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Self-Knowledge in Late Modernity: On Hegel, Culture and Contemporary Art

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Abstract

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This thesis provides distinct understanding of the term “self-knowledge” in contemporary philosophy through utilizing a notion of *gnothi seauton* or “know thyself” as conceived by ancient Greeks. The twenty-first century features various ways of comprehending the self that, I assert, are theoretically dissatisfactory. Accounts of the self provided in neuroscience and psychoanalysis, for example, justifiably distrust Enlightenment ideas concerning the human subject, but in inappropriate ways. Therefore I analyze a canonical response to the Enlightenment’s configuration of the self, Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This text, in conjunction with the work of Ernst Cassirer and Georg Simmel, reveals self-knowledge to be the dialectic of *praxis* (activity) and *theoria* (contemplation) grounded in human desire. Only through communal recognition of material objects labored over and transformed by individuals can self-knowledge be realized. This means self-knowledge emanates from vibrant culture. Applying this conception of self-knowledge to the “late modern” period, however, proves difficult. Siegfried Kracauer and theorists of the Frankfurt School persuasively argue that industrial and technological advancements in the twentieth century make self-expression and formation of *particular* communities implausible. In other words, the self is perpetually alienated from culture. I lastly turn to contemporary movements in visual art to verify if *gnothi seauton* is utterly lost in late modernity. The sculptures of Jeff Koons affirm the thesis of the Frankfurt School and art critic Clement Greenberg. Fortunately, the dynamic artworks of Thornton Dial suggest self-knowledge as grounded in culture is still viable in late modernity.

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The thesis is dedicated to my godmother, Rosa Beltran.

Contents

Introduction	3
1. Late Modern Conceptions of Self	7
2. The Idealist Self of the German Enlightenment	14
I. Transcendental Idealism and its Context	15
II. Kant's Transcendental Self: A Circumscribed Cognition of Phenomena	16
III. Fichte's Spontaneous Self and Enlightenment Freedom	21
IV. Overcoming the Pure Self of Modernity	25
3. Self-Knowledge in <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>	28
I. The Preface: <i>Vernunft</i> and a New Self	30
II. The Cognitive and Dissatisfied Self of 'Consciousness'	33
III. "Self-Consciousness is Desire"	37
IV. The Master-Servant Dialectic: Uncovering the Labor of Self-Knowledge	42
4. The Basis of Culture and its Dilemma in Late Modernity	51
I. Culture's Definition and Position in Late Modernity	51
II. The <i>Culture</i> Driven Life: Cassirer on Self-Knowledge and <i>Werke</i>	56
III. Culture and Community: Simmel on the Value of Cultural Expression by Self and Other	60
IV. The Isolated Self: Kracauer and <i>Dialectic of the Enlightenment</i> on the Dilemma of Late Modern Culture	66
5. Avant Garde, Kitsch and Self-Knowledge through Art	71
I. Greenberg on the Challenge of Contemporary Art	71
II. Kitsch at its Best: The Attraction and Dissatisfaction of Jeff Koons' Artwork	75
III. Particularity, Freedom, and Knowledge in the Work of Thornton Dial	78
Bibliography	82

“This much, then, of the ideals of humanism must survive; the goal of education is self-culture, one must hold it essential even for knowledge’s own sake that it be transmuted into character and personality. [This] must have been the essential meaning of Socrates’ favorite dictum- “know thyself”. . . . The capacity for deep understanding is proportional to the degree of self-knowledge, and by finding and expressing one’s true self, one somehow discovers the common denominator of the universe.”

- Alain Locke, “Ethics of Culture,” 1923 Address to Howard University

Introduction

The ancient Greek aphorism *gnothi seauton* (know thyself) is not desolate for the current age. This paper asserts that a return to this maxim is needed for the redemption of contemporary culture. *Gnothi seauton* (γνώθι σεαυτόν) was inscribed above the Temple of Apollo at Delphi and is recurrent in Plato's dialogues. Therefore the phrase was significant for both daily culture and philosophical thought. I concede that self-knowledge as an ethic is less viable in our epoch in comparison to the Greeks. This is because we no longer abide by their concept of human essence and teleology or final cause. This is due to (1) the considerable decline of religious faith in the twentieth century and, partially a consequence of this, (2) philosophical projects articulating the denial of human nature. Perhaps most notable of these is Jean-Paul Sartre's proclamation that for humanity, "existence precedes essence." If humanity is capable of extensive self-determination, could self-knowledge preserve any meaning, and if so, how would an individual go about achieving it?

