Ethics and “Bad Writing”: Dialectics, Reading, and Affective Pedagogy

Daniel L. Smith

The way the essay uses concepts is comparable only to the conduct of someone obliged in a foreign country to use the foreign language practically, rather than to cobble together its elements with rules learned in school.

—Theodor Adorno

One of the most common criticisms leveled against “postmodern theory” is that its often hard-to-read and jargon-laden prose functions to hide the vacuity of its ideas or to imbue the author’s writing with an air of importance and substance that it does not have. Dennis Dutton, for instance, co-editor of *Philosophy and Literature*, claims that “Some people willingly choose obscurity, mainly for two reasons. Either it’s used to hide something the writer doesn’t want the reader to know [for example, that the writer isn’t really saying much of anything], or so it sounds more prestigious” (202). However, the charge of using inflated language and labyrinthine prose as a form of rhetorical smoke and mirrors was around long before the specter of postmodern theory began haunting the humanities. One might say, then, that theory is the target du jour of academic gatekeepers faithfully committed to maintaining standards of “clarity” and “rigor.”

However, sometimes connected to these Strunk-and-White-esque evaluations of “bad writing” is a judgment about the writing’s moral implications. It is a judgment reminiscent of ancient Greek criticisms of sophistic discourse and pedagogy (artfully dramatized in Plato’s *Gorgias*). Its simplest expression looks something like this: your discourse is dangerous because it promotes relativism, thereby effectively disabling the ground for evaluation and judgment. The “Sokal Hoax” of 1996 in

*jac* 23.3 (2003)
Social Text, for example, added volatile fuel to the fire raging over postmodern theory, prompting a slew of commentary not only about the putative emptiness of such scholarship, but also the hazardous consequences of the very mode of writing through which that theory is articulated. Paul A. Boghossian expresses the sentiments of more than a few people when he claims that the "Sokal Hoax" ought to teach us to be concerned about the "pernicious consequences and internal contradictions of 'postmodernist' relativism" (14). Such anxieties about the effects of bad writing and its alleged concomitant, relativism, persist today.

In an effort to sketch the contours of a way of (en)countering the charge of bad writing leveled against postmodern theory, I'd like to explore the conceptual and rhetorical dimensions of three thinkers often cited as "bad writers": G.W.F. Hegel, Theodor Adorno, and Fredric Jameson. One does not have to look very hard to see these writers' prose described as unnecessarily difficult, if not downright impenetrable. Of the three, Jameson is perhaps the most (in)famous figure in the contemporary American academy. For some, particularly those who have read Hegel, Adorno, and Jameson, dialectics and bad writing are virtually synonymous. I submit that evaluations that simply characterize these authors' writing as "bad" or "too difficult" overlook a provocative and under-appreciated aspect of their discourse and the dialectical tradition from which it stems. My aim is to show the limits of a perspective that can only describe the writing that is performed in the dialectical tradition—and the contemporary theory genealogically connected to that tradition—in such negative terms. Furthermore, I will show how the intensification of dialectics in Adorno's and Jameson's writing can be seen as striving to "teach" their readers not only an ethics of encountering and responding to texts, but a general orientation to an ethics of encountering and responding to the multiplicity of existence. In the end, I want to suggest that the theoretically dense writing of these thinkers suggests ways of making the teaching and learning of reading and writing an exploration into the practical realm of ethics via the dynamics of affect.

Hegel's Rhetorical Performance
Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit is a notoriously difficult text, as most people who have encountered it would likely affirm. Although Hegel's prose is quite susceptible to the charge of bad writing, attending to the form and conceptual underpinnings of the Phenomenology reveals some-
thing other than long, difficult sentences marked by tortuous syntax and logical inconsistencies. With regard to form, it must be borne in mind that despite its status as a philosophical treatise, the Phenomenology performs the movement of a Bildungsroman: "The Phenomenology," observes Walter Kaufmann, "is the Bildungsroman of the Weltgeist [Worldspirit or Spirit], the story of its development and education" (158). Thus, a progressive movement of learning, of moving toward greater levels self-consciousness and autonomy, is coded into the Phenomenology's narrative structure. When we consider the conceptual apparatus that informs the text, we see that Hegel's understanding of (universal) Spirit and its relation to the particular has important implications for the representation of that narrative. Specifically, Spirit's development is only realized through the action and movement of concrete particulars, which are not (yet) identical with Spirit. Particulars are therefore other than Spirit even while they are inextricably connected to Spirit and its development. This development is marked by the progressive subsumption of particulars into an unmediated unity. Development, for Hegel, is therefore not simply that of a particular subject but of universal Spirit (which can also be understood as the universal Subject).

Hence, the developmental narrative of the Phenomenology does not quite exhibit the emphasis on the individual subject evident in the Bildungsroman genre. Instead, a more sweeping (historical) view of development is emphasized. But at the same time, because of the connection between the universal and the particular for Hegel, it must depict this development in a manner that traces Spirit's progressive self-realization through the Bildung (education, formative development) and progressive movement of individual consciousnesses toward Absolute Knowledge (an unmediated unity of consciousness and being). The question of how to represent discursively the development of the universal through the particular marks the union of the formal and conceptual issues discussed above. The paradox of the simultaneous negative difference and immanent connection between being and subjective consciousness is the logic that underlies and drives Hegel's writing in the Phenomenology. That is, the text's enactment of its form qua Bildungsroman is inextricably connected to Hegel's paradoxical conception of the (dis)connection between individual consciousness (subjectivity) and being (Spirit).

To understand this (dis)connection's relation to Hegel's rhetorical performance, we must delve a bit more into the task of philosophy as Hegel understands it. For Hegel, "philosophy moves essentially within
the element of universality”; however, philosophers can only know the universal by “exert[ing] ourselves to know the particulars,” which, recall, both are and are not the universal (1). There is, in effect, a gap between knowing particulars and knowing the universal totality of Spirit. Knowledge of that totality is always mediated by consciousness’ engagement with and negative relation to other particulars. The “True is the whole,” claims Hegel (11). But philosophy is pursued (and written about) by a subject that does not have unmediated knowledge of the whole and its Truth. Individual consciousness thus does not seem up to the task of absolute knowing. Nevertheless, this is exactly what philosophy demands of consciousness; or, to put it more accurately, what the development of Spirit demands of consciousness.

