had seen the need

for a new mythology to match modern times.<sup>67</sup> Later Hegel would regard philosophy as the highest form of Spirit--an art that happens preeminently through language.

## V

Though highly suggestive, Hegel's theory of language is not well developed by current standards; much in his views is the common property of his age.<sup>68</sup> Important for us is his insistence that self-consciousness exists primarily in language (rather than in individual bodies) and that the self knows itself in the same way it knows another. Moreover, Hegel includes what one could call a communicative imperative in his philosophical anthropology. In the Preface, Hegel mocks those who pretend to have a private inner oracle that exempts them from the need to argue their views with their fellows: such people trample "underfoot the root of humanity. For it is the nature of humanity to press onward to agreement with others; human nature only really exists in an achieved community [Gemeinsamkeit] of consciousness."<sup>69</sup>

Such claims have an uncanny resemblance to the notion of a community of interpretation developed in the shadow of Hegel by the American philosophers Peirce and Royce, a notion which posits that human nature exists precisely in the communicative relationships it finds itself in and among.<sup>70</sup> In closing, I want to pursue some insights of theirs which develop the concept of communication in a Hegelian direction. The relevance of Peirce and especially Royce for Hegel studies has been noted more often than developed.<sup>71</sup> Both thinkers grappled lifelong with German idealism, Royce being the

foremost idealist in the United States in his lifetime and perhaps the chief importer of German idealism into American circles.<sup>72</sup>

Peirce argues that "man is a sign. . . my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought."<sup>73</sup> Humanity and "words reciprocally educate each other."<sup>74</sup>

Consciousness for Peirce does not only apply to beings endowed with "animal life"--words have consciousness and grow in it. This position need not conjure the specter of animism (Geist as ghost) nor the fear that language is a totalitarian squelcher of cognitive freedom: for Peirce as for Hegel, the education between humanity and language is reciprocal. Neither is Peirce as it were a pre-post-structuralist arguing for the relentless hailing capacities of discourse through which we, as subjects, are shaped at will: his vision of language as--ideally--a set of historically-grounded and scientifically-tested public signs that has neither an inside nor an outside and develops through an open-ended community of inquiry sounds much like Hegel's notion of Geist.

The meaning of one sign, for Peirce and Royce, is another sign: meaning obtains in the commerce or concourse between signs, not in some terminus in either the material universe "outside" or the mental universe "within." Meaning is neither a matter of referring to objects nor evoking concepts. A sign "expresses a mind, and it calls for an interpretation through some other mind, which shall act as mediator between the sign, or between the maker of the sign, and some one to whom the sign is to be read." Each interpretation is itself a new sign, which in turn calls forth more interpretations or signs.<sup>75</sup>

The process of interpretation is triadic: (1) A sign (2) means something (3) to somebody: all three moments are necessary. For example, the hieroglyphics of ancient

Egypt, prior to the discovery and decipherment of the Rosetta stone, did indeed have meaning, but they did not have that meaning for anybody then living: they were mute, like the slave before his labors of externalization, what Hegel would call "an sich." Once deciphered, the significances of those signs were available to anyone who learned the sign-system, that is, someone who learned to systematically associate one sign with another. Indeed, that decipherment was precisely the mapping of one sign-system upon another. Even when I write a reminder or a diary entry to myself I treat myself as someone with whom I must later communicate: my note must be intelligible to my future self who is an other to me and must be able to make links to a public association of signs that I can recognize.<sup>76</sup> Even in talking to ourselves we employ public media of communication: inwardness is achieved only after outer expression. Signs signify, meanings mean, and minds interpret not through private whimsy but through public discourse.

Royce posits three kinds of intellectual processes to account for a community of interpretation: conception, perception, and interpretation (which correspond roughly to Peirce's categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness). "Perception has its natural terminus in some object perceived; . . . Conception is contented, so to speak, with defining the universal type . . . [Both] are self-limiting processes."<sup>77</sup> By perception Royce means something like the synthesis of sensory input; by conception, the analysis of ideas in their purely logical necessities. But like Hegel he takes the method of philosophy to be more than analytic and synthetic:<sup>78</sup> Royce's notion of interpretation is intended to account for social, symbolic life without reducing it to either the order of ideas or the order of events. Interpretation is a process that is, in principle, endless in time, since both its starting point

and its results are signs: "every interpretation, as an expression of mental activity, addresses itself to a possible interpreter, and demands that it shall be, in turn, interpreted."<sup>79</sup> Every sign shoots beyond itself to another sign: a sign, we might say, attains satisfaction only in another sign. Sittlichkeit is a Hegelian term of art that has long puzzled translators: ethical life, customary morality, mores? In a spirit of creative appropriation I might propose "structures of communication."<sup>80</sup>