These questions guide the entirety of my project, and I believe the appropriate response lies in, first, analyzing writings of G.W.F. Hegel and, second, evaluating contemporary culture. Completing these tasks to the fullest extent makes my project an ambitious one. Chapter two attempts to contextualize Hegelian ideas on the self by contrasting them to Kant's and Fichte's notions of consciousness and selfhood. My commitment to the prospects of late modernity is informed by a critique of how the Enlightenment and those at the forefront of modernity configure the self; that is, as autonomous, self-contained, and primarily serving cognitive functions. Certain features of late modernity allow us to get beyond attaching these notions to selfhood, and begin the process of self-knowledge.

Concerning the task of evaluating contemporary culture, in chapter four I iterate and analyze the theory of cultural alienation developed in the early twentieth century. This provides the framework to understand the struggles of culture present today. Especially in need of address is increasing impediments of the arts to ground, inform, and motivate the self. Chapter five analyzes contrasting artworks that either fail or fulfill the self in the twenty-first century. My ultimate claim is that Hegel's conception of the self (especially his discussion of desire) indeed is attentive to issues of cultural expression and recognition. For Hegel, individuals in a society lacking these features of a genuine culture are closed off from self-knowledge. In order for this claim to be persuasive, I first explore characteristics and understandings of the self present in late modernity. Although these late modern theories of self are alternatives to my own, I hope a survey of them can remind the reader of the thirst for self-knowledge that exists today. Analysis of such thirst guides us to seeing the major conflicts of the self in late modernity.

My usage of the term "late modernity" is meant to correlate to what is sometimes called the third wave of modernity.¹ One element of this transition is the illusive nature of autonomy and freedom increasingly being argued for, largely an effect of the hermeneutics of suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud). In the latter half of the twentieth century this suspicion becomes articulated in Existentialism as well as the notion of genealogy via Foucault and deconstruction via Derrida. In addition to the prevalent socio-cultural theories of the last century, my usage of "late modernity" will also refer to globalization, i.e., the blurring of national borders through the international expansion of cultural and economic enterprises, and the technological revolution which has profoundly affected social relations.

¹Leo Strauss, "Three Waves of Modernity," *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

Lastly, as the thesis will be tracking the thought of figures as varied as Immanuel Kant to art critic Clement Greenberg, allow me to provide three problems concomitant to an exploration of self-knowledge that are present in every chapter of this work. The first is the duality between a pure and particular self. The notion of a pure or abstract self suggest human individuality is grounded in a cognitive, neutral subjectivity associated with consciousness that is present for (or available to) persons universally. On the other side, a particular self is informed by someone's personality, character, and proclivities. Attention to this form of self positions us to better understand the differences among culture, communities, and individuals. The question quickly arises, how do these two notions of self relate to each other? Does one make the other obsolete? Can there be an account of how pure self transitions to the particular self, or vice versa?

The next concern is a question of how a human being can or should precisely relate to the objects of its environment. One account is that the self's primary relation to its environment is cognitive, i.e. the essence of human subjectivity is attempting to *conceptualize* objects in the world. A good account of this epistemological position is given by Michael Oakeshott, "this character of being susceptible of precise formulation gives to technical knowledge at least the appearance of certainty: it appears to be possible to be certain about a technique."² It is often assumed, especially in modernity, that conceptual or *technical* knowledge is the only form that exists. The ancient Greeks, however, often spoke of another form of knowledge based on *praxis* and resulting in *artistry*. In exploring self-knowledge, we must ask in which of these forms do we abide? And, furthermore, we must ask if knowledge as conceptualization and knowledge as artistry are mutually exclusive or are capable of coexisting?

² *Rationalism in Politics and other essays*(Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1991) 15.

The final concern in exploring self-knowledge is the nature of human freedom. The very imperative “know thyself” suggests a person has some distinction from other persons or, more specifically, his or her society or community. Therefore an investigation self-knowledge already implies a minimal commitment to human freedom. But where does this freedom leave the self in relation to its community? Should the freedom of self-knowledge be in tension with human interdependence?