In other words, philosophy and its task of achieving an unmediated grasp of the universal emerges because of Spirit’s developmental movement, a movement that enacts itself through its “motivation” of subjectivity to gain the unity with being it lacks. What drives the subject, then, is its desire to overcome the difference or alterity between its consciousness and the being of all other particulars, and thus being itself. In effect, for Hegel, subjectivity is the lack of identity—the gap between consciousness and being—a lack that “moves” the subject to pursue knowledge. This “moving” is the movement of consciousness as it progressively encounters the alterity of that which is not itself but which is nevertheless constitutive of its very being by virtue of the negative relation between self and other. Subjectivity will strive to negate alterity (the otherness that is not “self”) by subsuming it into a progressively developing unity that culminates in the identity of consciousness and being. The subject is driven to repeat this process of negation until there is no remainder, nothing outside/other than consciousness that would alienate it from the total unification of consciousness and being. As we shall see, what the subject of the Phenomenology “learns” repeatedly as it reflects on its knowledge and its relation to the world is that it continually fails to totally negate the alterity that bars its unmediated grasp of the whole, and that it is thus that being is still “other.” Yet, as it reflects on this failure, the subject also learns that it has made “progress” and must continue the process of Bildung. The subject must therefore keep striving to achieve a unity between consciousness and being by negating the difference that separates them. In Hegel’s thought, one cannot conceptualize the subject apart from this learning process. Indeed, the subject is this learning process, which is defined by a logic of alterity, failure, reflexivity, and progression.
With this background, we can now examine how the union between Hegel's conceptual framework and the formal dynamics of the *Phenomenology* are enacted in the text. A quick examination of the text will show that what the *Phenomenology* does is not only explain this learning process, but it also performatively enacts the process, which Hegel describes as "the education of consciousness" (50). Furthermore, it also invites the reader to participate in that process.

Hegel begins his narration of the subject's educative process with a description of what he calls "sense-certainty." "The knowledge or knowing which is at the start or is immediately our object," he writes, "cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge itself, a knowledge of the immediate or simply what is" (58). Hegel also notes that this immediate knowledge is the "richest kind of knowledge" and the "truest knowledge" (58). However, soon after making the certain-sounding claim about the truth of "simple immediacy" and the concomitant apprehension of "pure being" (59), the narrative effects a radical shift in perspective:

But when we look carefully at this pure being which constitutes the essence of this certainty... we see that it is much more involved. An actual sense-certainty is not merely this pure immediacy, but an instance of it. Among the countless differences cropping up here we find in every case that the crucial one is that, in sense-certainty, pure being at once splits up into... two "Thises," one "This" as "I" and the other "This" as object. When we reflect on this difference, we find that neither one nor the other is only immediately present in sense-certainty, but each is at the same time mediated [by the other]. (59)

After Hegel has stated unequivocally that the knowledge of sense-certainty "cannot be anything else but immediate knowledge," the reader and subject of the text learns that it is actually mediated knowledge. Moreover, it is learned that this mediation marks a split in pure being, a division between consciousness and world. It is the becoming aware of this split that initiates the process of Bildung, which may be seen as an attempt to overcome the "impurity" of mediation to achieve a pure unity of consciousness and being.

But, as the reader moves on in Hegel's narration of the development of consciousness, the subject-reader encounters yet another shift that seems to contradict what was learned upon reflecting on the immediate knowledge of an object. Specifically, the subject learned earlier that the apparent certainty and immediacy of its knowledge of a concrete particular, instead of being the "truest knowledge," is in fact "the most abstract
and poorest truth” (58). Now, upon further reflection on the mediated “This-ness” of both particulars (subject and object), the subject learns that the “This-ness” of particulars “shows itself to be a mediated simplicity, or a universality. Pure being remains, therefore, as the essence of this sense-certainty” (61). So now, sense-certainty—earlier the “richest knowledge” and then the “poorest truth”—has become knowledge of the universality of pure being, as mediated through particulars. As Hegel describes it, “When we compare the relation in which knowing and the object first came on the scene, with the relation in which they now stand in this result [of conscious reflection], we find that it is reversed” (61). The ability to understand and grasp this reversal cannot be separated from the process of learning that led to it. For Hegel, the education of consciousness presupposes all the “knowing” that preceded it. Furthermore, it also presupposes all subsequent comings-to-awareness of the failures of consciousness and, then, the negation of these failures through conscious reflexivity. The subject, in other words, could not know now that a mediated apprehension of universality is possible through the “This-ness” of particulars unless there were the earlier “failures” of consciousness that took forms of knowing that were less complete, less whole and thus less True because they presupposed an unmediated apprehension of being. More complete knowledge—that is, less of a gap between consciousness and being—presupposes and subsumes the failures of consciousness, for it is those failures and their subsequent recognition and negation by the subject that are the very enactment of subjectivity and the progressive expansion of self-consciousness.

Rather than inconsistencies in the text, these breaks, shifts, and reversals mark a process of learning, a movement enabled by reflection on conscious experience of particulars that produces an awareness of the lack of completeness—that is, the failure, of consciousness to know being without mediation. Furthermore, the detailed, difficult to read, and complex narration of this process by Hegel is not an exercise in pedantry because, for him, if the reader of the text is to learn, the reader cannot simply be told about the failures of consciousness and its repeated and progressive overcoming (negating) of these failures, but must also feel them him or herself. Put differently, it is not simply a case of knowing conceptually but also of being subject to the affective force of this learning process. In the case of the section we just examined, the reader is invited to be certain about that which “cannot be anything else” and then is taken through the text in manner that affirms and then negates that certainty, moving on to another encounter with alterity to which con-
sciousness must respond and overcome through conscious reflexivity. As we saw above, this process is repeated and, as a reading of the entire text reveals, is repeated again and again—these are the progressive movements of dialectical Aufhebung, or sublation, for which the Phenomenology is so (in)famous. The reader is thus not only prompted to read about the learning process but is also provided an opportunity to participate in and be subject to that process at the level of affect. Of course, Hegel could have presented his argument about the education of consciousness in a much more readable, concise, and accessible fashion, but that would have eliminated the asignifying “pedagogical” possibilities immanent to the other style of writing he performs.6

Before leaving Hegel, it is worth pointing out that an ethics of learning and knowledge, and thus of encountering and inhabiting the world, is implicit in the Phenomenology. This ethics is ultimately eclipsed by the teleological movement of the text toward absolute unity, but is of interest nevertheless. We can discern the contours of this ethics from the text’s Preface, where Hegel describes the subject’s proper relationship to alterity. Figured in the following passage as death, Hegel describes this way of encountering the alterity of the world as the “Life of Spirit”: “Death . . . is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast to what is dead requires the greatest strength.” Therefore, “the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It [the subject of the life of Spirit] wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment it finds itself.” The power of the subject to win truth is achieved “by looking the negative in the face and tarrying with it” (19). For Hegel, then, Bildung, while a formative movement of growth and education, requires undergoing and inhabiting a process of encountering and responding to alterity, one that interrupts the stability and integrity of one’s knowledge and very being—here highlighted by the metaphorics of death and dismemberment.

