

# Desire for Hegel

Judith Butler, Alexandre Kojève, and Subjective Spirit

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## Abstract

In this paper I pay tribute to Butler's reading of Alexandre Kojève, especially in his presentation of Hegel's notion of desire. I suggest that Kojève's radically anthropocentric reading of Hegel inaugurates a tradition of interpretation with which we are still living. I want then to argue the following: first, that Kojève (and many who have followed him) pursue an understanding of desire in Hegel that Hegel's texts cannot support. As we shall see, for Hegel desire is not an end in itself, nor is it constitutive of subjectivity. In fact, in the *Jena* texts of which Kojève was aware (but perhaps not closely), desire is rejected as too "animal" a category to found subjectivity at all; second, the abandonment of Hegel's absolute subjectivity in favour of what Kojève sees as the temporal consequences of the privileging of desire have the effect, not of positing an adequate anthropology, but of suspending the interpretation of time. Far from opening the way to reading Hegel as an "anthropology", Kojève's reading (and that of those who have followed him) has had the effect of reducing Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* to a philosophy of only subjective spirit. Hegel's philosophy of absolute spirit at least provided for the possibility of providing a ground for social forms, since at each stage of the development of spirit humanity manifests the higher forms of the concept. Without any understanding of absolute spirit, humanity is reduced either to a pure constructivism, or, worse, as interpreting all social forms beyond those of individuality as forms of power. Put more starkly, Hegel's subjectivity is made to come very close to Nietzsche's. I want to conclude that Kojève's reading (and what follows from it) constitute a "suspension" of Hegel's thought as one of subjective, rather than absolute, spirit.

## Introduction

Judith Butler's first book, published in 1987, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France* is not as widely read as her other works,<sup>1</sup> but forms a philosophical foundation for her subsequent reflections on subjectivity and gender. The book is a formidable survey of French readings of Hegel, beginning with Kojève, but extending to Hyppolite, Sartre, Lacan, Deleuze and Foucault. Hegel continued to be important for Butler as her work developed.<sup>2</sup>

Kojève's lectures on Hegel, primarily directed towards Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, were delivered between 1933 and 1939. These were edited by Raymond Queneau and presented in a single volume in 1947, with a partial English translation appearing in 1969. As is well known, the lectures were followed by what became almost a "who's who" of French post-war philosophy: Sartre, Levinas, Bataille, Koyré, and Lacan to name but a few. The lectures were hugely influential, not least on Jean Hyppolite who, in large part, engaged with the interpretative framework that they offered, even if he expanded on, and challenged, that framework with a scholarship less sweeping and more precise, than Kojève's.<sup>3</sup>

Butler provides a detailed and perspicuous reading of Kojève's analysis of desire in Hegel: "Kojève's peculiarly modern appropriation of Hegel's doctrine of desire occasions the questions of what in Hegel survives into the twentieth century and what is lost". It is Kojève's refusal of "Hegel's postulation of an ontological unity" that, through privileging the notion of desire, leaves Kojève "free to extend Hegel's doctrine of negation". Kojève, and his readers "live without the hope that philosophy will reveal new truths concerning the human situation [. . .] the end of history is the beginning of a truly anthropocentric universe".<sup>4</sup> Butler quotes with approval Dufrenne's summary of Kojève's position in a review of 1941, "what is ontologically considered as negativity, and metaphysically considered as time [is] phenomenologically considered as human action".<sup>5</sup> In particular, Butler adds, "Kojève builds upon Hegel's notion that desire both forms and reveals subjectivity [. . .] Kojève's subject is an essentially intentional structure; the subject *is* its desire for its object or Other; the identity

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*. The book was a revised version of Butler's 1984 doctoral dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance, Butler's 2012 essay, first published in German and English, and republished as 'To Sense What is Living in the Other: Hegel's early Love', pp. 90–111.

<sup>3</sup> Hyppolite speaks of how Kojève was, in this framework, "going beyond a literal reading". See Jean Hyppolite, 'Preface to the English Edition' in Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 65.

of the subject is to be found in the intentionality of its desire”.<sup>6</sup> It is desire for another human that truly reveals the meaning of desire as fully human. Above all this is a conception of desire “freed from the implicit teleological claims of Hegel’s view in the *Phenomenology*”.<sup>7</sup> Desire “must become manifest as a thoroughgoing experience of ‘conscious and voluntary progress’,” and as such is not an “innate drive” nor instance of “natural teleologies”.<sup>8</sup> Butler notes that Kojève had taken (at least some) account of Hegel’s remarks in lectures delivered during his period in Jena forming his view (of which more below). This is particularly important with regard to Hegel’s understanding of time, which Kojève reads to mean that “the desire of another individual serves as the condition for the experience of futurity”, hence, Butler adds, “reciprocal recognition and temporality are, for Kojève, essentially related”.<sup>9</sup>

Kojève (and many who have followed him) pursue an understanding of desire that is unsupported in Hegel’s own work. For Hegel desire is not an end in itself, nor is it constitutive of subjectivity. In the *Jena* texts of which Kojève was aware (but perhaps not so closely), desire is rejected as too “animal” a category to found a subjectivity of spirit; the abandonment of Hegel’s absolute subjectivity in favour of what Kojève sees as the temporal consequences of the privileging of desire have the effect, not of grounding an anthropology, but suspending the interpretation of time. Kojève’s reading (and that of those who have followed in his wake) has the effect of reducing Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* to a one-sided philosophy of only *subjective* spirit. Hegel argued that only the philosophy of spirit as *absolute* could provide a ground for social forms, since at each stage of the development of spirit, the attainment of humanity to that point *at the same time* manifests the drive towards higher forms of the absolute concept. Without any understanding of absolute spirit, humanity is reduced either to mere constructivism, or, worse, forces us to interpret all social forms as forms of power. Put more starkly, in Kojève’s hands Hegel’s understanding of subjectivity moves much closer to Nietzsche’s.

Butler observes that “the philosophical preoccupation with desire in the twentieth century begins in France with Alexandre Kojève’s lectures on Hegel in the 1930’s”.<sup>10</sup> Towards the end of *Subjects of Desire*, having surveyed the most significant voices in the French debate, Butler concludes:

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<sup>6</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 67 (Butler’s capitalisation).

<sup>7</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, pp. 73, 74.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 5.

If Kojève halts the *Phenomenology's* progress at the struggle between lord and bondsman, and Hyppolite emphasizes the temporal flux of Life as the central moment of the text, and Sartre rewrites the dialectic of desire and recognition, it should not surprise us that Foucault, like Lacan, reformulates the Life and Death Struggle in contemporary terms. Both the French reception and the French criticism of Hegel appear, then, to take their bearings within the *Phenomenology's* Chapter 4. Indeed, it is striking to find how regularly even the most tenacious of post-Hegelians appear to remain faithful to the founding struggles of Hegel's desiring subject.<sup>11</sup>

While it *could* be argued that this reading is supported by “*Phenomenology's* Chapter 4”, such a claim is far less easy to substantiate from earlier texts, especially the *Jena* lectures or “system sketches” of 1805-6, immediately prior to the *Phenomenology's* writing. Such a reading is one-sided: it not only privileges just one aspect of the *Phenomenology* over another, but distorts and obscures the connection between the *Phenomenology* and Hegel's *Science of Logic* as both its point of departure and (inasmuch as what it represents is incorporated into the structure of the *Encyclopaedia*) as a component of it.<sup>12</sup> Hegel comments in the Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Logic* that “In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I presented consciousness in its moving forward from the first immediate opposition of itself and of the object up to absolute knowledge”.<sup>13</sup>

Butler seems well aware that the reading grounded in Chapter Four of the *Phenomenology* is one-sided: however, she argues that this is not a misreading. I want to conclude by arguing that by the time of Kojève and even more certainly now, reading Hegel's philosophy of subjectivity as Hegel designed it has become near impossible. Butler's own reading, sensitive and grounded in “the French reception and the French criticism” of Hegel,

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<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 230 (Butler's capitalisations).

<sup>12</sup> The connection as Hegel explained it between the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic* changed over time, but was never anything less than explicit in its systematic intentions. The *Phenomenology* does not, in other words, stand apart or outside the system, but is always understood as holding a determinate place within it. What became the final title of the work for posterity was in the original 1807 edition only a subtitle, “*First Part: The Phenomenology of Spirit*”, thus only projected as the first division of an overall larger project whose title (on the cover page) is *System of Science*. Martin Heidegger presents a careful and detailed analysis of the developing relationship of the *Phenomenology* to Hegel's entire system in his lectures on the *Phenomenology* of 1930 (see Martin Heidegger, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GA32), pp. 2–13), arguing that the *Phenomenology* represented as a separate work was, finally, subsumed into the structure of the *Encyclopaedia* system as a portion of its third division, namely the second section of the first part.