The entirety of my thesis, from a critique of Fichte to modifying the claims of sociologist-philosopher Georg Simmel to an analysis of Thornton Dial’s art, attempts to unpack and respond to these questions.

Chapter 1: Late Modern Conceptions of Self

My primary claim in this paper is that self-knowledge needs to be understood as grounded in culture. In order for this claim to be convincing I will engage with other accounts of self prevalent in the late modern period.

Some would assert that the contemporaneous time period I am referring to represents not a later stage of modernity, but is actually a wholesale shift in ideas and orientation from the previous epoch. Thus, it can be argued, the current age is a postmodern one. Those at the forefront of postmodernism claim the Enlightenment ideal of the human subject has been devastated by features of the twentieth century.¹ This includes the reality of the totalitarian state, expansive access to information, and demise of religious practice. Postmodernists proclaim the end of modernity through asserting that the rational, autonomous self of the Enlightenment is no longer a viable concept and, furthermore, was always a fiction. They dismiss any essential self that lies at the core of all experience. Rather, these theorists argue the self is a cultural product.²

The postmodern depiction of the twenty-first century offers little hope of recovering a classical notion of self-knowledge. The self is no longer something to be known, but instead only executed or, using a term of the literature, performed.³ The self is constituted externally rather than internally. This consideration of external acts in defining the self is an important, and I believe positive, modification of the self as often understood in modernity. Nevertheless,

¹ Arguments to this effect are given in Jacques Derrida's political writings. For example, see *Specters of Marx* (1994).

² Jaber M. Gubrium, and James M. Holstein, "Grounding the Postmodern Self," *Sociological Quarterly* 35.4 (November 1994).

³ For the canonical treatment of performativity see Part 3 of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

postmodernists often portray self-identification as overly fluid and vulnerable. With such an account, the self becomes something too tenuous to have knowledge of. While I primarily argue for the importance of culture for self-knowledge, I abide by the Enlightenment's assertion that subjectivity breeds a notion of selfhood *a priori* to the community. Although various positions falling within the umbrella of postmodernism are prominent in contemporary socio-cultural theory, theoretical contributions such as performativity should be understood as modifying rather than replacing "modern ideals of inquiry, humanism, and community."⁴

The theory of psychoanalysis and practice of psychotherapy, rather than postmodernism, are highly indicative for comprehending how the self is conceived in late modernity. Freud offered a revolutionary account of self with his explication of the unconscious, whereby forces are operative in one's thoughts and desires but unknown to the subject. A fractured self is further expressed in Freudian psychology through its threefold division of the id, ego, and superego. Rather than signifying the conclusions of reason or acknowledgement of the good, the superego or *Das Über-Ich* is the internalization of civilization's demands. When compared to Plato's desiring, spirited, and *rational* components of the soul, Freud's usage of the superego reveals how his division of the psyche is a product of modernity.

It is informative to see the *method* of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as an important attempt at self-knowledge in late modernity. The method of free association has someone speak about their experiences freely, hopefully reflecting on past experiences to arrive at self-identity retroactively with the facilitation of a therapist. While free association may provide high functional success for its practitioners, this element of psychotherapy gives a skewed representation of how self-identity is configured by a subject, and what is considered therapeutic for an individual's feelings of dissatisfaction.

⁴ Robert Cummings Neville, *Religion in Late Modernity* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002) xxi.

Psychoanalysis rests upon assumptions similar to romantic autobiographies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most famously Rousseau's *Confessions*. Such texts feature an individual constructing a narrative of his own life and taking a critical stance towards his own choices, ambitions, and actions. The latter of these features make romantic biographies a distinctly modern phenomenon. The primary flaw of psychoanalysis in the twentieth century and the autobiographies of the Enlightenment is that they assume a narrative synthesis of one's life is *the key* to self-knowledge through satisfying the human desire for an integral identity. On the contrary, I believe utilization of narrative around one's past experiences is only one component of self-knowledge.