Paradoxically, it is in this state of “dismemberment,” while facing the threat of “death”—that is, when the subject inhabits this position of dissolution and uncertainty—that the subject is in a sense most “alive” and closest to “truth.” The Preface of the Phenomenology can be read, in part, as an invitation to the reader to inhabit uncertainty and “danger”—to tarry with the negative—as the reader encounters the rest of the text and the alterity it performatively enacts through its rhetoric.7 It is an invitation to practice a particular ethics of reading, one that, given the text’s status as a depiction of moving through the world as a process of encountering
and responding to that which is other, is also an ethics of inhabiting the world. One might say that this ethics is a particular mode of intensifying a Socratic ethics of ignorance in which learning and social intercourse are haunted by uncertainty and aporia, an alterity immanent to life itself. If the reader of the *Phenomenology* does not practice this ethics to some degree, the text is likely to appear simply as a labyrinthine, repeatedly contradictory, or overly difficult text whose value for learning anything other than the ideas of one of philosophy's prominent figures must questioned.8

We must also bear in mind, however, that despite Hegel's invitation to tarry with alterity, the telos of Hegelian *Bildung* is, finally, to transcend the alterity that is immanent to human existence. Within this "Socratic" ethics of existence, to ultimately transcend the immanence of alterity is, in a sense, to no longer be human. It seems, then, that Hegel's privileging of unity and purity over encounters with alterity and the inhabitation of uncertainty creates something of a counter-movement against the ethics of encounter, response, and inhabitation "taught" by the *Phenomenology*. Thus, the ethics of alterity—that is, of attempting to acknowledge and sustain the force of difference—is countered in the *Phenomenology* by a telos of final reconciliation, unity, and purity. The task taken up by some thinkers in the twentieth century has been to intensify the ethics of alterity operating in Hegel's work while problematizing and interrupting its progressive narrative and thus its valorization of reconciliation, unity, and purity. One such thinker was Theodor Adorno.9

**Negative Dialectics, Ethics, and the Practice of Writing**

Reading Adorno on Hegel teaches us that Hegel's *idealist* philosophy, because of its emphasis on the materiality of the encounter, its focus on the concreteness and particularity of experience, "is at the same time anti-idealistic" (*Hegel* 31). In other words, Adorno helps us to see that Hegel's emphasis on the priority of the encounter and the force of difference interrupts Hegel's idealism, while being at its very heart. Put yet another way, alterity, for Hegel, is an imperfection or impurity that philosophy must encounter, inhabit, and respond to if it is to overcome alterity in the quest for the purity of Absolute Knowledge. But at the same time, alterity is fundamental to Hegel's thought because it is the very engine of pedagogical movement insofar as it is what enables the "failure" at the heart of Hegelian pedagogy. To use Adorno's words, there is in Hegel's articulation of consciousness "a will on the part of the subject to jump over its own shadow" (13). Thus, the subject seeks to overcome and
transcend permanently that which is not the subject but inextricably immanent to subjectivity as such—namely, alterity. Paradoxically, Adorno points out, if we can say that "Hegel's philosophy fails in terms of its highest criterion"—the achievement of unmediated knowledge, of finally jumping over one's own shadow—"it thereby also proves itself true" (31; emphasis added). Put differently, to the extent that we can say Hegel's philosophy cannot but fail to achieve the unity and purity it desires, then the priority of a logic of "failure," which cannot be disconnected from the materiality and alterity of the encounter, is affirmed. And thus, as Adorno articulates it, we must conceptualize "a whole that is not the true but the untrue," which is to say that the whole's truth is not identity (the unity of thought and being) but rather nonidentity—the un-transcendable immanence of alterity, the ontological priority of difference (31).

Adorno's reversal of Hegel's ontological priority from one of identity to one of difference, a conceptual move immanent to Hegel's philosophy itself, gives us insight into the title of Adorno's perhaps most well-known work, *Negative Dialectics*. For Adorno, Hegel's dialectic articulates an interesting way of encountering the concrete particularity of objects and subjects and their alterity, but it does so in manner that is, as we saw above, finally "dictated by the universal" (6). That is, the encounter is organized by a logic of identity and unity. On the other hand, the priority of alterity in Adorno's negative dialectic means that alterity cannot be totally subsumed by thought and discourse, the two of which intersect and are expressed in Adorno's notion of "the concept." For Adorno, there is and always will be a "remainder," an excess alterity that thought and language, and therefore subjectivity, cannot capture or subsume, although thought and language are intimately connected to and dependent on it: the concept is "filled with untruth," non-identity. For Adorno, it is this ineradicable and fundamental alterity immanent to thought, language, and the multiplicity of existence that philosophy must acknowledge and intensify, for the operation of the logic of identity, while necessary for human existence, is, in numerous senses, inimical to that existence because it effaces that which is an ethical life's condition of possibility: alterity.

Adorno points out, however, that one cannot simply decide to be done with the logic of identity and its concomitant logic of unity. One cannot simply leave identity-unity, and thus Hegel, behind as if it were simply a matter of choosing alterity over identity. The logic "of identity is inherent in thought [and thus language] itself. . . . To think is to identify" (5). The
operations that constitute the identity-unity of particular—the articulation of equivalences between different particulars and the unification of heterogeneity into sameness—are intrinsic to thought and language, for Adorno. Thus, undermining the identity-producing functions of “the concept is the antidote of philosophy” (13). But, at the same time, “[n]ecessity compels philosophy to operate with concepts” (11). Thought and language cannot, to use an earlier metaphor, jump over the shadows that are constitutive of their movement and operation. But for Adorno, unlike Hegel, the “shadow” is not alterity but identity. Attempting to encounter, respond to, and inhabit the materiality and singularity of difference in a way that avoids the “violence” of identity—the reification and effacement of alterity—is an impossible but necessary task. In such circumstances, the goal is “to use concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with[in] concepts” (10). Put differently, one cannot simply step outside of the logic of identity as it operates in and through thought and language; but one can, because of alterity’s immanence in thought and language, “unseal” or intensify that other aspect of thought and language in a manner that disrupts the operations of identity, and its effects of reification and erasure. The goal, then, for Adorno, is not to get rid of or transcend the concept, but “to get rid of concept fetishism. Philosophical reflection” intensifies “the non-conceptual in the concept” and thus may interrupt the “reification . . . which establishes the [identity-producing functions of the] concept.” To change the “direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity,” suggests Adorno, “is the hinge of negative dialectics” (12).

We should note that Adorno’s focus on the non-identical sounds very much like Hegel’s description of the “Life of Spirit” expressed in the Phenomenology’s preface. However, the negativity tarried with in Adorno’s negative dialectics cannot be overcome through conscious reflection and negation. Instead, the operations of reflection and negation are enacted to “de-reify” that which the logic of identity has made discrete, unquestionable, static, straightforward, natural, or self-evident. It does not perform this operation from a standpoint that somehow transcends or is outside of thought, language, and their reifying effects, but rather one that is immanent to and dependent on them. Moreover, in addition to its efforts to intensify the force of alterity, negative dialectics demands an “honoring” of alterity, which we can describe as “yielding” to the otherness that is always part of the object of an encounter: “To yield to the object means to do justice to the object’s qualities” (43; emphasis added)—that is, to its singularity, its difference. But, as we have learned,
because thought and discourse presuppose a logic of identity that cannot be eliminated, intensifying and acknowledging alterity is a task that will always, on some level, fail. Thus, if we take negative dialectics as a modified expression of Hegel's Life of Spirit—that is, as an ethics of alterity and the encounter—then the practice of ethics must also be seen as an impossible but necessary task, insofar as the "violence" and "injustice" of identity is woven into the fabric human existence. This explains why Adorno likens the practice of negative dialectics to "the labor of Sisyphus" (108).