The text of what has come down to us as Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* comprises volumes 21, 11 and 12 of the Academy Edition of Hegel's ‘Collected Works’ or *Gesammelte Werke*. Part One (GW21) was revised for publication only just before Hegel's death in 1831, and was published posthumously in 1832; Hegel had plans to revise the second part, but his death prevented those plans from being fulfilled. The version published by Leopold von Henning in Berlin in 1833 (edited again by Lasson in 1932) therefore included the two unrevised parts originally published respectively in 1812 (GW11) and 1813 (GW12) with the revised part (GW21).

<sup>13</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik: die Lehre vom Sein*, p. 32. “In der Phänomenologie des Geistes habe ich Bewußtseyn in seiner Fortbewegung von dem ersten unmittelbaren Gegensatz seiner und des Gegenstands bis zum absoluten Wissen dargestellt.”

is at the same time the mark of an impasse in the philosophy of subjectivity that is yet to be overcome. It is an impasse that marks, and is revelatory of, the age in which we are. Believing ourselves to have dispensed with “the absolute” (whatever that is), we are henceforth suspended and caught in the knots and entanglements of Nietzsche’s will to power while *waiting*: waiting for an absolute we do not believe can ever come. Yet I do not argue for a restoration of Hegel’s absolute: only the absolute itself could restore itself: I argue that this *suspended place* is the only authentic experience of both Hegel’s and Nietzsche’s metaphysics: after all, for finite man, if the absolute is not first and entirely realised and accomplished in the present, then the only other time at which the absolute must be accomplished and realised for each of us is at the moment of my death. No matter how long it keeps us waiting, to each of us death does most surely come.

### **Kojève and Hegel**

We can find the essentials of Kojève’s reading of Hegel summed up in his short *Preface to the work of Bataille*, where Kojève traced a kind of genealogy of Hegel’s work, “from Thales to our own day”, in which, teasingly, he overturns Hegel’s “Trinitarian” Christianity (with the aim of setting it aside altogether) by identifying “Spirit” with “man”, *l’homme* (and so other than with God), “for as long as man should live”. Kojève suggests that “Hegelianism is a ‘gnostic’ heresy, which, while Trinitarian, improperly gives primacy to the Holy Spirit”.<sup>14</sup> He makes a deft move when he says “for as long as man lives”: for with this phrase he points up and explains a deferral of a most important kind that marks the French reading of Hegel and with which Butler certainly concurs, a deferral that restricts everything that follows to a very precise understanding of what this “time” is. He says:

Man will certainly one day attain the One, the day when he ceases to exist, that is to say, the day when Being will not be revealed by the word, when *God*, deprived of *Logos* again becomes the opaque and mute sphere of the radical paganism of Parmenides.<sup>15</sup>

Hegel’s Christianity is set aside here, and even Parmenides’ paganism reappears only in the impossible situation in which man would “be” no longer, and so “is” not now. “Being”,

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<sup>14</sup> Alexandre Kojève, ‘Préface à l’œuvre de Georges Bataille (1950)’, p. 36. “De Thales à nos jours . . . l’Esprit . . . l’homme . . . tant que l’homme vivra . . . l’Hégélianisme est une hérésie ‘gnostique’ qui, trinitaire, attribue indûment le primat au Saint-Esprit.” (Kojève’s capitalisations)

<sup>15</sup> Alexandre Kojève, ‘Préface à l’œuvre de Georges Bataille (1950)’, p. 36. “L’homme atteindra certainement l’Un un jour, le jour où il cessera d’exister, c’est-à-dire le jour où l’Être ne sera plus révélé par la Parole, où Dieu, privé du Logos, redeviendra la sphère opaque et muette du paganisme radical de Parménide.” (Kojève’s capitalisations)

accordingly, becomes an end which is either never knowable, or becomes knowable only when there is no-one to know it. This riposte to the claims of the sacred, exemplified by “the work of Bataille”, means that any consideration of God, the sacred and the divine as what is both “One” and absolute, are to be *deferred*, to an end that only manifests itself negatively, or as a paradox. This inner unity of all things is to be known only when *unknowable* (after death), since (as Kojève clearly implies) man is the only one we know of who is capable of speaking of what he knows: and all knowledge flows from life. The unity of the one and absolute is in this way postponed and excluded from the consideration of Hegel’s thought, rather than developed as the very being of *the* moment within it.<sup>16</sup> The reading of Hegel of which the *Preface to the work of Bataille* is the sum is entirely consistent with Kojève’s earlier introductory work on Hegel: “if Being itself is *one*, or what amounts to the same, if the Concept is Eternity itself, ‘absolute knowledge’ reduces itself for man to absolute *silence*”.<sup>17</sup>

Butler presents Kojève’s reading of Hegel as “one that sought less to be faithful to the letter of Hegel’s text than to produce new interpretations that reflect the changed historical circumstances of reading itself”.<sup>18</sup> Thus Kojève’s re-reading of Hegel is not to be understood as a misreading, but on the contrary, a reading properly in accord with its time.<sup>19</sup> With this we should be in agreement, provided it is clearly understood that to read Hegel in this way is implicitly to defer to the fact that Hegel was during his life, and is now still aptly, describing the world as it stands open before us. Nevertheless, this (French) reading of Hegel transforms the meaning of time itself, separating it from eternity and the absolute, converting it into endlessly successive “subjective” time, and so defining time in terms of an understanding of the infinite – an understanding that Hegel resists. Hegel’s understanding of time is defined by what he inherits from Christian theology as the simultaneity (as co-presence and *absolute* presence) of all things: time has its meaning only as the negative determination of an eternity that does not change. This is time understood in terms of being: as complete in itself: its negative postulate is always the absolute: a *same* that is static and eternal.<sup>20</sup> Time as Kojève

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<sup>16</sup> Bataille, with his idea of the sacred, is through this gesture also excluded from the “circle” of the French readers of Hegel.

<sup>17</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 352. “Si l’Être est *un*, ou ce qui revient au même, si le Concept est l’Éternité, – le ‘Savoir absolu’ se réduit pour l’Homme au *silence* absolu.” (Kojève’s capitalisations and emphases)

<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. ix.

<sup>19</sup> And properly in accord with time as it *itself* is to be understood.

<sup>20</sup> Hegel’s discussion of time (together with space) is ordinarily taken from §§254–259 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830)* (GW20), pp. 243–247. An earlier, and longer, discussion can be found under the title ‘System of the Sun’ in G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe II: Logik, Metaphysik Naturphilosophie* (GW7), pp. 193–205.

proposes it, is *for the present* an unceasing stream of present “nows” within which all things flow, and which has no end of which we can speak, or can know. The corollary to this is that “being”, for Hegel at least, has nothing to do with the present: the present is always experienced as a becoming. This is time as Nietzsche understood it: time within which there is never equilibrium or stasis. Time is the infinite flow of pure and eternal force, *Kraft*.<sup>21</sup> Everything is flux: time is a feature or property of space.<sup>22</sup> This is also time as Marx would have understood it: time is a human production. Even this is time as first Schopenhauer presented it, in a presentation that Nietzsche took over.<sup>23</sup>

Butler tells us that were she to revisit her book and write it again, *Subjects of Desire* “would have also considered the influence of Hegel’s *Logic* in greater detail”,<sup>24</sup> and here she goes right to the nub of how Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel became defining for those who disagreed with him. Kojève privileged a subjective interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* over the *Logic*, and in doing so enabled the privileging of subjective knowing over absolute knowledge, minimising in importance the place of the *Phenomenology* in Hegel’s wider system, and setting aside the concluding section of the *Phenomenology* with its consideration of “absolute knowing”. Just as the interpretation of Nietzsche has almost invariably tended to emphasise the subjective element of Nietzsche’s thought, exemplified in the “will to power” of willing subjects *over* the objective necessity of the eternal return,<sup>25</sup> so this reading of Hegel has emphasised the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a philosophy of subjectivity (and so a subjective philosophy) and underplayed that part of Hegel’s system which reached its final form in the *Science of Logic* as the unity and totality of subjective and objective logic of the concept in the absolute.<sup>26</sup> This is clearly what Hegel is preparing for in the transition from knowing to absolute knowing, “the final form of *Geist*”,<sup>27</sup> at the end of the *Phenomenology*, but all that is to be found well beyond the *Phenomenology*’s Chapter Four. It

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<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachlaß 1880–1882* (KSA9), p. 523. “Wohl aber ist die Zeit, in der das All seine Kraft übt, unendlich, das heisst, die Kraft ist ewig gleich und ewig thätig.”