This psychoanalytic method of self-knowledge in late modernity lacks something the ancients, according to one philosopher, realized was essential to self-knowledge. Self-knowledge needs to include "knowledge of the whole and of man's place in the whole."⁵ This suggests, first of all, that self-knowledge cannot be completed in isolation. Rather, there needs to be mediation between the experiences an individual has and the values and opinions of other individuals. The role an individual has in constituting a society and culture through dialogue and interaction with others, which needs to be self-reflective, is self-knowledge proper. This society and culture cannot be viewed as analogous to Freud's *Über-Ich*, because its primary role is not providing a functional civilization to individual persons, but to provide a source of human flourishing to a community. Constructing a narrative of self is definitely part of Socrates' imperative to live an examined life, but it is not that alone.

The postmodern notion of the performative self and the fractured narrative-building self of psychoanalysis are two examples of how the prevalent perspectives of self in late modernity are a large shift from Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*. The necessary toward concerning sensory

⁵ Ann Hartle, *Self-Knowledge in the Age of Theory* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997) 91.

phenomena which precedes Descartes's assertion "I think therefore I am," initiated modern philosophy and was essential to the social and scientific developments initiating modernity as an era. *Cogito ergo sum* is a crucial, although not exhaustive, representation of how the early modern period considers self-knowledge. Descartes argues there are two kinds of substance, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, thinking and extended things. The self has both a mental and material component, but a person's *thinking* is their essence because it is irreducible for *I*. In other words, a sense of self is inherent in thinking, and thinking is how our presence is defined. Thus, thinking is the substance of "I". This notion of thinking substance further dominates discussions of the human self for rationalists such as Spinoza and Leibniz.

Self-knowledge as the Cartesian process of acknowledging mental substance has taken on the name "introspection" in the last century and a half. One contemporary philosopher defines introspection as "a special method or means by which one comes to [be] certain of one's own mental states, specifically, one's current conscious states."⁶ A majority of the literature currently being published on self-knowledge, especially in analytic philosophy,⁷ focuses on this concept of introspection and is thus grounded in Cartesian thought. Philosophers writing on introspection use the term "self-knowledge" equivocally. It signifies not only knowledge of self, but a particular type of knowledge. If introspection provides a subject with legitimate information on mental states and processes, then a form of knowledge is revealed that has the criteria of objectivity, but instead is only accessible through a first person perspective.

⁶ Cynthia Macdonald, "Introspection and Authoritative Self-Knowledge," *Erkenntnis* 36.2 (2007), 356.

⁷ For a classical account see Sydney Shoemaker's *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963), for a recent extrapolation see Matthew Boyle's "Two Kinds of Self-Knowledge" (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78.1, 2009).

The most prominent literature with this account of self-knowledge comes from Brie Gertler.⁸ The project of Gertler and her colleagues is very important to developments in philosophy of mind and consciousness. I find it perplexing, however, that they have entitled the mental activity being explored self-knowledge.⁹ The type of knowledge a subject gains through introspection is always of a pure consciousness that lacks any particular (or *self*) content. Introspection provides an individual with no knowledge that is distinctive to the individual, but instead informs the individual of what is available to humans as conscious entities. An awareness of the subjective processes available to all conscious individuals is not what self-knowledge appropriately refers to. This process leaves individuals with an abstract self that is ultimately empty. Categories informing self-consciousness may be discerned, but a deficit of character stops any distinct knowledge from being gained.

Before beginning to explain the alternative understanding of self-knowledge that I provide, we must see how late modernity has developed what Descartes argued was the lesser substance conditioning the self. While contemporary philosophy has explored the nuances of mental substance, research into the extended or material substance of self has been more extensive in the twentieth century. While this substance is not distinct to humanity, body is a common attribute to every self. Embodiment has become a formidable definition of the self in contemporary times.

There are two very different genera of arguments concerned with embodiment. The first is rooted in social and cultural history, positing the impossibility of a universal self and

⁸ See *Self-Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2011) and the collection of essays she edited, *Privileged Access: Philosophical Accounts of Self-Knowledge* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2003).