The epigraph quoted at the beginning of this essay perhaps best encapsulates the connection between Adorno's negative dialectics, its (implicit) ethics, and the practice of writing: "The way the essay uses concepts is comparable only to the conduct of someone obliged in a foreign country to use the foreign language practically, rather than to cobble together its elements with rules learned in school" (emphasis added). It bears mentioning that "the essay," for Adorno, refers to what I have described as dialectical writing. In Notes to Literature, Adorno notes that the essay is "condemned as a hybrid" by the German academy, and that such writing can keep one "out of academia" because "the academic guild accepts as philosophy only what is clothed in the dignity of the universal and enduring" (1: 3). Adorno's assessment of the circumstances in which his writing is judged to be nonacademic and the circumstances in which "theory" scholars operate today are not dissimilar. Adorno's disdain for the gatekeeping function of the academy is unmistakable. His reference to "rules learned in school" alludes not only to the process of "disciplining" students and scholars to perform writing "properly," it also functions as a synecdoche for any system that demands and enforces rigid, reifying, and homogenizing conventions of propriety and competence.

The "essay," suggests Adorno, exerts an effort to subvert "the compulsion of identity" and has the potential to evoke something "that eludes official thought" (17). But this "elusion" is not outside or simply against "official thought" insofar as interrupting the compulsion of identity is a process of intensifying the differences within official thought. It is also worth pointing out the ethical resonance of the terminology Adorno uses when he describes writing in the style of "the essay." It is a mode of conduct that the writer is obliged to practice not only because he or she inhabits a foreign space whose difference must be honored but also because (the) language itself is alien. We see here the two tasks of philosophy articulated by Adorno—intensifying and ac-
knowledging alterity—translated into an ethics of writing. Implicit within this ethics is an invitation to inhabit, encounter, and respond to Adorno’s writing, indeed perhaps all writing, as if we are visiting a foreign place, and not with the ready-made reading practices taught to us by systems of “official thought.”

One can say, moreover, that Adorno sees his own writing as attempting to produce in his readers something other than an increased conceptual knowledge of the immanence of alterity. Like Hegel’s writing, it attempts to enhance the readers’ “sensitivity” and receptivity to alterity through writing that intensifies the affective dimensions of reading. This affective “pedagogy”—this teaching through something other than, but nevertheless through, the indication of referents, the representation of things and events, the signification of meaning, and the transmission of knowledge—might be described as a potential of all writing’s asignifying dimensions. What I am describing here as the asignifying dimension of writing is akin to what Adorno describes as the “rhetorical” dimension of discourse (Negative 55). That is, writing that “salvages a moment of sophistry” (Notes 21). The invocation of sophistry signals Adorno’s emphasis on the importance of the performative aspect of philosophical discourse, the effects that can be produced by the stylistics of writing. Adorno uses music as way of talking about the stylistics of discourse. As with “many musical features,” the asignifying force that can be produced by a discourse’s style and form may be understood as “a pure determinant of the presentation itself” (21; emphasis added). This is another way of saying that style’s “persuasive element,” the force that can make style itself “compelling,” is performatively enacted through “its construction” (21). The very enactment of discursive form—the performance of discourse—can produce a moving, persuasive energy that, like music, is irreducible to signification or representation. So, when Adorno describes one of the tasks of negative dialectics as the “critical rescue of the rhetorical element” of discourse, the significance of that statement for understanding his writing cannot be underestimated. On one level, then, asking what his texts (can) do—rather than or in addition to what they mean—seems to be a very productive way to read Adorno (as it was with Hegel).

Before we move on to Fredric Jameson let us take a brief and therefore cursory look at the rhetorical dynamics of Adorno’s writing. Although much of Adorno’s work is difficult to read, it is not difficult in the same manner as Hegel’s. This not only highlights Adorno’s distinction from Hegel in terms of thought and rhetorical style, but also suggests
that there is no formulaic model of dialectical writing. Among the many ways in which Adorno’s rhetoric differs from Hegel’s is the absence of an optimistic narrative of increasing self-consciousness and thus more complete knowledge. Although Hegel’s prose enacts numerous breaks, shifts, and reversals, the Phenomenology’s overarching logic of progress and reconciliation renders these paratactical aspects of Hegel’s writing simply moments of alterity or “contradiction” that will be overcome through the exercise of conscious self-reflexivity. Although Adorno does not reject the transformative potentials of consciousness and thought, the paratactical elements of his writing are never ultimately overcome. Indeed, the variously enacted parataxis of Adorno’s writing may be seen as an attempt to foreground the untranscendable primacy of alterity and thus the limits of consciousness. If the subject of Adorno’s writing makes any progress toward greater self-consciousness, it is one that, paradoxically, teaches the subject about the limits, danger, and violence immanent to the concepts of self-consciousness and progress—a negative Bildungsroman, as it were.

Adorno’s Minima Moralia, a book unabashedly concerned with ethics and “teaching the good life,” is a collection of brief encounters that confronts a multiplicity of issues through a rhetoric of aphorism (15). The paratactic assemblage of these aphoristic fragments weaves a centrifugal energy into the fabric of the text, whose force attempts to counter the centripetal and unifying movement that, according to Adorno, tends to predominate in thought and language. The discontinuity marking Minima Moralia performatively amplifies the fact that this text on ethics, indeed any text on the “good life,” cannot be “complete or definitive” (18). More specifically, the very nature of ethics presupposes uncertainty and incompleteness—not knowing the future; not knowing what response can or should be enacted in a future encounter; not knowing whether one’s response will produce effects other than those intended. And thus, as far as Adorno is concerned, a discourse on ethics—or one might say, with hesitation, ethical discourse as such—should in some way militate against certainty or a sense of “definitive” or “complete” knowing. It should, in other words, interrupt the logics of purity and unity so pervasive in Western culture. It should seek ways to honor and intensify that which is ethics’ very condition of possibility: the nonidentity and alterity immanent to existence that can never be wholly subsumed and is presupposed by any conception of encounter and response. The asignifying aspects of Minima Moralia’s form and movement—the paratactic “presentation” and “construction” of the discourse, to use Adorno’s musical
terms—tries to discourage a reading experience that would allow for a sense of completeness and definitiveness, and thus of certainty. Each encounter enacts a singular engagement with and response to a particular problematic. Each encounter eschews any abstract generalized logic of right and wrong that is to be applied to particular cases, for such a formulaic approach to ethical action effaces the concrete singularity of the encounter and thus the possibility of responding to the specificity of the situation. As Adorno puts it, with any “abstract conception” of right and wrong “all concrete responsibility [response-ability] vanishes” (25). Thus, the very form and style of *Minima Moralia* performs a mode of engagement that it would have its readers emulate. The text does not therefore simply tell its readers to practice such an ethics of the encounter; rather, it would inscribe that habit into the very affective disposition of the reader by prompting him or her to have to perform that ethics to read the text itself.