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht* (GOXVI), §862 (=KSA11, *Nachlaß 1884–1885*, p. 69). “Zeit als Eigenschaft des Raumes.”

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche: ‘Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne’ (KSA1), p. 885. “Zeit- und Raum-Vorstellungen. Diese aber produciren wir in uns und aus uns mit jener Nothwendigkeit, mit der die Spinne spinnt.”

<sup>24</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. viii.

<sup>25</sup> The objective necessity of the eternal return is, for Nietzsche, the understanding of “nature” as pure chaos, and so as something which neither represents the purposes and designs of a creator-God, nor in which we can find concepts of beauty, perfection, and complexity. For Nietzsche “das ist alles Vermenschung!” See *Nachlaß 1880–1882* (KSA9), p. 524. This section of the notebook, under a heading “Sils-Maria 26th August 1881”, 11[201]–[213] concern the “Entmenschung der Natur” in the context of the working out of the thought of eternal return.

<sup>26</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik* (GW21).

<sup>27</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), p. 427. “Diese Letzte Gestalt des Geistes.”

is however, what is (for Hegel) formally foundational to particular knowing, since consciousness becoming self-conscious of absolute knowing can only appear in time because it is already negatively present, as the unchanging ground of being, and of absolute *Geist*. Absolute *Geist* or *Spirit* is also what originates, or calls into being, subjective *Geist*: “in consciousness, on the other hand, the whole, though uncomprehended, is prior to the moments”.<sup>28</sup> Time is the means by which consciousness, becoming self-consciousness, progresses through the moments which “the whole” therefore makes manifest. But as knowing (consciousness becoming self-consciousness), becomes absolute knowing, momentary time is “obviated” (*tilgt*), because what it is “the” time *for* is negated. Hegel explicitly does not speak here of sublation (*Aufhebung*) because time is not raised somewhere higher, cancelling what is lower, but rather time is quenched by a realisation of what “is” already: the unchanging, the “always”, the same.

The introductory section of Queneau’s edition of Kojève’s published lectures on Hegel is itself marked by a certain strangeness. It claims to be both a commentary on, and a translation of, section IV A of the *Phenomenology*, entitled in French “Autonomy and dependence of self-consciousness: mastery and slavery”.<sup>29</sup> In the published text the commentary is italicised and the translation is not: the great majority of the text (and the citations I make from it here) are Kojève’s commentary, and not any text of Hegel’s himself. Kojève speaks *for* Hegel in the determining of what is to be said: as Queneau presents it, Kojève offers few textual evidences for his reading of Hegel – Hegel appears most often in Kojève’s words (and so not his own).

### ***Le Désir* – “Desire”**

As Butler indicates, the decisive concept that Kojève presents both as a key to the *Phenomenology* as a text, and to the movement of Spirit as such, is that of Desire, which Kojève capitalises throughout the text as *le Désir*, and which he presents as the ground of the movement of Spirit: “the (human) Self is the Self of a – or of – Desire”.<sup>30</sup> Desire (as Kojève explains it) becomes the ground of the transformation of consciousness into self-consciousness and of

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<sup>28</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), p. 429. “In dem Bewußtseyn dagegen ist das Ganze, aber unbegriffne, früher als die Momente.”

<sup>29</sup> “Autonomie et dépendance de la Conscience-de-soi: maîtrise et servitude”. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), pp. 109–116.

<sup>30</sup> Alexandre, ‘En guise d’introduction’ in *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, pp. 11–34; 1. “Le Moi (humain) est le Moi d’un – ou du – Désir ” (Kojève’s capitalisations).

“Being, revealed to itself by itself in (true) knowledge, as an ‘object’ revealed to a ‘subject’ by a subject different to the object and ‘opposed’ to it”.<sup>31</sup> Kojève proceeds from the Self (*le Moi*) to an analysis of Desire, and concludes in a description of what he refers to as the recognition of the Master by the one who is recognised by the Master and by himself as the Master’s Slave (what has become known almost ever since as the “Master-Slave” relation, or even “dialectic”).<sup>32</sup> All of these terms – Desire, *le Moi*, and the Master and Slave, appear without direct reference to their place or context in the *Phenomenology* itself. Quite the reverse: when Hegel’s own words are quoted, they amplify the definitions Kojève supplies (and not, as in a more conventional scholarly presentation, the other way around).

Desire, then, represents the ground of the deferral of the absolute, so that the particular self or subject will never attain to the absolute, and absolute subjectivity, since it remains beyond whatever Desire is desire *for*: indeed, this striving-forth, desire, will necessarily remain open, and never, strictly speaking, be satisfied. In Kojève’s discussion of the master-slave relation, the satisfaction of desire, and the transformation of desire into its opposite (in satisfaction), would necessitate an end to the impulse to mastery (the impulse to overcome being-mastered by mastering of one’s own or one’s-self), which would otherwise reduce the one-desiring to a never-ending slavery.

Rather, Kojève says, “the very being of this Me will be becoming, and the universal form of this being will be, not space, but time”. For Kojève, the existence of this self will signify both its self-negation (in constant becoming) and “in its very being, this Me is intentional becoming, willed evolution, conscious and voluntary progress”. This is grounded in Desire, an open infinite, which does not desire any desirable thing, but only another Desire.<sup>33</sup> However, the structure of the relation between Desires (or ones constituted as Desire) takes on a necessary form: “in his nascent state, man is never simply man. He is always, necessarily and essentially, either Master or Slave”. By “nascent state” Kojève means a state of becoming: “If man is nothing other than his becoming, if his being human in space is his being in time or as time, if the revealed human reality is nothing other than universal history, this history must

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<sup>31</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 1. “L’Être révélé à lui-même par lui-même dans la connaissance (vraie), en un ‘objet’ révélé à un ‘sujet’ par un sujet différent de l’objet et ‘opposé’ à lui.” (Kojève’s capitalisations)

<sup>32</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 15. “Le ‘reconnaître’ comme son Maître et se reconnaître et se faire reconnaître comme Esclave du Maître.” (Kojève’s capitalisations)

<sup>33</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, pp. 12–13. “L’Être même de ce Moi sera devenir, et la forme universelle de cet être sera non pas espace, mais temps. [. . .] Dans son être même, ce Moi est devenir intentionnel, évolution voulue, progrès conscient et volontaire.” (Kojève’s capitalisations)

be the history of the interaction between Mastery and Servitude”.<sup>34</sup> This history will never, therefore, strictly speaking be resolved. The implication is that one will always be required to overcome one’s being-enslaved.

We have here in outline the shape and most important features of the reading of Hegel that Kojève inaugurates, and that Butler identifies in the French readings of Hegel, and which she herself pursues. Butler provides us with a very clear definition of the Hegel that emerges: “reading Hegel in this Nietzschean fashion, we can take the *Phenomenology* as a study of desire and deception, the systematic pursuit and misidentification of the Absolute, a constant process of inversion which never reaches ultimate closure”.<sup>35</sup>

This, therefore, is a reading of Hegel as a philosophy of subjectivity, but not as a philosophy of absolute subjectivity. Butler is correct to identify this reading of Hegel with Nietzsche, with an important qualification. It is a reading of Hegel as an effect of the philosophy of the will to power: in other words, as a philosophy of the subjective *experience* that Nietzsche named through his figure of the will to power. As a philosophy that has displaced the absolute, and as a one-sided reading of Hegel, it is *also* a one-sided reading of Nietzsche, because it does not connect this experience, which Nietzsche named as the will to power, with what Nietzsche went on to name as the doctrine of eternal return. Butler describes the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a *Bildungsroman*,<sup>36</sup> suggesting that Hegel is engaged somehow in “fiction-making”,<sup>37</sup> or the construction of utopian hope. The implication is somewhat bleak: utopian hope, even as promise, is never to be fulfilled.

Butler takes her license from Hegel’s use of the term *die Begierde* (supplying the textual justification that Kojève sidesteps), whose translation Kojève systematically capitalises in French.

### ***Die Begierde – Desire***

Butler takes the phrase “[Das Selbstbewußtsein] ist *Begierde* überhaupt” from the *Phenomenology* (right at the beginning of Chapter Four, where she argues that the French

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<sup>34</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, pp. 15–16. “À son état naissant, l’homme n’est jamais homme tout court. Il est toujours, nécessairement et essentiellement, soit Maître, soit Esclave. [. . .] Si l’homme n’est pas autre chose que son devenir, si son être humain dans l’espace est son être dans le temps ou en tant que temps, si la réalité humaine révélée n’est rien d’autre que l’histoire universelle, cette histoire doit être l’histoire de l’interaction entre Maîtrise et Servitude.” (Kojève’s capitalisations)

<sup>35</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, pp. 20 and 135.