⁹ Though Gertler considerably contributes to the conflation of self-knowledge and introspection, this usage of the term is not primarily her doing. Since the seventies, philosophy scholars have appropriated the “self-knowledge” to refer to first-person exclusive reflection on mental processes. This includes Roger Scruton’s “Self-Knowledge and Intention”(1976) and Robert Audi’s “The Limits of Self-Knowledge”(1974).

suggesting how race and gender influences self-consciousness. These arguments have much in common, and many of the same adherents as do the postmodern arguments on presence and performativity. The other form of self embodiment concerns neurology and neuroscience. Proponents often assert that any indubitable knowledge of self needs to correlate with an observable brain function.¹⁰ While neuroscientists attempt to achieve self-knowledge through the opposite avenue of those who advocate introspection, i.e., the objective methods of studying divisions and patterns in brain activity, the two groups of theorists face the same deficit. Neuroscientists study and analyze particular material bodies but hope to provide the details of an embodied self that is widely applicable. In this paper I hope to show that self-knowledge as understanding the distinctiveness of one's own time period and location was not only an ambition of the ancients, but something we still desire today. Contemporary usage of the term self-knowledge should not be distant from this desire but attempt to recapture it. We wish to have knowledge not of *a* self but of *ourselves*, of *me* and *my* place in the world.

I have provided accounts of the performative self of postmodernism, the fractured self of psychoanalysis that seeks redemption through narrative, the introspective self of analytic philosophy rooted in Descartes' mental substance, and the embodied self of neuro- and cognitive science. I realize this is an arduous literature review, but I provide these depictions of the self in late modernity to show flaws and misconceptions of how the term self-knowledge is, or in some cases can be, utilized today. Hopefully, through summarizing these contemporary accounts of the self and noting what appears lacking in all them, my own account of self-knowledge in the twenty-first century will be taken seriously because it fills a gap in late modern discourses on the self. I am not merely interested in showing that contemporary society has forgotten how the self

¹⁰ For an introduction see the collection of essays in Part II of *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (2011) on "Bodily Selves."

is grounded in culture, but, furthermore, arguing that the lack of this conception of self is a source of popular dissatisfaction in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, this form of cultural self-knowledge is not closed off to us. Alienation is not inevitable in the twenty-first century. I hope to provide suggestions to begin the process of cultural reappropriation for self-consciousness.

Chapter 2: The Idealist Self of the German Enlightenment

Essential to satisfactory self-knowledge in the twenty-first century is appropriate engagement with and understanding of culture. Culture should be understood as the mirror by which the self in a particular time period and space can be known. In order to best understand the relation between self-knowledge and culture I will draw from the first two sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹ As I am attempting to provide resolutions to conflicts around concepts of self in the twenty-first century, it seems anachronistic to turn to a philosopher of the early nineteenth century. An analysis of Hegel's writings shows, however, that he had amazing foresight into the problems of late modernity. This analysis is provided in the next chapter. In order to understand Hegel's significance in articulating self's relation to culture, an account of his predecessors and interlocutors must be given.

Any accurate reading of *PhG* must consider the terminology and arguments of philosophers in the German Idealist movement. For Hegel, the most significant of these figures are Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. Since Schelling's writings have a highly mystical element and he can often be reduced to a passageway from Fichte to Hegel, this chapter will not be concerned with his role in German Idealism. Through reviewing and critiquing Kant and Fichte's conceptions of self, three different things will be accomplished. First, key ideas of self from a modernist or Enlightenment perspective will be represented. This is needed to differentiate late modernity from the epoch that preceded it. Second, the reader will understand problems around selfhood that Hegel's *PhG* is attempting to

¹ In the original German, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Subsequently cited as *PhG*.

resolve. And third, the way Kant and Fichte theoretically explore and justify interest in self-knowledge is valuable to understand the concept in any time period.

I. Transcendental Idealism and its Context

As opposed to Hegel, Kant and Fichte can be grouped as advocates of transcendental idealism, a modification of subjective idealism. The concept of transcendental idealism shall become clearer as the chapter goes on, but subjective idealism is associated with George Berkeley. The transcendental perspective claims material reality exists but our ability to know it is limited. Beyond giving a summary of the movement, I want to point out that transcendental idealism is defined by a particular notion of freedom. In the previous chapter I pointed to a few late modern conceptions of self that lack a rigorous account of freedom. Modernity as defined by the Enlightenment, however, features ubiquitous accounts of self as grounded in freedom and autonomy. One precedent to articulating an autonomous human subject is Descartes' assertion that "*I think therefore I am.*" Such a model of self-understanding allows John Locke to argue for a liberal state contained by the individual reason and liberty of its citizens.² Locke's political conversion of Descartes' revolutionary claims about the self allows intellectuals of the French Enlightenment to argue for individual freedom and universal rights of man. In the 18th Century, the French defend their revolution through asserting political autonomy as emanating from a philosophically grounded freedom.