But, it is difficult to read *Minima Moralia*—and most of Adorno’s work—without also encountering a judgmentalism that seems to betray the spirit of the ethics that I have suggested can be learned from his writing. How, then, can we account for Adorno’s ethical commitment to alterity and the judgmental and sometimes moralistic tone that peppers his writing? The easiest—and in my opinion least interesting—explanation is that Adorno was simply a cranky elitist who was prone to bouts of ressentiment. I suspect this is true on some level. But if this explanation is the only way we can account for the moralism that erupts in Adorno’s work, then we are failing to consider an aspect of Adorno’s work that he illuminates conceptually and performs rhetorically. Specifically, one does not simply get to choose to slough off prevailing modes of thought and action. With this in mind, one might say that Adorno’s eruptions of judgmentalism highlight his dependence upon and complicity with that which he seeks to interrupt. Adorno’s imbrication in abstract systems of right and wrong made it difficult for him to practice the nonjudgmental ethics implied by his own thinking. Thus, Adorno’s claim in *Negative Dialectics*, “To think is to identify” may be rephrased, “To judge is to identify.” For Adorno, then, any attempt to intensify and honor alterity and uncertainty in the interest of cultivating possibilities for different modes of thought, discourse, and action is necessarily intertwined with judgment. And because judgment is a mode of identification, it is therefore a mode of violence that is ultimately impossible to avoid. Adorno writes as he does not only because he wants us to know about this dangerous paradox of thought and ethics but also because he
Daniel L. Smith

wants us to feel that paradox inscribed in the materiality of our bodily existence.

What we have learned from this discussion is that Adorno insists that we remember at least two things. First, that one is always dependent on and must work within “official thought” (not to mention within dominant relations and forces of production). Second, that alterity is immanent to being itself and thus can never ultimately be overcome by consciousness. These fundamental principles of Adorno’s thought highlight the limitations of individual action, consciousness, thought, and reflexivity in any critical or transformative politics. One might say that the rhetoric of Fredric Jameson’s dialectical writing is an attempt to intensify and teach Adorno’s lessons about these limitations. Moreover, it might also be read as an effort to teach us to learn and develop new concepts and vocabularies of critical and transformative politics in light of these limitations. Furthermore, Jameson’s efforts to rethink politics and social change will offer us some ways to think about reading and readers, and why he, Hegel, and Adorno tend not to be read as I have suggested they can be.

Jameson’s Hybrid Discourse
If Adorno’s writing exhibits a pessimistic, Sisyphean tone, Fredric Jameson’s project might be described as adopting that same perpetual rock-rolling ethos and folding it into another that is Promethean in its disposition. What results is a hybrid discourse, with bipolar tendencies, in which one senses both a resigned acceptance of the burden of existence and a naive optimism about tomorrow’s possibilities for social justice and redemption. Simultaneously cynical and sanguine, the manic-depressiveness of Jameson’s dialectal writing oscillates between dramaturgies of tragedy and comedy, as his discourse tells the tale of a social drama whose denouement is perpetually deferred. In Jameson’s work, the line between tragedy and comedy—or ideology and utopia, to use Jameson’s Mannheimian-inspired terms—becomes provocatively fluid, while somehow managing also to maintain its solidity. Jameson’s dramatization of the social through his dialectical writing aims to be a political intervention. His discursive efforts result in a rhetoric that seeks to help us to know about and understand the contradictions and possibilities of postmodern hyper-capitalism. His efforts are also attempts to instruct us, through an affective pedagogy, to cultivate an ethics that might help forge an intensified sense of social collectivity and praxis. Jameson’s rhetorical work is, among other things, a form of affective
politics that complements the conceptual work of his texts. In short, Jameson attempts to produce new modes of sociality and collective existence by trying to tap into, create, and alter affective dispositions that will foster new modes of experience, thought, desire, action, and social connectivity. The question is, how is this affective politics practiced through his writing?

One way to begin answering this question is to consider a recurring feature of Jameson's rhetoric: his writing makes reading his prose very hard work. While form and content should be thought together, the emphasis here is not so much on what is being said but rather on how it is said. Here is a sentence from Jameson's The Political Unconscious:

> The triumphant moment in which a new systemic dominant gains ascendency is therefore only the diachronic manifestation of a constant struggle for the perpetuation and reproduction of its dominance, a struggle which must continue throughout its life course, accompanied at all moments by the systemic or structural antagonism of those older and newer modes of production that resist assimilation or seek deliverance from it. (97)

One can find even longer and more difficult sentences in Jameson's work, but this one won Jameson his first "Bad Writing" award from Philosophy and Literature. Now consider the "revision" of the sentence by Dennis Dutton, co-editor of Philosophy and Literature: "The triumph of a social group at a given moment is never permanent. The struggle for power goes on as the dominant group is antagonized by other social groups, both traditional and emerging" (204). Notwithstanding Dutton's reduction of Jameson's emphasis on complex systemic dynamics to an issue of antagonism between social groups, his prose is undoubtedly the more readable of the two. But is it "better"? Or to put the question more appropriately, for whom and for what is it better? What makes Jameson's sentence an instance of writing so "bad" that it is worthy of an award from a scholarly journal?

Dutton's revision presupposes a number of things. It presupposes, for example, that clarity, conciseness, and readability are intrinsically better than their opposites, which are alleged attributes of "bad writing." It assumes that the primary goal of all scholarly writing should be the efficient and effective transmission of meaning or knowledge; or that that goal cannot be coupled with another that may make the achievement of the former goal more difficult. It presupposes that writing should be easy, readily consumable, and repeatable (like an advertising slogan). Dutton
assumes, moreover, that Jameson’s social analysis and political project can be reduced to a series of propositions. Of course, underwriting these assumptions are a host of other assumptions about language, writing, reading, knowing, understanding, and politics. Furthermore, and more importantly, these assumptions cannot be disconnected from the social systems and apparatuses that legitimize, (re)produce, and circulate them, so that the subjects these same systems constitute (that is, “us”) may enact the logics of these assumptions through various concrete practices (such as reading and writing).

But I want to leave these systemic issues aside for the moment and return to the sentences themselves. Assuming for the sake of argument that Jameson’s and Dutton’s sentences both say and mean the same thing, can they be said to do (or attempt to do) the same thing? It seems fair to suggest that what Dutton wants his revision to do is to make a point clearly and concisely. Indeed, it does just that. But what does Jameson’s original sentence do (or at least try to do)? If we think of reading as a mode of encounter and a responsive movement through a field writing, Jameson’s sentence slows the reader down. It is difficult to read the sentence and simply grasp its content—what it says or means, what its implications are—unlike Dutton’s sentence. Jameson’s sentence performs an alien quality, an opacity, that requires that we interrupt our typical reading habits, and understand and respond to the specificity of the sentence. The length of the sentence and the oddness of its syntax disrupts the possibility of easy consumption and invites us to engage the very concreteness of language; to experience language as something more than an abstract system of signs that conveys thoughts, ideas, and meanings, but rather as something that has a materiality and force of its own. Jameson’s prose enacts the alterity that a strand of dialectical thought insists is immanent to existence and experience, intensifying through writing that which reification occludes. Its frustration of the typical speed, apprehension, and comprehension with which much prose allows us to read is likely to require that to read the sentence—and numerous others like it in Jameson’s work—we assume or cultivate new or different affective dispositions. We tend not to think about affect when we read because the affective dispositions that enable most of our reading are so automatized and habitual that their operations and their effects are not consciously perceived by us. These habitual affective dynamics of dominant reading and writing practices promote and reinforce an understanding of reading as a mental activity of conscious apprehension and comprehension, and not one that also depends upon bodily, extra-cognitive, and socially
enabled dispositions of openness, receptivity, connectivity, and response of which we are not typically conscious.