Royce's notion of interpretation as necessarily social and temporal, and of social life as necessarily interpretive, returns us to Hegel. Hegel, read through Royce and Peirce, can be seen to have discovered a truth about social life, with all its love and strife: since humans are signs, and since the meaning of one sign is another sign, one human being finds his or her meaning in another human being. Selves and signs exist alike only in their relations to others. Both are examples--perhaps the most basic ones of all--of Hegel's principle of the identity of identity and difference. The nature of the self is to transcend itself.

What is a stumbling block to solitary philosophical reflection--the self as a paradoxically circular entity--is a truth in community life: the self is a relation that relates itself to an other. Such relations, as the Phenomenology shows, can range from the grotesque to the sublime, from the violence of battle to the ecstasy of the community work of art. Peirce and Royce do not feature the dark side of self-other relations as much as Hegel: Royce's vision of interpretation is unremittingly sunny. Hegel would likely accept Royce's vision as a normative description of Geist, but he would insist on its being possible only as a result of a larger process of social and historical preparation. Peirce and Royce help show the centrality of communication--the meeting of selves in public sign-processes--

for Hegelian thought, and point toward the homeland of Geist in the community of interpretation.

## NOTES

1. Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche," in Gesammelte Werke, vol. 12 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1947), pp. 262-3, note 1.
2. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 179-80.
3. I have developed this argument in "John Locke, the Individual, and the Origin of Communication," Quarterly Journal of Speech 75 (1989), 387-99. Locke can be read as the author, I argue, of this notion of communication, and taking human discourse as an issue of mind-matching or successful transmission shows up in some current theorists (e.g. Karl Popper) but more commonly in a wide range of popular and self-help discourses.
4. Vittorio Hösle, Hegels System: Der Idealismus der Subjektivität und das Problem der Intersubjektivität, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987).
5. Hösle, vol. 2, 385, 407.
6. For example, Robert R. Williams, Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); Andreas Wildt, Autonomie und Anerkennung: Hegels Moralkritik im Lichte seiner Fichte-Rezeption (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982); Ludwig Siep, Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie: Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer

Philosophie des Geistes (Freiburg/Munich: Karl Alber, 1979); Raymond Plant, Hegel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973); Jürgen Habermas, "Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel's Jena Philosophy of Mind," in Theory and Practice, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 142-169.

7. Translated into English by T. M. Knox, in G. W. F. Hegel, Early Theological Writings, ed. Richard Kroner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 302-308. See also, more generally, H. S. Harris, Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight, 1770-1801 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

8. For recent work in this vein on Hegel's Philosophy of Right, see, for example: Siep, 285-294; Allen W. Wood, Hegel's Ethical Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 77-93 and passim; Michael Theunissen, "The Repressed Intersubjectivity in Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in Hegel and Legal Theory, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York/London: Routledge, 1991), 3-63; and David J. Depew, "The Polis Transformed: Aristotle's Politics and Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in Marx and Aristotle: Nineteenth-Century German Social Theory and Classical Antiquity, ed. George E. McCarthy (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).

9. G. W. F. Hegel, Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III, Werke, vol. 20, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), 120.



10. Manfred Frank, Einführung in die frühromantischen Ästhetik: Vorlesungen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 249.

11. See Dieter Henrich, "Fichte's Original Insight," trans. David R. Lachterman, in Contemporary German Philosophy, vol. 1 (College Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982), 15-53, and his "Self-Consciousness: A Critical Introduction to a Theory," Man and World 4 (1971), 3-28.

12. J. G. Fichte, The Science of Knowledge [Wissenschaftslehre], with the First and Second Introductions, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1982), 99.

13. "Sophistik des Ich." Novalis, quoted in Frank, Einführung, 268.