<sup>36</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 23.

reading of Hegel takes its ground) and suggests the translation: “self-consciousness ‘is Desire in general’ ”.<sup>38</sup> Although Butler does not ordinarily capitalise Desire (Kojève almost always does), here she does too.

Butler notes: “at this juncture in the text, the term clearly acquires the meaning of animal hunger; the sensuous and perceptual world is desired in the sense that it is required for consumption and is the means for the reproduction of life”.<sup>39</sup> From this Butler extrapolates rapidly that “desire is the principle of self-consciousness’ reflexivity or inner difference, and because it has as its highest aim the assimilation of all external relations into relations of inner difference, desire forms the experiential basis for the project of the *Phenomenology* at large”.<sup>40</sup> Butler quotes with approval Stanley Rosen’s assertion that “the struggle to satisfy my desire leads to the development of individual consciousness. Since others desire the same things, this struggle is also the origin of the family, the state, and in general, of world-history.”<sup>41</sup> Butler interprets this struggle through the experience of loss and privation, and so of what is lacking. Through lack, we are impelled to pursue whatever offers increase.

A slippage begins to make itself felt in the way Butler constructs her argument: because the word “negation” makes its appearance all the way through the passages of Hegel that she identifies as pressing Desire to the fore, she conjoins Hegel’s notion of *die Begierde* with the negative connotations of the English term “desire”: above all, the irrational. By doing this, Butler (despite her initial assertions to the contrary) subtly shifts Hegel’s notion of *die Begierde* towards an interpretation in which desire appears much more like a “drive”, and so again, in the direction of an interpretation much more akin to Nietzsche’s.

Butler cites an important text of Aristotle’s from the *Nicomachean Ethics* for the interpretation of this Desire.<sup>42</sup> Aristotle formally connects the appetitive with a part of the soul which is ἄλογον. This is the appetitive, τὸν ὀρεκτικὸν, which is at the same time ἄλογον. Very often in Greek the word ἄλογον is translated as “irrational”. Strictly speaking, however, ἄλογον is merely the privative of λόγος, namely that which has no reason (in or for itself). This can make whatever is ἄλογον irrational, but there is also another, perfectly serviceable meaning in Greek: indeed the very passage Butler chooses from the *Nicomachean Ethics* employs

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<sup>38</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 33, translating G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), p. 104. (Butler’s capitalisation)

<sup>39</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 33. In the language Butler uses here has parallels to a passage in the English translation of Kojève’s *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 39, “Animal Desire”, which Butler may have had in mind.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 45.

<sup>41</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 45, citing Stanley Rosen, *Hegel: An Introduction to the Science of Wisdom*, p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> Arist.EN 1102 b 29–30.

another word to explain what ἄλογον means in the text: ἡ κατήκοον ἐστίν. In Rackham’s well-respected translation of this text, we find no reference to irrationality but “we speak of ‘paying heed’ ”.<sup>43</sup> Ἄλογον, therefore, is that which has no “rationale”, no explanation (no word) within *itself*, but requires one from “without”, beyond itself (to which it must pay heed). As having no reason within itself, it obtains its reason *extra se*. Something that is ἄλογον can be perfectly ready, and so prepared, for – heedful, even – of the “word” or rationale that is its *need*. There is every reason to think that Hegel understood the appetitive in this way, as what awaits, heedfully and with readiness, its being lifted up (*aufhebt*) beyond where it is now *to* somewhere and *as* something higher.

How should “[die] *Begierde* überhaupt” be translated to be in accord with this interpretation of Aristotle? Is Butler’s translation, pointing to a decisive interpretation of the role of desire in Hegel’s thought, correct? Surely the phrase that Butler cites from the *Phenomenology* does not say “self-consciousness ‘is Desire in general’ ” but rather “[self-consciousness] is generally *appetitive*”. If Hegel does emphasise the word, nevertheless, as I want to show, he does not elevate *die Begierde* in any of his texts to the level of a primary drive, deserving of a capital, “Desire”. Hegel emphasises *die Begierde* only very exceptionally: the term does not even appear very frequently in the *Phenomenology*. Rather, Hegel appears to draw attention to what in its most basic determination the appetitive signifies: namely, the will. The will, appearing first as desire, then appears as something more constructive (that which in itself constructs: namely work), and then finally, it signifies that which the constructive is aimed at uncovering in the widest sense: the *all*. Late in Chapter Four of the *Phenomenology*, *die Begierde* is in fact associated with *die Arbeit* (work), of which (for self-consciousness) it is the higher form. Desire, having become work, directs the unhappy consciousness beyond even work, toward a reality (*Wirklichkeit* – “that which has been ‘worked’ – the verb is *werken* – and stands before us”) that signifies, not the nullity that work is, but in fact the universal (*Allgemeines*). The universal is the unchangeable (*das Unwandelbare*).<sup>44</sup> Desire, as nothing *itself* universal (*überhaupt*) but, as *generally* that which then *more specifically* goes on to become work, fulfils itself (in its highest specificity) when it indicates where the universal (*das Allgemeine*) is to be found in the form of the unchangeable. Desire points, in fact, to the realisation of the absolute. This is what Hegel has already told us to expect of how the *Phenomenology* proceeds.

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<sup>43</sup> H. Rackham (trans), *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 67.

<sup>44</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), pp. 126–7.

Having understood this, we glimpse how Kojève proceeds away from Hegel's original description, a shift that (because of her willingness to pursue the direction that Kojève's interpretation follows) also appears in Butler's interpretation of desire. For Hegel, the phenomenon that *die Begierde* names takes different forms and manifests itself in different ways depending its on intermediations: in each case, on *in* what, and *in what ways*, it is manifesting itself, and *to what end*. This is the reason why Hegel is often keen to contrast *animal* appetite with other kinds of appetite that have the power to become rational (*geistig*) and so result in different, higher, forms of expression.<sup>45</sup>

We ordinarily interpret "will" as that which stretches out, stretches forth, in every direction, and for itself – and indeed, Hegel is well aware of this most basic determination of willing. Will is the *errant*, as what animals exhibit, precisely because they are not able to take into consciousness (as a self-consciousness) what it is they stretch out for. However, Hegel is already in advance of any understanding of will in this way, since will stands in relation to what is, already, "the willed", as that unity which presents itself through the appetitive. Thus the "objectly" (*gegenständlich*), is already present in advance of itself, but not yet realised (*wirkt, wirklich*). It is, however, that toward which the "properly" appetitive is always in some way directed. The will becomes work, and realises itself (objectifies and negates itself) as, and through, what work "realises" (*wirkt*). What is *generally* so in some way becomes particularised, but always with respect to the universal. As the union of the particular *with* the universal, it first points to, and then attains, the *all*. As such it is the genuinely rational: what begins as a movement of individual *Geist* becomes absolute *Geist*.

When we interpret will as lack, as appetite in and of itself, we lose sight of the multiple possibilities of the manifestation of will: "The manifold expanse, individuation and complexity of life distinguished within itself is the object upon which the appetitive and work itself is active".<sup>46</sup> What Hegel is concerned with is the *how*, the manner of the activity, and so not just with "will" as a category. Hegel wants to think through the range of meanings of the will, by thinking through their manifestations. The meaning and significance of the appetitive and work (*Arbeit*) appear in the *Phenomenology* as part of the discussion of Stoicism, as the historic (and at the same time intermediate) form of the upbuilding of *Geist* itself. This corresponds to

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<sup>45</sup> Heidegger, for instance, in a multitude of places interprets German Idealism's appropriation of the phrase *animal rationale* as a movement: *from* the animality (and so, in a way, preoccupation with particularity) in humanity *to* the rational (and so universal).

<sup>46</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), p 117. "Die vielfache sich in sich unterscheidende Ausbreitung, Vereinzelnung und Verwicklung des Lebens ist der Gegenstand, gegen welchen die Begierde und die Arbeit thätig ist."

Aristotle's characterisation of the ὀρεκτικὸν as ἄλογον: what in each case is paid heed to is what enjoins to higher forms of living – the educative, the “directing toward the higher”, which is what it means to pay heed and be obedient to, in “being addressed by a father and those who love us”.<sup>47</sup> What I have translated as “being addressed” is ἔχειν λόγον – taking possession of and therefore finding out for itself and so having the word and discourse that gets consciousness beyond remaining merely ἄ-λόγον.

It is only later, in the conclusion of the discussion of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, that Hegel explains and lays out the fundamental connection between the appetitive (*die Begierde*), work as labour, and the will. At this point will is to be understood not through what it asserts, but at a different moment in will's appearing, not therefore in what work does (productive upbuilding and education), but only once that work is complete. This completion is fulfilled not in more appetite, but in something that is the opposite: a moment of surrender (*Ablassen*). Hegel comments: “Therefore the giving up of one's own will is only in one aspect negative, its concept, or in itself, it is at the same, however, positive, namely the positing of the will as of another and the determining of willing as something not particular, but universal”.<sup>48</sup> The moment of surrender corresponds to the moment of speculative contemplation of the *all* – it is the moment when genuine freedom is realised (attained, worked, realised).