Affect, then, cannot be made synonymous with or reduced to emotion, as our common use of the term tends to do. If we are to make this everyday term do more work than its common usage allows, we must explore other ways of conceptualizing affects. Spinoza's *Ethics* is helpful in this regard. Borrowing from Spinoza, we can describe affects as potentials immanent to social *systems*, and the relations that compose them, which are actualized through individual bodies as modes of sociality, connectivity, experience, feeling, desire, emotion, action, and movement. These actualizations are what Spinoza calls "affections," or the individuated expressions of affects: an individual body's mutable and contingent capacities to affect and to be affected. Because they are enabled by and operate through systems, affects can be embodied by an individual but they are not reducible to that individual's corporeal body. The individual subject is therefore not the locus of affective capacities or experiences but is a site of their expression. New technologies and the relations and forces of production that enable them, for example, are only one instance of how social systems make possible changes in the way that the visual, the temporal, and the spatial enable new affects and alter the way these dimensions of life are experienced and lived. How a body or group of bodies is habitualized (that is, in-corporated into systems of affects) can be said to "inscribe" particular, mutable dispositions or potentials into the body, resulting in that body's *tendencies* to actualize (or embody) affects in particular ways. A body's intimate connection to the social also links it to other ecologies of affect that may be actualized. Thus, affective dispositions are expressed as a body's capacities-habits-tendencies, but these capacities to affect and to be affected cannot be thought apart from the social systems that have constituted a subject-body, as well as the social systems in which that subject-body may be operating at a particular time and place.

Returning to Jameson, what I have called the affective dimension of his rhetoric—and more generally, the affective pedagogy of the dialecticians discussed above—is an attempt to harness the asignifying potentials of language and writing in an effort to try to interrupt and maybe even alter the affective dispositions of his readers. Some of Jameson's comments on writing provide insight into how he conceptualizes this process. For Jameson, the rhetoric of an affective politics requires "reawakening the reader's numbed sense of the concrete through the administration of linguistic shock, by restructuring the overfamiliar," which can be achieved.
“by appealing to those deeper layers of the physiological” (*Marxism* 20–21). It is thus an effort to prompt us “to read with our bodies,” thereby foregrounding the role of affective dispositions in the reading process and creating possibilities of disrupting the habituality of reading and experience (*Ideologies* 69).

We might say, therefore, that Jameson’s aim is to enable new actualizations of affects by reader-bodies, affective habits that, it is hoped, will contribute to new and different capacities to affect and to be affected. These capacities are immanent to late capitalist social systems but are also “post-capitalistic” (or, as Jameson would say, Utopian) in that they can promote conditions of existence and modes of life that exist within capitalist systems even as they have an enhanced potential to mutate capitalism into something else. His work attempts, to put it another way, to contribute to a conceptual and “affective revolution” through *a micropolitics of reading and writing*. It is, to paraphrase Raymond Williams, the work of altering structures of affect, which “exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action” (122).18

What is particularly interesting about Jameson’s project is his attempt to rethink the role of consciousness and reflexivity in transformative politics, particularly in its Marxist incarnations. In a manner similar to Hegel’s valorization of consciousness and reflection, the Marxist tradition (with its dialectical roots) is marked by numerous instances when its theorists and practitioners posit the power of consciousness to engage in radical critique, which reveals alleged fictions of ideology and enables a conscious grasp of the true conditions of social determination—a putative prerequisite for revolutionary political action. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson notes that his project attempts “to distance itself . . . from those implacably polemic and demystifying procedures traditionally associated with the Marxist practice of ideological analysis” (281). Phrasing it in Freudian terms, Jameson eschews the idea of “some ultimate cure, in which the dynamics of the unconscious proper rise to the light . . . of consciousness and are somehow ‘integrated’ in an active lucidity about ourselves and the determinations of our desires and our behavior” (283). Although the terms of the debate are different, Jameson’s words express the Adornoan insight that alterity can never be totally subsumed and that there will always be a remainder that cannot be apprehended by consciousness, that exteriority and alterity (the “political unconscious”) always trump consciousness and, in fact, are its very condition of possibility. As we saw above, Jameson’s prose performs this
principle. By intensifying the alterity of thought and language, Jameson, like Adorno, tries to invite his readers to inhabit, encounter, and respond to his writing with an ethics of reading that honors and is open to that alterity, instead of judging and rejecting it as “bad” or not worth the effort. Such reading can be described as “practice” for social encounters and “reading” and responding to the world.

What distinguishes Jameson from Adorno is that whereas for the latter the insight about the limits of consciousness and reflexivity imply an epistemic and ethical prudence and humility, for the former it implies this and more. For Jameson, it also suggests that transformative politics must expand its conceptual vocabulary by thinking in terms other than those of individual consciousness and is in need of articulating “a whole new logic of collective dynamics” (294). This task requires a “dialectical reversal” away from the power of consciousness and the individual and entails “a painful ‘decentering’ of the consciousness of the individual subject” by emphasizing forces and dynamics “extrinsic or external to conscious experience” (283–84). Jameson makes a point of saying that this decentering “must necessarily be felt” by the subject (283; emphasis added), which suggests that having conceptual knowledge that consciousness is determined by the social and not the reverse is not enough. There must be a dimension of transformative politics that is simultaneously corporeal and transpersonal if there is to be any chance “of escaping from the purely individualizing categories [typically associated with] ethics,” thereby “opening up the radically distinct transindividual perspectives of collective life” (116). Because of its role as a circuit between transpersonal systemic forces and corporeally inscribed capacities for action, experience, and sociality, affect (although he does not name it as such) plays an important role in Jameson’s politics. By thinking about and engaging dimensions of subjectivity and politics that have been typically ignored, an affective politics expands possibilities for an ethics and politics of social transformation.

**Toward an Expanded Theory of Reading**

Before discussing what pedagogical possibilities are implied above, there are two questions that need to be addressed. First, given their frequent citation as instances of bad writing (even by those who may appreciate their conceptual work), isn’t it fair to say that the affective pedagogies of Hegel, Adorno, and Jameson have failed to promote the ethics of reading their writing aims to promote? Second, and consequently, doesn’t this signal the ineffectiveness of what has been described as affective peda-
gogy? These questions deserve detailed responses than I cannot offer here. However, the theory of reading and readers implicit within the discussion above gestures toward a conceptual framework through which detailed responses can be constructed.