While political autonomy is the transparent aim of freedom with the French Enlightenment, intellectuals in Germany are invested in theoretically investigating the freedom and individualism that Locke's liberal ideal is built upon. This becomes autonomy articulated as

² I make this claim while acknowledging that Descartes and Locke's epistemological views are completely contrary. I take Descartes' *Meditations* as an emblem of modernity's emphasis on selfhood that is a precondition to Locke's liberalism.

the human subject's relation to the objects of experience. German philosophical modernism is distinct in being concerned with freedom as defined subjectivity primarily and agency effectively. Hegel offers an innovative enmeshed account of subjectivity and agency, but the epistemological concerns with self in Kant and Fichte is key to a nuanced understanding of freedom in modernity. The haste by which British and French intellectuals turn to the political sphere to manifest their freedom does not leave room for an investigation of the self, which knowledge of the self can only follow from. The transcendental idealist approach of German modernism essentially refers to various attempts of understanding how persons have knowledge of the world through knowledge of themselves. Freedom, for transcendental idealists, is not a predetermined attribute of the human, but can only be concluded through investigation of *how* we react and respond to our surroundings. Below is my attempt to think self-knowledge via a transcendental idealist framework, with acute focus toward how freedom is conceived in the German Enlightenment. To put it simply, I see these idealists arguing that a process of self-knowledge is needed to demonstrate freedom and the form it takes. I will ultimately assert that the process Kant and Fichte suggest for self-knowledge is incomplete, but their focus on subjectivity and its relation to objectivity as key elements of selfhood is durably significant.

II. Kant's Transcendental Self: A Circumscribed Cognition of Phenomena

While freedom is the key theme grounding German Idealism within modernity as an epoch, the movement is also essentially concerned with the nature of human cognition. The former is most manifest in Fichte, and the latter in Kant's philosophy. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant asserts human perception and understanding of phenomena defines its objective existence. Objectivity refers to the thoroughgoing and universally acceptable attributes of a thing. For Kant, all things in the world contain both phenomena and noumena; that is, the thing's nature for human

cognition and the thing in itself. The human subject is never able to know objects as they are in themselves. The question that quickly arises in this framework is: if there are quarrels among human accounts of an object's attributes, how can the *correct* or *true* understanding of a thing be determined? In order to retain the possibility of objectivity, Kant must argue that *all* experience is conditioned by something *a priori*. In other words, there is something essentially similar about all human selves. There has to be a single way they experience the world. Or, in Kantian terms, "the objective validity of the categories, as a priori concepts, rests on the fact that through them alone is experience possible."³ This means Kant must deduce how experience is inherently transcendental. By transcendental I simply mean that it is his imperative to show that experience is conditioned by something universally accessible and given to human subjects, rather than determinable by the subject.

What is significant for our purposes is that Kant's deduction for transcendental experience is grounded in (1) a configuration of the self's unity and (2) an emphasis on self-consciousness. Famously, Kant extensively altered the transcendental deduction chapter of *KrV* in the second edition. Besides taking out two thirds of what is presented in the first edition, he added so much material in the second edition that the deduction itself was reconfigured. Rarely, however, are the arguments in the two versions contradictory. Therefore I will use elements of how the transcendental deduction is presented in both editions.

Kant argues a subject always processes phenomena through (a) apprehension of representations (i.e. patterned perceptions), (b) reproduction of them through the imagination, and (c) recognition of the concept they pertain to (*KrV*, A97). The inevitability of these operations in relation to phenomena is predicated upon a necessary synthetic unity of

³ *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1998; trans. by Guyer and Wood), A93/B126. From now referenced as *KrV* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*).

representations. This means that while there is a manifold of intuitions (another word for phenomena) in a subject's environment that by no reason are innately organized, what is always available to human consciousness are unified objects. This synthetic unity of representations is neither caused by something in the environment, nor spontaneous, but the effect of a unified self, i.e., continuity in the processes of consciousness. For Kant writes, "Now no cognitions can occur in us, no connection and unity among them, without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of the intuitions, and in relation to which all representation of objects is alone possible. This pure, original, unchanging consciousness I will now name transcendental apperception" (*KrV* A107). In this excerpt Kant provides the proper conditions of consciousness or *Ich* for objective representation of phenomena. *An individual's consciousness must be pure, original, and unchanging.* For Kant, these adjectives describe the continuous and complete nature of the self's operations in handling intuitions. The unified self is the basis for a unified world.