Action is to be understood *through* the will, not only as a positing, but as what has achieved something higher, and it signifies this not in appetite and drive, but at the *end* of appetite (and the work it enjoins), at the point of surrender and letting-be, so that the successful activity of the individual, his or her accomplishment of the ordering toward freedom given in the universal idea, is a grasp, not of any particular will, neither mine nor even that of another, but a renunciation for the sake of – and so that – the universal will can appear, however momentarily, both in actuality and to (speculative) contemplation. This contrasts sharply with Kojève's and Butler's suggestion of desire as something constantly – never-endingly – open-ended, and, as Butler says, which “never reaches ultimate closure”. In fact surrender is the moment when the appetitive ceases (reaches an intermediate satisfaction) and returns on itself for the sake of something higher. We would need to go so far as to say this *is* the formation of the (temporal) moment in itself. In this time (as a momentary “now”) is both produced, and,

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<sup>47</sup> Arist.*NE* 1102 b 30. οὕτω δὲ καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τῶν φίλων φαιμέν ἔχειν λόγον.

<sup>48</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), p 131. “Denn das Aufgeben des eignen Willens ist nur einerseits negativ, seinem Begriffe nach oder an sich, zugleich aber positiv, nemlich das Setzen des Willens als eines Andern und bestimmt des Willens als eines nicht einzelnen, sondern allgemeinen.”

because time is overcome, negated (it flows away into the past). Time must be not only produced (i.e. when, as earlier, it is not sublated): it must be both produced *and* fulfilled, and as such, genuinely sublated (thus it is fulfilled *through* surrender, so that it can be exceeded). Time like this is not merely passed through, but actually accomplished. Accomplished time indicates being as such, the *all* (the eternally-unchanging), but only in the limitation of the temporal moment (each moment is itself succeeded in the succession of moments that is the experience of time). No moment is *genuinely* a moment unless it actually represents and makes present the *all*.

In the *Phenomenology* Hegel determinedly conceives of action as *either* with respect to that which is “for itself”, or “for another”. But the “other” here is properly a pretext for what subsumes both the same and the other, namely the *all*, the universal.

We now have an explanation in full for the phrase to which Butler had appealed as justification for her interpretation of desire. In fact, this phrase initiates a moment of understanding in a much wider and greater movement, the movement of spirit itself, which, if it begins in desire or appetite, is not grounded there. The movement is explained thus: activity arises, “generally as appetite” (*die Begierde überhaupt*), more specifically as various kinds of work, of different kinds of upbuilding and constructiveness (*Arbeit*), but still more finally as *Bildung*, cultivation, creativity, and representation. All of this is in itself to be understood out of will – not the willing of any specific subject, but as what occurs through what willing wills, such that in the appearance of what is constructed and cultivated, an ever more universal form, so that the self simultaneously appear alongside (and in opposition to) the constructed object, and is finalised in moments of renunciation, of letting-be, that conclude by leaving the object behind (as past) for the sake of glimpsing the “all”. The subjectivity of the subject is *also* transformed with respect to the proper movement of spirit or *Geist*, as a relation not only to itself as individual subject, but as the negation, and so determination, of itself as absolute subject.

For Hegel, therefore, what is “generally appetitive” (correctly understood) has the possibility in each case *either* merely to satisfy itself with respect to the objectly – that is to say, to be directly and only concerned with the objectly, *or* to surmount the objectly by at the same time subsuming and exceeding it in accomplishing a more universal subjectivity: thus through an *Aufhebung*: both a rising-up-higher, and (simultaneously), a cancellation or annihilation. This distinction is made with respect to what is to be accomplished. The appetitive can be “for itself”, i.e., in some sense restricted to the particular, or it can exceed itself and negate the immediately willed desire for the sake of what the desire points to *through*

(the negation of) work. It is here why there is never the *merely* willed: the particularity of the will is *always* with respect to its universality, and so to the absolute. In this sense that which is attempted to be willed merely for itself, or even merely willed for itself in the other, results in unhappiness and pain.<sup>49</sup> That which is genuinely willed beyond itself is that which is willed overall, universally. It is by this means that the particularity of consciousness is able, through particularity, to make the universal “present” (to re-present it: *vor-stellen*). As such, genuine willing (for Hegel), of which the appetitive is merely the inception, may be directed toward the absolute, but is at the same time what the absolute *demands*. Hegel’s thought (as also Nietzsche’s, but that is not now our concern), must be read as a philosophy of plenitude, not of a lack, even though it has an inception in the immediate experience or “feeling” of a lack. Repeatedly in the interpretation of Hegel, history and its abstractions are to be understood through its materialised forms – but these are only for the sake of representations indicating what exceeds the immediate materialities: not “above” in the sense of the supersensible, but beyond in the sense of a realised totality which is both present (as universal) and absent (as as-yet-unfulfilled demand) at one and the same time. What the will points itself to is therefore both what is already present, and what is yet to be present (present as unrealised: present as *absently* present). This *looks* like the future, but is actually an “already”: ever-present, eternally so.

Any talk of “drives” from below and the “eternal” as the “above” receive this altogether different configuration in Hegel, for whom there is no “supersensible (*Übersinnliche*), strictly speaking. The “below” and “above” are, within the movement of subjective spirit becoming (representing) absolute spirit, the prior and the subsequent, or the earlier and later. They signify movement, *as* time. Time is not, in this sense, infinite, but rather progression “with respect to” the “eternal” as the unchangeable.<sup>50</sup> Momentary time will thus always be erased in a return to itself, which is not in itself an *Aufhebung* or cancellation of the lower for the sake of the attainment of the higher (this occurs in time), but the erasure is because a return allows consciousness-become-self-consciousness to know, and so to realise (*wirken*) what was already also present, namely the *all* in the *eternal*. We “recognise” the *all* as the unchanging and the eternal because we can “see” representations of it, which always stand over-against (and so momentarily beyond) the objectifications which are the occasions for this representation. The

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<sup>49</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), pp. 122, 131. “Dieses unglückliche, in sich entzweyete Bewußtseyen”; “der Schmerz”.

<sup>50</sup> Thus eternity is not the goal of time, since, as Hegel notes, this would make eternity itself a moment *of* time: rather, eternity is time. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (GW20), §258, p. 248.

objectifications are not themselves the representations (because the objectifications are mere particularities), but they occasion our capacity to envision the representations (of the universal and the *all*).

It could be argued that this account is not really inconsistent with Kojève's. The different constructive forms which desire, work and fulfilled will produce are each, as far as I have argued, higher forms of the self. These, one could argue, are stages on the way to the "perfect Man" of whom Kojève speaks. Moreover, Kojève resolves this highest man through an understanding of the infinite, "the infinite in question is the infinite of Man". In the same place, Kojève makes one of very few references to the *Logic*: whereas, Kojève argues, Man's temporal or historic becoming is the topic of the *Phenomenology*, his eternal being is understood "in the *Logic*".<sup>51</sup>

Kojève resolves his discussion of Desire at the end of the opening section of his *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*. The prominence given to the Master-Slave relation by Kojève, and the influence this discussion had on the French interpretation of Hegel, is the reason why this arguably not so important discussion in the *Phenomenology* has come to be understood as the interpretative key both to that work and to Hegel's thought more generally. Setting aside whether "master" and "slave" even manage to translate correctly *der Herr* and *der Knecht*,<sup>52</sup> the effect of Kojève's analysis is to construct an opposition between master and slave that is only overcome through an overcoming of the world "in its entirety".<sup>53</sup> This formal antagonism between a man and his other, structured through Desire, however, is the very humanisation of the world in its entirety that is far more familiar from Nietzsche's *Vermenschung der Natur* (humanisation of nature) as the (subjective) overpowering of nature through the will to power.<sup>54</sup> It is difficult to see what such a "revolutionary" (as Kojève repeatedly calls it, doffing his cap to Marx) overthrow of the world could owe to Hegel. It is difficult to reconcile even as a development of Hegel's remarks in the *Phenomenology* on *der*

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<sup>51</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 442. "L'Infini en question est l'infini de l'Homme. [. . .] son *devenir* temporel ou historique (dans la *Phänomenologie des Geistes*) et de son *être* éternel (dans la *Logik*)." (Kojève's capitalisations and emphases)

<sup>52</sup> See, for an important discussion of this, Andrew Cole, 'What Hegel's Master/Slave Dialectic Really Means', especially p. 581 and 583. Cole notes "Hegel uses *Herr* and *Knecht* with purpose and distinction. That he means these to be feudal terms is indicated by the fact that whenever he examines slavery in Greek and Roman society, he prefers a different word, *Sklave*, for 'slave'." Cole, who translates *Knecht* as "bondsmen", makes the point that the aim of the Lordship-Bondsmen discussion in the *Phenomenology* is not so much to provide an account of self-consciousness *as such*, but rather of the *means by which* self-consciousness becomes a possession of the subject. In terms of my own discussion of work as both *Arbeit* and *Bildung*, it is in this way that we are to understand that "work" forms and constructs what it at the same time takes possession of.