Sociologically inflected theories of reader-response and reception have taught us that texts, readers, and reading practices must be conceptualized within the social formations whose dynamics "determine" the production, circulation, and uses of texts, and thus the value, utility, and normativity of certain types of texts, subject-positions, and reading practices. Such analyses would help to explain why the texts of Hegel, Adorno, and Jameson have failed to promote a particular ethics of reading through their writing. However, an examination of the way such analyses of texts and their reception are usually performed reveals that even in the instances where affect is an issue, two things are noticeable. First, affect tends to be reduced to subjective emotion or feeling, which unduly limits the scope of inquiry. Second, analysis is limited to issues of how representation, signification, and meaning evoke subjective feelings and emotions. What these two points suggest is that the conceptions of subjectivity, discourse, and affect that inform analyses of readers and reading set the parameters of theory and inquiry in a way that discourages consideration of the issues discussed above. They also suggest that to offer a fulsome account of why these affective pedagogies have "failed," an expanded theory of reading and readers would be helpful.

The contours of such a theory of reading and readers can be distilled from this discussion and articulated in four brief points. First, it would be a theory that conceptualizes affect in a way that renders the distinction between the social and the corporeal-subjective indeterminate, or existing along a nonlinear continuum that has no definitive dividing line, while focusing on the primacy of the social as an explanatory category. Second, emotion would be understood as one expression of how systems of affects into which we are in-corporated "determine" capacities to affect and to be affected. Third, because of the privileged status that capacities of consciousness, reflection, and choice have had in conceptions of subjectivity, life, learning, and politics in the humanities—though this privilege has been problematized in the last two decades—an emphasis would be placed on bodily, extra-cognitive, unconscious, and habitual dynamics and capacities. Finally, it would complement prevailing theories of representation, signification, and meaning with a conception of discourse that attends to the force and effects of discourse's asignifying and performative dimensions. Though in need of detailed elaboration, this
theory of reading and readers would help to explain the "failure" of attempts to promote particular ethics of reading by mapping how the various social formations diminish and enhance particular capacities to be affected by texts through the privileging or discouraging of specific affective dispositions.

In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson informs us of the importance of "the relationship between culture and pedagogy" for a "new radical cultural politics" (50). Part of this importance lies in the role of various cultural workers who, through whatever means available to them, "teach" in ways that problematize the status quo and create investments in politics and social change. More provocatively, it also entails the difficult task of trying to practice affective pedagogies in concert with pedagogies of concepts. This task is difficult for a number of reasons, especially for cultural workers who work in institutions of higher education. For starters, as teachers we would have to contend with the tenacity of prevailing, but often implicit, conceptions of subjectivity, discourse, and affect that students bring with them to class. At the level of scholarship, it might prove difficult to publish work in this area for some of the same reasons it would be difficult to incorporate a focus on affective pedagogy and learning into teaching at the conceptual level. Also at issue are the obstacles and difficulties that come along with teaching in an institution where any formal attempt to incorporate issues of affect into pedagogy and curricula would be subject to justifying itself within a discourse whose logic is organized by higher education's current predominant function as a mechanism for distributing cultural capital. In other words, it would have to justify itself in terms of how it makes students more valuable and thus marketable to employers.

Despite these complex and complicated issues, I see possibilities for theories and politics of affect and their relation to the teaching of reading and writing. They involve attempting—in a manner inspired by Hegel, Adorno, and Jameson—to use the teaching of reading and writing to raise and explore issues of the ethics of reading and writing, with a particular emphasis on the connection of all three to issues of affective politics. The advantage that the classroom setting has over the essay or book is an increased capacity for responding to and being responded to by the class as a whole and the individual students who comprise it. The teacher can attempt to facilitate the materialization of an affective ecology within the classroom that may enable the emergence of new and different "affections" and alter—perhaps only within the space of the class—affective dispositions. It is hoped that the classroom would foster the cultivation of
practices of inhabitation, encounter, and response that are less judgmental, more open to difference, and capable of experiencing uncertainty or ambivalence without being paralyzed by them or experiencing a need to overcome them. Indeed, I say, with hesitation, that uncertainty and ambivalence are persistent features of the ethical and political life envisioned by this essay.

There are at least two immediate "problems" that should be pointed out. First, the very spirit of ethics that such an affective pedagogy embraces disallows any formulas of teaching or curricula formation. This is because the ethics being discussed here is predicated on the idea that ethical response requires responding to the specificity of concrete situations with consideration of one's capacities and the systems of affects that constitute the macro- and micropolitics of spaces of discourse and practice in which one is responding. One learns to teach affectively by experimenting with how to do it and watching others do the same (over time, so that one has a "feel" for the class's affective ecology and how it emerged). However, the specificity of concrete situations does not mean that there are no patterns or tendencies that one can expect to encounter and thus can learn to use and respond to in a number of situations. Second, the theory of affect discussed here implies the importance of habit and unconscious dynamics; thus the repetition of affectively intensified styles of teaching and learning must take place over time (both within a particular class and across a number of classes). Otherwise, learning about connections between affect, ethics, politics, reading, writing, and so on occurs primarily on the cognitive-conceptual level within established affective dispositions. Teaching students about these issues on a cognitive-conceptual level would be a victory in itself, in my estimation; and perhaps that is best we can hope for until conditions are more conducive to such teaching. However, these conditions are not likely to emerge in the future if cultural workers such as ourselves do not cultivate that emergence through our teaching and scholarship today.

Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania

Notes

1. Cited in Jameson, Late 76.
2. In his review of Rukun Advani's Indian History from Above and Below, Dutton praises the book's author for writing about postcolonialism while avoiding "the degraded state of academic writing" often associated with the
subject (200). It is also worth noting that since 1994 *Philosophy and Literature*
has presented numerous "Bad Writing" awards. Past "winners" include Roy
Blaskar, John Guillory, Homi K. Bhabha, and Judith Butler. Fredric Jameson
has won twice (1995 and 1997).

3. Such criticisms of these writers' prose are not restricted to academics, as
anyone who has attempted to bring the work of Hegel, Adorno, or Jameson into
the undergraduate classroom is likely to know firsthand. This suggests three
things: First, that criticisms and complaints about such writing by academics are
not simply (or only) motivated by a tendentious opposition to Continental
philosophy or theory. Second, there is some reason (or reasons) why these
authors' works are consistently experienced as unnecessarily "dense" by readers
who occupy very different subjection-positions in the academy. At the same
time, however, it also suggests, thirdly, that on a certain level, some academics
are reading Hegel, Adorno, and Jameson in a manner similar to many under­
graduates. This is not an issue of knowledge or intelligence—or the intrinsic
difficulty of the texts—but rather one of an "ethics" of reading and, ultimately,
of affect. I shall return to these issues in the essay's conclusion.

4. Throughout the remainder of this essay, unless indicated otherwise
parenthetically, all italics appear in the original text.

5. I think it is important to trouble the distinction between intellect and
affect. It is perhaps more useful to discuss the process as an intervention into the
affective dimension immanent to all modes of learning, knowing, and doing.
Moreover, we should not reduce affect to emotion. I will return to these matters
later in this essay.