14. Here I follow the lucid explication in Frank, Einführung, pp. 264-5.

15. Novalis quoted in Frank, *ibid.*, 265. Cf. Novalis Werke, ed. with commentary by Gerhard Schulz (Munich: Beck, 1969), 295: "Um sich selbst zu begreifen muß das Ich ein anderes ihm gleiches Wesen sich vorstellen, gleichsam anatomieren."

16. G. W. F. Hegel, Phaenomenologie des Geistes (hereinafter PhG), ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952 [1807]), 79ff; paragraphs 91-110. I have relied for

paragraph numbering on Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). English quotations in this essay come from the Miller translation with occasional modifications.

17. Josiah Royce, The Spirit of Modern Philosophy (New York: Dover, 1983 [1892]), 205.

18. Royce, Spirit, 206.

19. PhG, 27-8, 39, 524, 564; paragraphs 29, 47, 753, 808.

20. Royce, Spirit, 207.

21. PhG, 133-50; paragraphs 166-196. This section has been given a dazzling variety of interpretations: see George Armstrong Kelly, "Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage,'" in Hegel, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Garden City: Anchor, 1972), 189-217, who treats the range of readings historically made of the section: psychological, social, political, etc. I am convinced that Hegel intended the account of the struggle for recognition as more a rewrite of Book I of Aristotle's Politics, Hobbes's state of nature and Fichte's notion of Anerkennung (see Wildt, 337-342) than a description of the necessary negativity of all interpersonal encounters, however suggestive such readings are (e.g. by Lacan). It comes early in the PhG and hence belongs to an early stage of human consciousness: Höle (vol. 2,

374-5) rightly compares this section to monumental mythical struggles such as Enkidu and Gilgamesh, Arjuna and Shiva, Jacob and the Angel. For Hegel, recognition is already achieved in modern states: a fresh battle needn't begin at every encounter.

22. PhG, 139; paragraph 175. Emphasis in original.

23. PhG, 140; paragraph 177. Robert R. Williams, "Hegel's Concept of Geist," in Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit, ed. Peter G. Stillman (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 1-20, outlines three competing models of Geist in Hegel interpretation: Spirit as 1) a transcendental ego redivivum; 2) humanity itself; 3) social or intersubjective. Both Williams and I favor the third reading.

Throughout this paper I will use "Spirit" with capital S for Geist (following A. V. Miller).

24. Williams, Recognition, 143. One should note that it was Fichte, not Hegel, who first developed the concept of Anerkennung: see Williams, Recognition, 49-64; Wood, 77-83; Wildt, 19-23, 287-293, and passim. Nonetheless, as Höhle argues (vol. 2, 379-80, note 85), the first principle of Fichte's philosophy was always the "I" and it was Hegel who broke through to intersubjectivity.

25. Williams, Recognition, 149.

26. Cf. PhG, 257-8; paragraph 351, and PhG, 471; paragraph 671.
27. PhG, 141; paragraph 178.
28. Leo Rauch, "Introduction: On Hegel's Concept of Spirit," in Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with Commentary, ed. and trans. Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 33.
29. Josiah Royce, Lectures on Modern Idealism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), 158.
30. PhG, 141; paragraph 179.
31. PhG, 142; paragraph 182.
32. PhG, 143; paragraph 186.
33. Hegel's term (PhG, 144; paragraph 187) for putting one's life at risk in the battle for recognition--daransetzen--ups the stakes in the philosophical history of the verb setzen in German idealism, making it a matter of life and death, rather than only a matter of philosophical speculation, as in Fichte. Cf. Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Reading

of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr., assembled by Raymond Queneau, ed. Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

34. PhG, 56; paragraph 69. See below.

35. Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 137, notes the uniquely modern self-alienation of seeing oneself on screen or hearing one's recorded voice. Mirrors are more ancient.

36. Charles Sanders Peirce, The Philosophical Writings of Peirce, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), 351.

37. Josiah Royce, The Problem of Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1913), vol. 2, 138-9. Royce here seems to be commenting on Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," Philosophical Writings of Peirce, 228-250.

38. Royce, Spirit, pp. 208-9, note 2, underscores this point by translating Hegel's Allgemeinheit, in section 436 of the Berlin Encyclopaedia, where the self-consciousnesses affirmatively recognize each other as recognizing, by publicity.