<sup>53</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 33. "*Dans son ensemble*" (emphasised in the French text).

<sup>54</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachlaß 1880–1882* (KSA9), 11 [201].

*Herr* and *der Knecht*. It seems marked by an antagonism that is overpoweringly masculine in its structure (I shall shortly explain why this matters), setting man against man (hence, why in my translation references to *l'homme* very deliberately retained the masculine pronoun).

It is clear from Kojève's account, exactly as Butler suggests, that Desire is the ground of subjectivity: each of us *is* as a desiring thing. Desire is not resolved into something higher (through work), only perpetuated. Rather than work being a progression beyond desire, work becomes a separate category of human activity, for Kojève: "work (*Bildung*) creates history itself" because "work *is* time".<sup>55</sup> This has the effect of separating out different spheres of human activity, while obscuring the connections (Hegel sought to establish) between them.

### The Jena, or "First", Philosophy of Spirit

Between 1923 and 1931 material from Hegel's lectures of the *Jena* period (1801–05) became available, nearly all of it for the first time.<sup>56</sup> These lectures, among other things, throw much light on Hegel's philosophy of spirit, his philosophy of nature, and his *Logic*. The texts were certainly to some extent familiar to Kojève and he makes reference to them, although there are suggestions in the text of his lectures that some of his knowledge came at second hand, in part from Koyré. Again, textual citations are often absent, and even when present, Kojève tends to shift the emphases of the original.<sup>57</sup> Marginal remarks of Hegel's are not recorded as such, but reported as commensurate with, or as if part of, the arguments themselves.<sup>58</sup>

Kojève attributes the basis of his interpretation of the *Phenomenology* to Koyré's presentation of the texts of the *Jena* period.<sup>59</sup> It is hardly inappropriate, therefore, to attempt to measure Kojève's interpretation against what Hegel himself actually said at *Jena*. As part

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<sup>55</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 180. "le Travail (*Bildung*) crée l'Histoire [. . .] Le Travail est Temps." (Kojève's emphasis)

<sup>56</sup> See G. W. F. Hegel: *Jenenser Logik* (SW18) and *Jenenser Realphilosophie I and II* (SW19–20). The earlier volume was edited by Lasson in 1923, providing a more scholarly presentation of material that had first come to light in 1915. The second two volumes, with a substantial explanatory introduction, were edited by Hoffmeister, and appeared in 1931. Substantially revised editions of these manuscripts were published between 1971 and 1976: see G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenae Systementwürfe I–III* (GW6–8): the more recent volumes have been taken as more definitive, although I refer to the earlier volumes as well.

<sup>57</sup> Kojève on at least one occasion cites the *Jenenser Realphilosophie II*, however the quote is substantially redacted, and given a quite different emphasis, when compared with Hoffmeister's original. See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 236, citing *Jenenser Realphilosophie II* (SW20), p. 206.

<sup>58</sup> Marginal remarks can of course have huge significance in interpreting texts (it could even be said that Derrida made his career from the margins, but at the same time he in each case emphasises with high precision why the marginal remark is decisive): Kojève (by contrast) seizes upon the marginal remark because it lends support to his interpretations, sometimes when the main text otherwise does not.

<sup>59</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 367. He speaks of Koyré's "decisive article" which "est la source et la base de mon interprétation de la *Phänomenologie*." See Alexandre Koyré, 'Hegel à Iéna (À propos de publications récentes)'.

of the *Jena* material, Hegel's 'Jena Philosophy of Spirit 1805/06' runs parallel to what we have so far described from the *Phenomenology*. *Die Begierde*, desire, is mentioned, but only rarely (far less often even than in the *Phenomenology*), and only in order to be set aside. The *Jena* material makes the foregrounding of the notion of desire as the ground of the subject in Hegel's thought even less justifiable than can be argued from the *Phenomenology*.

In this material Hegel begins by grounding spirit in being (*Seyn*), described as "the abstract pure concept of existence".<sup>60</sup> Hegel describes how consciousness proceeds to become self-consciousness as a reflection *on* reflection: consciousness becomes self-consciousness as it sees *itself beholding* its looking at some thing. We see the importance that speculation, initially as *Reflexion*, assumes in this progression. Consciousness both sees something, and it sees itself seeing (the very distinction between object and subject that we require for the inner unity of subject and object to constitute the *all*). This is consciousness's rising up beyond what for Hegel is the merely animal. Hegel then speaks of the night with its terrors encroaching upon the reflexivity of the subject: he speaks, therefore, of the experience or *felt knowledge* of negation that thought is, wherein the *I* knows itself, as through a movement that is at the same time driven by an urgent *experience* of, and through, negation. The terror of the night is the experience of negation itself. The conscious self takes on itself the power to name, and so to name things (to *objectify* them), after accomplishing the experience of negation. The continuing effect of negation means that from here consciousness becoming self-consciousness discovers itself successively as self, then as will, such that "willing wills, that is, it posits itself, making itself its own object. It is free."<sup>61</sup> The moment of freedom appears where the subjective self and the objective self (the self as object) are together, and at the same time: again this is a moment where simultaneously something is posited as possible: where contemplation (re-presentation) and surrender, are united. However, re-presentation can only take place in the production of an objectification. As a pure moment of freedom, both the possibilities of errancy, and of (correct) fulfillment, are posed for the proper (and so *sittlich*, ethical), direction of the will.

In this sense, as Hegel says, the will initially presents itself as formally bad (*schlechte*) in that it is a drive (*Trieb*) standing between the universal, which is its goal, and the self which will achieve that goal. This badness is initially a lack, which requires satisfaction in the

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<sup>60</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III* (GW8), p. 185. "[Das] Seyn; es ist der abstracte reine Begriff des Bestehens."

<sup>61</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III* (GW8), p. 202. "Das Wollende will, d.h. es will sich setzen, sich als sich zum Gegenstande Machen. Es ist frey."

production of something – a representation – with material consequences (all objects must be made), and so is overcome through a fulfilment. Thus consciousness becoming self-consciousness resolves itself first through work (aiming at the production of some materiality), and then artifice (*List*). Artifice is directed (skilful) work, work aimed at something. Significantly there is no mention here of *die Begierde* until Hegel names the movement that impels all of this as “drive”, and then *only negatively*, as he explains that what the drive seeks is its “conclusion” or satisfaction (*Befriedigung*). This satisfaction is given in the drive itself. This drive is “not one of desire (*die Begierde*), which is animal-like”, but rather is the drive toward an externality, a form.<sup>62</sup> In work, as in self-reflexion, desire is not present, it is left far behind (it is mere animality).

For Hegel, animality therefore consists in a being held back, in a desire that cannot fulfil or accomplish itself in something higher. Animality is prior to, and outside, the realisations of spirit, *Geist*. Animality is therefore a limitation, a being held at a lower state. It is perhaps possible to see here a development in the articulation of desire between the *Jena* manuscript and the *Phenomenology*, but the development is in the articulation, not in the actual working out of what desire becomes. In the *Phenomenology*, desire is given slightly greater prominence, but only in order to clarify how it is fulfilled in work. The fundamental movement described by the two texts is the same.

In the *Jena* text, artifice, as the exercise of reason according to a plan, is therefore distinguished from something Hegel sets aside, namely desire. As an artifice (*List*), this drive manifests itself initially as work, and then *negatively*, as withdrawal: from work or labour (once what work “works”, or fulfils and completes). Such a drive does not merely press ahead endlessly, but must be ready to turn back on itself for the sake of what it must attain. This is the same moment as we also witnessed in the *Phenomenology*, a moment of renunciation or surrender (*Ablassen*).<sup>63</sup>

Both the *Phenomenology* and the *Jena* lectures speak of the way drive, and desire, transforming itself into something else (work, artifice, and, as we shall shortly see, love), brings about a realisation of the universal, which is accomplished in the selfhood of the self. In the *Jena* texts this accomplishment is very clear: at each stage of the upbuilding, and so

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<sup>62</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III* (GW8), p. 203. “Die Befriedigung ist [die] des Triebs, nicht der Begierde, diese ist thierisch, d.h. der Gegenstand hat die Abstracte Form des eigentlichen Seyns, der Äusserlichkeit; und nur so ist er für das Selbst.” This phrase is also to be found in G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenenser Realphilosophie I* (SW19), p. 195.