6. To describe these possibilities of the text as asignifying is to say that their
effects cannot be reduced to operations of meaning, reference, or conscious
understanding.

7. "Tarrying with the negative" is a phrase made popular by Slavoj Žižek's
provocative *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of
Ideology*. While there is some overlap between Žižek's project and my own, the
dialectical ethics of reading put forth here diverges from Žižek's reading insofar
as it does not embrace the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory that informs Žižek's
interpretation of Hegel.

8. Is this to suggest that people who will not attempt to understand, fail to
understand, or understand only instrumentally the *Phenomenology* are some­
how, then, guilty of some ethical failing? I would suggest that this is the wrong
question to ask. Instead, the important question is one of asking why Hegel's
famous text tends not to be read as I have read it here. The answer, I suggest, is
less about individual readers than it is about the tendencies of various social
institutions and other apparatuses to produce certain types of readers. The ethics
of reading, then, is not simply a matter of knowledge, choice, or individuals, but
of systemically enabled-delimited modalities of response-ability.

9. Jacques Derrida may also be seen as a thinker whose work is intimately
connected to an encounter with and inhabitation of Hegel's thought. For
example, Derrida tells us that his notion of *differance* maintains “relations of profound affinity with Hegelian discourse (such as it must be read),” and is “up to a certain point, unable to break with that discourse,” but, he remarks, “it can operate a kind of infinitesimal and radical displacement of it . . .” (*Margins* 14). Again marking his connection to and distinction from Hegel, Derrida explains that “If there is a definition of *differance*, it would precisely be the limit, the interruption, the destruction of the Hegelian releve [Aufhebung] *wherever* it operates” (*Positions* 40–41). However, despite this need to interrupt *Aufhebung*, and thus the movement toward unity and purity that is internal to its progressivist logic, Derrida points out that *differance* at the same time is thought and operates “at a point of almost absolute proximity to Hegel” (44). Derrida also writes in *Positions*: “We will never be finished with reading and rereading Hegel, and, in a certain way, I do nothing other than attempt to explain myself on this point” (77). Notice how Derrida’s relation to Hegel is not an attempt to reject or to “sublate” Hegel’s philosophy, but rather it is an effort to perform a way of encountering, inhabiting, and responding to Hegelian philosophy differently. The difference that Hegel would desire us to ultimately sublate is, instead, not accepted or rejected by Derrida, but “displaced” while also being sustained in a manner that seeks to make it do something else. Deconstruction cannot be said, then, to refute or shut down Hegelian dialectics, but neither does it simply allow dialectics to operate unproblematically. For an excellent account of Derrida’s connection to and distinction from Hegel, see Gasché.

10. This is not to say that the contemporary American academy is akin to Nazi Germany.

11. Although Adorno never explicitly speaks of what his writing “does” through the vocabulary of speech-act theory, as I am doing in this essay, his understanding of language’s “identity-functions”—in addition to his use of rhetoric and music to talk about “persuasion” being enacted through the very presentation and form of discourse—suggests that Adorno thought about language in terms of what it both means and *does*. Consider, for example, the following passage: “Whenever something that is to be conceived flees from the identity with the concept, this last will be forced to take extreme steps to prevent any doubts as to the seamlessness, closure and accuracy of the thought-product from arising” (*Negative* 22). Notice that is the concept and not the user of the concept—who is for all intents and purposes absent from the sentence—that performs the action of containment and reification.

12. This does not justify or excuse Adorno’s moralism; rather, it helps us to understand it. It is also important to point out that what the violence of judgment produces is not necessarily “bad”—which also implies that what ethical action produces is not necessarily “good.” Thus, one might suggest that judgment, for Adorno—like Nietzsche’s observations about slave morality and reactive force in his *Genealogy of Morals*—has creative and productive potentials. This should not be taken to mean, then, that Adorno’s judgmental claims should not be questioned or problematized because judgment is impossible to avoid and
performs particular rhetorical functions in his work. For better or worse, judgment can do the work it does in Adorno's texts because of its force and violent intensity.

13. It bears mentioning that Jameson is quite capable of writing what many of his detractors would consider to be lucid and flowing prose. Perhaps the most protracted example of such writing in Jameson's oeuvre is his book on Bertholt Brecht, *Brecht and Method*, whose sober and yet vital prose is markedly different from Jameson's dialectical writing.

14. Dutton suggests that Jameson's original sentence “betrayed its deeply middle-class character in a desperate yearning to be viewed as serious and important” (“Empire” 204). Whether you agree with Dutton's general insight that there tend to be correlations between social position and language use, it is interesting to note that he seems unable or unwilling to apply that insight to his own discursive preferences.

15. Of course, “leaving aside” these systemic issues could be said to disconnect us from the social dynamics that shape the production, circulation, reception, and use of these sentences. It may be perhaps more accurate to say that they are not being left behind, but rather implicit and assumed in the commentary that follows.

16. The brief discussion of affect that follows is a radically abbreviated deployment of Deleuze's work in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. For a more detailed discussion of thinking about affects differently, which also includes a discussion of Deleuze's readings of Bergson and Nietzsche, see Smith, 123-39.

17. The two are not always the same, though they will have varying degrees of overlap, and may result in a dissonance between subject-body and the social field it is inhabiting. Perhaps one of the most commonly familiar experiences that can be described in these terms is the phenomenon of “culture shock.”

18. I am alluding to Williams' concept of structures of feeling.

19. It is important to note that this does not mean that Jameson's project has somehow transcended the necessity of “tarrying with the negative” and all that such tarrying implies. He points out, citing Hegel's *Phenomenology* in the process, that his project “offers no way out of... the ‘labor and suffering of the negative’” (*Political* 284). Consequently, this suggests an inescapable dependence on that which an affective politics, in a certain sense, seeks to move beyond—namely, consciousness and reflexivity. However, this dependence is mutual; and thus one of the goals of an affective politics is to highlight and intensify the role of the corporeal and unconscious dimensions of life as they operate in concert with consciousness. It bears mentioning that what I am calling here an affective politics is not intrinsically “liberatory” or progressive. Thinking about affect is primarily a way of theorizing how the extra-cognitive and unconscious dimensions of ethical and political life—and the habits and capacities of inhabitation, encounter, and response that compose those lives—“work,” as it were, in politics as such.
20. Which is not to say that emotional responses to texts are unimportant. Insofar as they might be seen as an index or symptom of other subjective and non-subjective affective dynamics, then affective responses in the more traditional sense are of analytic value. The key is to avoid reducing these domains to the private/inner/subjective experiences of individuals—that is, maintaining the primacy of the "outside"—while still attending to the force and effects of individual experience. This is no easy task, and may require the articulation of new concepts. Although it more or less equates affect with emotion, Lawrence Grossberg's *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* presents some interesting ideas about attending to the role of emotion in politics. For scholarship that attends the interrelations of pedagogy and affect/emotion, see McLeod, Worsham, and Alcorn.

21. For thought-provoking work in this area, see Hawhee.

**Works Cited**