39. PhG, 146-7; paragraph 190. La phénoménologie de l'esprit, trans. Jean Hyppolite (Paris: Aubier, 1941), vol. 1, 162, note 24 (Hyppolite's note).

40. PhG, 149; paragraph 195.

41. Here one is reminded of Schleiermacher's claim, as recounted in the chapter in this volume by Jeffrey Hoover, that the forming of property is necessary for the forming of one's individuality.

42. The phrase "gallery of images" of course comes from PhG, 563; paragraph 808.

43. See Williams's excellent discussion in Recognition, chapters 9 and 10.

44. Hegel defines Sittlichkeit in terms of Geist--PhG, 256; paragraph 349. Cf. Höhle, vol. 2, 381-385.

45. Paragraphs 508, 652, 710, 713, 726 among others. Language does appear in different moments in the PhG--as a corrupted vehicle of sycophancy and flattery in paragraphs 508ff, as the breakdown of public moral substance in the reliance on conscience in 652ff, and as the very soul of Greek religion in 710ff. Nevertheless, Hegel admits a repetitive purpose: each discussion of language he uses the term "wieder" [again] as if reminding himself and us of the return of the same point.

46. PhG, 362; paragraph 508.

47. PhG, 362; paragraph 508.

48. PhG, 149-50; paragraph 196.

49. Joseph Simon, Das Problem der Sprache bei Hegel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966), 70.

50. PhG, 362; paragraph 508.

51. PhG, 363; paragraph 508.

52. Simon is very useful in explaining why the voice, as a medium that works in time, must disappear for Hegel: "The voice for Hegel signifies the cancellation of localization in space, the expression of freedom from spatial determination to which the living being strives" (72).

53. PhG, 363; paragraph 509.

54. PhG, 458; paragraph 652.

55. PhG, 140; paragraph 177.

56. PhG, 458; paragraph 652. The sense here of "just as" is less "at the same moment" than "in the same way."

57. Robert C. Solomon, In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G. W. F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 607.

58. PhG, 496; paragraph 710.

59. PhG, 496; paragraph 710.

60. PhG, 445ff; paragraphs 632ff.

61. Ibid. Miller omits part of the phrase in translation. Note Hegel's images of fire and water, which capture the contagion of such collective devotion.

62. PhG, 496-7; paragraph 711.

63. PhG, 498; paragraph 713. That Hegel's model here is Homer is clear on 507, paragraph 729.

64. PhG, 505; paragraph 726.



65. The male pronoun is Hegel's.
66. PhG, 506; paragraph 727. Cf. Herman Rapaport's chapter in this volume concerning national poets.
67. See the misnamed "Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism" translated in H. S. Harris, Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight, 1770-1801 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 510-512; also the interesting discussion, though a bit strained in its reading of the political views of the document, in Manfred Frank, Der kommende Gott: Vorlesungen über die neue Mythologie, part 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 153-87.
68. Plant, Hegel, p. 27ff, and Charles Taylor, Hegel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 380ff and passim, both emphasize Hegel's debts to Herder.
69. PhG, 56; paragraph 69.
70. See, e.g., Peirce, Philosophical Writings, 247, 250, 39; Royce, Problem, vol. 2, passim.
71. See, Höhle, vol. 1, 8, and vol. 2, 384; Williams, Recognition, 169, 199; and Williams, "Hegel's Concept," 18: "Perhaps no one has understood this [Hegel's theory of Sittlichkeit,

with its central conception of Geist as social infinite] better than Josiah Royce in his book The Problem of Christianity."

72. See Royce's chapters on Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel in The Spirit of Modern Philosophy and Lectures on Modern Idealism. Royce is often called a Hegelian, but it was a label he resisted: see Problem, vol. 1, xi-xii.

73. Peirce, Philosophical Writings, 249.

74. Ibid.

75. Royce, Problem, vol. 2, 283.

76. Royce, Problem, vol. 2, 140ff.

77. Royce, Problem, vol. 2, 149.

78. Hegel, Differenzschrift, quoted in Plant, 90.

79. Royce, Problem, vol. 2, 160.

<sup>80</sup>I am grateful to Marsha Paulsen Peters, Ben Peters, David J. Depew, Kenneth Cmiel, and Kate Neckerman for much-needed help and encouragement in the writing of this paper. POROI, Figuring the Self workshop for their learned and congenial company.