<sup>63</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW8), p. 115. This moment of surrender is at the same time the release from unhappiness.

constructive “work” which the successively formed self engages in, a higher realisation (as self-realisation) is attained – from an initially animal consciousness, to self-consciousness (reflexivity), to love and the formation of the family (and later through the family to the formation of civil society and the state). In each of these stages, “actual being is recognised being”:<sup>64</sup> however recognition appears at the moment of completion and *ablassen*, so of surrender.

In the *Phenomenology* this is further developed: the more frequent references to *die Begierde*, desire, even desire with respect to the object or the other, are for the sake of showing the further work that is to be done (in getting to the “unreachable beyond”, *Jenseits*, that desire brings only fleetingly in view),<sup>65</sup> such that “work, by contrast, is desire held in check, fleetingness prevented or rather made constructive”.<sup>66</sup> Fleetingness has to attain to objectivity, that is, to an actual objectification in a *thing*, for it to constitute the genuine, fulfilled moment that both points to itself as object, and beyond itself to the *all*. The fleeting as such is altogether *too* fleeting for the moment of surrender, and its concretisation in the object, to occur. This holding-in-check and cultivating within the movement of spirit is, in the *Phenomenology*, also for the sake of an *Ablassen*, a “surrender”, which “posits the will, through the will of *another*, and determines the will not as one that is individual but universal”.<sup>67</sup>

In the *Jena* text there is an important addition, distinguishing it from the *Phenomenology*. Artful “willing becomes directed toward the feminine”,<sup>68</sup> and discovers another self, but now not through drive, but renunciation. Hegel concludes:

In itself the both are sublated: each is made same to the other, precisely in that which is opposite to the other, or is made same in what is other to each’s other. Inasmuch as each knows itself in the other, each has attained to renouncing itself. Love.<sup>69</sup>

Love is the representation that appears at the moment a material form will become possible. It is important to recognise here that love too, cannot be taken as another name for desire, since it is not open-ended. Love appears not as a drive-towards, but *at* the moment of fulfillment,

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<sup>64</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III* (GW8), p. 226. “Daseyn ist Anerkanntseyn.”

<sup>65</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), p. 125.

<sup>66</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), p. 115. “Die Arbeit hingegen ist gehemmte Begierde, aufgehaltenes Verschwinden, oder sie bildet.”

<sup>67</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), p. 131. “Ablassen . . . das Setzen des Willens als eines *Anderen* und bestimmt des Willens als eines nicht einzelnen, sondern allgemeinen.”

<sup>68</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III* (GW8), p. 207. “Durch die List ist der Willen zum Weiblichen geworden.”

<sup>69</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III* (GW8), p. 209. “An sich selbst aufheben beyder; geradedarin ist jedes dem andern gleich, worin ihm entgegengesetzt, oder das Andre, das wodurch ihm das Andre ist, ist es selbst. Eben indem jedes sich ihm Andern weiß, hat es auf sich selbst Verzicht gethan. Liebe.”

and therefore surrender. It is from here that Hegel will proceed in the text to the formation of the family. This description (of which I can provide only the briefest account), which parallels what Kojève (and Butler through him) identifies in the *Phenomenology*, proceeds without the foregrounding of desire (indeed in this description desire is seen *only* as animal-like), and concludes, not with an opposition between men, but the recognition of fulfillment through an opposite, a male's counterpartness to a woman. This fulfillment produces an intermediate subjectivity (the "itself") named above, which will objectify itself as the family, united in the ethical bond, and in the further object-production of a child, but whose representation of the absolute manifests itself (in this instance) in love. This is not explained in the *Jena* text, and is missing entirely from the *Phenomenology*, but will take its most developed form in the *Rechtsphilosophie*.<sup>70</sup>

### The Suspension of the Whole

Butler presents Kojève's reading of Hegel as "one that sought less to be faithful to the letter of Hegel's text than to produce new interpretations that reflect the changed historical circumstances of reading itself":<sup>71</sup> the same can be said for her own appropriation, as an entirely legitimate inheritance of this "Nietzschean" way of reading Hegel. Turning to Gilles Deleuze, Butler identifies the emergence of primacy of desire in Hegel allows Hegel's "self-identical" subject to be dissolved into "a fundamentally multiplicitous set of desires which can only be falsified by any effort to describe them as a unity".<sup>72</sup> Butler quotes the passage in Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* that itself cites Nietzsche's *Will to Power*: "the will to power is not a being nor a becoming, it is a pathos".<sup>73</sup> This prepares us well to understand what Kojève's privileging of the notion of desire in Hegel seeks to achieve: through the primacy of affect as an ontological, not merely psychological category, to constitute subjectivity as pluriform and unstable. Butler suggests that this view is already prefigured in Hegel: "the *Phenomenology's* narrative suggests the impossibility of metaphysical closure within experience," and furthermore, "Hegel's criticisms of Spinoza highlight Hegel's own scepticism toward metaphysical closure". Experience itself constantly dissolves the identity of the subject: "new

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<sup>70</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, GW14.1, §§158–181, pp. 144–159 (=TWA7, pp. 307–339).

<sup>71</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 63.

<sup>72</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 214.

<sup>73</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht* (GOXVI), §635, p. 113. "Der Wille zur Macht nicht ein Sein, nicht ein Werden, sondern ein Pathos." See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la Philosophie* (Paris: PUF [Quadrige], 1999 [1962]), p. 72. "La volonté de puissance n'est pas un être ni un devenir, c'est un pathos."

experience does not augment an existing subject, but occasions an entirely new narrative of the subject itself".<sup>74</sup>

The interpretation Butler lays out, inherited from Kojève and manifesting itself in a variety of ways across the French engagements with Hegel, has the effect not of disbanding, but of suspending Hegel's metaphysics: what is suspended is the erasure (*tilgen*) of time as the completion of the cycle of return for the sake of an understanding of subjectivity that resists any resolution into an absolute. This suspension calls into question subjectivity as individuality becoming absolute. The distinctive contribution of Kojève's reading of Hegel is in its contribution to the understanding of time: time is no longer to be resolved in its inner (present) unity through an unchanging eternity.

However the result is not a resolution of the understanding of time in its totality, but the opposite, namely the necessity of resolving time *only* as the present. Kojève at one point becomes preoccupied with a marginal note in Lasson's 1923 *Jenenser Logik*, to the effect that that "Geist ist Zeit", "spirit is time".<sup>75</sup> This, he argues, is equivalent to Hegel's statement from the preface to the *Phenomenology* that "time is the actuality of the concept itself".<sup>76</sup> Kojève emphasises that this is not time in general, but a specific form of time, that concerned with the future, in an analysis he attributes primarily to Koyré, and supposedly grounded on Koyré's and Kojève's reading of the *Jena* lectures. Kojève posits the primacy of the future. Desire, argues (Kojève's version of) Koyré is "the presence of a future in the present".<sup>77</sup> There could be no clearer statement of Kojève's interpretation of the essentially *constructive* character of the present for Hegel, as the place wherein the demand to produce what is to come appears as an immediate, *human*, demand and task.

In both the places where this remark ("spirit is time"), or something like it, appears in the lectures of the *Jena* period, it does so only in the margins. In both places the reference to *Geist* as time is in contrast to nature as *Raum*, space. For Hegel, nature, in its cyclicity, is

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<sup>74</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, 'Addendum' to *Jenenser Logik* (SW18), p. 369. A very similar marginal remark can be found in a fragment from some *Jena* lectures of a year earlier. In the only edition that would have been available to Kojève at the time, however, Hoffmeister reports them as "der Geist ist [in der] Zeit". See G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenenser Realphilosophie I* (SW19), 'Die Vorlesungen von 1803/04' p. 4, note 2. In the edition of 1975 they are reported in the same form as in the *Jenenser Logik*. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe I* (GW6), p. 5, marginal note 1.

<sup>76</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (GW9), p. 34. "Was die Zeit betrifft [. . .] so ist der daseyende Begriff selbst. See Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 73, and n. 11. Butler cites, but alters, the German text (the Suhrkamp version she cites does not differ in any important respect from the Akademie edition), so making it parallel to what she argues is Kojève's citation of the *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, "p. 4". You could call this a concatenation of mis-citations.

<sup>77</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 372. "Le Désir [. . .] c'est donc bien la présence d'un avenir dans le présent."

essentially unchanging. Inasmuch as change can be observed in nature, the change is repeated, and can be anticipated. Only *Geist* genuinely changes by sublating itself to something higher: in effect by becoming not repetitiously self-identical, but different *within* itself. In this it bears the absolute *through* its negations. Spirit *is* time only because it is at the same *in* time, and because it always points towards, and bears (speculative) witness to, eternity. The subjective experience of the requirement to produce the future in the present must be understood as the dialectical counterpart *to*, and so merely the subjective experience *of*, the “negative” presence of the unchanging absolute, making itself co-present with the subjectively experienced demand. Here is not the place to explain it, but this is identical in structure to Nietzsche’s understanding of the eternal return.<sup>78</sup>

Kojève, having abandoned any reference to the absolute, attempts to press Hegel in the direction of an understanding of time that could be considered closer to Heidegger’s, for whom the possibilities of human being, the *Dasein im Mensch* are not “in” time, but are “timely”, *zeitig*, and timeliness itself, *Zeitlichkeit*). Kojève is relying, therefore, on a distinction between being “in time” and being “time itself” that Hegel does not make (but Heidegger formally relies upon) when he says that the human being is the empirically existing form of the concept, and even that “Time is Man”,<sup>79</sup> and by stressing the “futural” aspect of time (something Hegel can also come close to saying at times). However, Kojève fails to appreciate the extent to which for Heidegger time is not subjective: being-timely does not mean that time is dependent *on* the human mind (as Aristotle had claimed it was). Heidegger, no more than Kojève, accepts Hegel’s abstract notion of eternity as absolute time, but nor does he accept the succession ofnows in the human mind as the “being” of time. Heidegger’s “transcendence” of time is the human being’s already being stood out for the arrival of time: time is this arrival as such, not, therefore the future appearing as a present (human) demand (to be realised), but the presencing of time *for* (and even *as*) the human self.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, from very early on, Heidegger opposes Hegel’s claim about the subjective experience of the future as a present demand, and moreover, on the basis of an interpretation of a text from the Jena period. Citing the *Jenenser Logik* at the point where Hegel clearly states that the subjective experience of time is that “the future is

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<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, Nietzsche’s note to the effect that “the doctrine of the return is the turning-point of history”. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachlaß 1882–1884* (KSA10), 16 [49].

<sup>79</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 372. “L’Homme est le Dasein du Begriff . . . le Temps est l’Homme.” (Kojève’s capitalisations)

<sup>80</sup> Heidegger describes the future not as the “becoming” of a subject, but: “Zukunft besagt entsprechend: kommende Anwesenheit der Jetzt (future correspondingly means: the coming presence of the now)” See Heidegger’s discussion of “futurity” and time as “expectation” and “arriving” in Martin Heidegger, *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit* (GA21), pp. 409–415, 412.

the essence of the present”,<sup>81</sup> Heidegger says “the meaning of the thesis which I hold is the diametrical contrary to what Hegel says here”.<sup>82</sup> For Heidegger the future is not the experience of a demand as something we are to produce, but rather the contrary: that which arrives *for* us as the opening of the unconcealed. Nevertheless, in drawing attention to the difference between Hegel’s and his own understanding, Heidegger implicitly acknowledges (especially in referencing the reception of his published work) that an equation was being suggested between his own and Hegel’s position. Without doubt Kojève, who was aware of Heidegger’s work, and perhaps Koyré too, were part of that reception to which Heidegger was referring.

Kojève, in not being able to overcome the subjectivity of time, can only conceive of time as what subjectivity itself produces: time is the *work* of humanity. Which is exactly what Kojève is forced to argue: “if Man is the Concept, and if the concept is Work, Man and the Concept are also *Time* itself.”<sup>83</sup>

Another way of asking why desire become such a dominant key in the wake of this interpretation of Hegel is to ask: is this interpretation really Nietzschean (as Butler suggests it is)? Is Nietzsche’s privileging of the will, as psychic drive and even as will to power, read back into Hegel by Kojève and even Butler? In her citation of Deleuze, what Butler does not seem to notice is that Deleuze leaves out the second half of the final sentence of §635 of the *Will to Power*. This says that the will to power is “the most elemental fact, from which alone a becoming, an effecting, brings itself to be”.<sup>84</sup> The will to power is here understood as a universal, or as Heidegger had suggested, Nietzsche’s resolution of the “whole of present being” (*das Seiende im Ganzen*), that which stands in the place of God, now that God is dead. Understanding the will to power in this way means that Nietzsche does not resolve *pathos* only as experience, or affect, but also as the “the pathos of distance” – a term he uses with some frequency, but by which he means “the will to be yourself, to stand out for yourself – this, which I name the pathos of distance, belongs to every strong age”.<sup>85</sup> The subject, for Hegel and for Nietzsche, is only dissolved into multiplicity when it is not strong enough to secure,

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<sup>81</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenenser Logik* (SW18), p. 203. “Die Zukunft [. . .] ist das Wesen der Gegenwart.” Cited by Heidegger in Martin Heidegger, *Logik* (GA21), p. 264. Heidegger cites the sentence as if there were no interjecting explanation.

<sup>82</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Logik* (GA21), p. 265. “Der Sinn der Zeitlichkeit ist die Zukunft. Der Sinn der These, die ich vertrete, ist aber diametral dem entgegengesetzt, was Hegel hier sagt.”

<sup>83</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 377. “Or, si l’Homme est le Concept, et si le Concept est Travail, l’Homme et le Concept sont aussi le Temps.” (Kojève’s emphasis and capitalisations)

<sup>84</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht* (GOXVI), §635, p. 113. “Der Wille zur Macht [. . .] – ist die elementarste Thatsache, aus der sich erst ein Werden, ein Wirken ergibt.”

<sup>85</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘Götzen-Dämmerung’ (KSA6), p. 138. “der Wille, selbst zu sein, sich abzuheben — Das, was ich Pathos der Distanz nenne, ist jeder starken Zeit zu eigen.”

and so unify, itself *through* a realisation of the absolute (however momentary): to *recognise* itself *as* itself, to overcome its suspension by sublating desire into something higher, while yet preserving in itself the same (through the will to power: in absolute knowing). The transition that these French readers make, away from the universal and absolute, overcomes the resolution of time neither as the eternal and unchangeable, nor as eternal recurrence, without being able to resolve time in its timeliness as such, as itself the hidden unity (and so not “present”) from out of which disclosure comes.

What pressed itself to be heard through Kojève’s interpretation, and continues to press itself in the interpretations of desire that follow on from his, has more to do with the disappearance of the universal as a category of interpretation. Not that the universal has disappeared as such, but in the manner in which it no longer becomes available as what can be effectively thought. Foucault will come to say at a certain point: “we suppose that universals do not exist”,<sup>86</sup> an understanding of negation quite different to Hegel’s, and a surrender, to what we might call the acceptance of an *inability to think*, of a quite different kind.

## Conclusion

What is the significance of drawing attention to Judith Butler’s and Alexandre Kojève’s reading of Hegel’s concept of desire? In the first instance I have wanted to show how a certain reading of Hegel has taken hold, in consequence of the way in which Kojève, and to a certain extent Koyré, chose to interpret certain passages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Theirs was not the only reading of Hegel that emanated from France: Foucault’s reading of Hegel, for instance, arguably owes much more in its detail to the measured and careful reading to be found in the work of Jean Hyppolite. Jacques Derrida’s reading of Hegel also reaches far beyond Kojève’s for its breadth and sources. The significance of Kojève’s reading, and one shared by Foucault, Derrida and many others, is the assault on the absolute in Hegel’s thought. This assault has consequences, as I have suggested, even for the reading of Nietzsche. It is an assault that has influenced not only the French, but also much subsequent Anglophone reading of Hegel, which is why I took as a central exemplar of that reading the figure of Judith Butler. For without Kojève’s redescription of Hegel’s desire, Butler’s remarkable claims about materiality would be impossible. I have tried to show, contrary to Kojève, how Hegel actually

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<sup>86</sup> Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), p. 5. “Supposons que les universaux n’existent pas.”

places desire, and so traces the relationship between what is present (broadly thought, “materiality”), or objectivity, or actuality (*das Seiende, die Gegenständlichkeit, Wirklichkeit*) and the will.

For Butler drives to a most extreme place the relationship between what Kojève understood as the future as a present demand and the materialisation of that demand, and she does this on the basis, yes of an interpretation of Foucault, but *first* and only because Kojève has already reconfigured the relationship between the will and desire in Hegel. It is only because of this that Butler could argue that from henceforth “materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect”.<sup>87</sup> For Kojève lays down the basis, through an entirely subjective account of Hegel, for how power itself, as will to power, is *itself* nothing other than an effect, an effect of the movement of time.

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<sup>87</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 2.

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