Awareness of this relation between human subjectivity and material objectivity can breed a concept of the human self having dominion over its environment. Rather than phenomena serving to orient human consciousness, the "I," to a large degree, is a predetermined package. The self is analogous to a machine waiting for material to be operative. The material is needed for the machine to be functional, but that material does not influence the operations of the machine. The material is only necessary for those operations to begin. The Kantian self must have this predetermined or *transcendental* nature for objectivity to exist. In the first edition of *KrV*, this self-purity and -unity of representation is all Kant means by the term 'apperception.' A lack of unified representations can only be due to a gap in transcendental apperception. A lack of representational unity can only be sourced to something outside of the self.

The first edition of *KrV* extensively discusses consciousness' unity as part of the transcendental deduction, and hints toward self-awareness as a part of this unity. Self-awareness or self-consciousness, however, is at the core of the second edition of the chapter. Kant asserts that "I think" must attach itself to all representations. "Thus all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to 'I think' in the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered" (*KrV*, B132). In order for any person to perceive, there is a necessary self-relation to that perceiving. That person must be aware that an *I* is perceiving. Here, I believe, Kant is expanding on the notion of transcendental apperception that he provided in the first edition. Not only does the self imply a consciousness whose processes are continuous, whole, and constant, but additionally, one considers (or thinks of) the objects of consciousness as one's own. This grounding of perception in thought is more comprehensive than Berkeley's purely empirical idealism because it provides a more secure basis for objectivity. In the words of contemporary scholar Robert Pippin, ". . . it is the case for Kant that my implicitly 'taking myself' to be perceiving, imagining, remembering, and so on is an inseparable component of *what it is to* perceive, imagine, remember, and so on."⁴

Kant ultimately uses the term *self-consciousness* to describe this element of apperception.⁵ This view of self-consciousness present in the transcendental deduction greatly influences the entire project of German Idealism and noticeably occupies Hegel's writings. Self-unity and self-consciousness as elements of subjectivity making objectivity possible begin to indicate how a concern with self-knowledge is key to the development of a common discourse among people. The process of arriving at objectivity must begin with inquiry into the self,

⁴ Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21.

⁵ "All possible appearances belong, as representations, to the whole possible self-consciousness" (*KrV*, A113).

because that is what essentially conditions the environment we know. The arguments present in Kant's transcendental deduction are one demonstration of how self-knowledge needs to be utilized for understanding the scientific and cultural environments we participate in. More importantly, however, some things are misplaced or missing within Kant's duality of self and world. This causes questions and problems to arise in Kant's account of what subjectivity and objectivity is, which Hegel will attempt to address. But before going deeper in this epistemological concern, we should return to the issue of freedom. One must wonder about the precise form of freedom, or perhaps autonomy, advocated with Kant's empowered subjectivity. Does Kant extend or critique the modern project of autonomy?

Kant acknowledges that when we consider empirical reality, it must be accepted that all things operate through causality, including human subjects. Kant provides space for human freedom as an *idea*, however, that does not conflict with pure reason (*KrV* A444/B472-A449/B477). Additionally, freedom becomes obligatory as a moral principle. These explicit positions on freedom are clearly ambivalent; and in suggesting that the notion of "a free self" is not needed for the Understanding (*der Verstand*), Kant lacks to account for his own conception of self-consciousness.

Allow me to clarify; in Kant's theory of apperception, that is the self-relation present in apprehending all objects, one of the important concerns is what the source of self can be. How does this sense of self, which is present simultaneous in the thinking of representations, arise for consciousness? For Kant, this self-consciousness cannot be provided *as a consequence* of intuitions, and he does not provide an adequate alternative to the self's source. The only logical resolution is that self-consciousness arises *spontaneously*. Kant's explicit position on freedom, however, denies this deduced resolution. Kant's account of relative freedom means his idealism

is only partial, while his theory of self-consciousness and its basis is left haphazard. Johann Gottlieb Fichte attempts to save it by inheriting Kant's claim about self-consciousness and arguing for its spontaneity. This means the self essentially has autonomy in being its own source. An explanation of Fichte's position needs to be provided to display the full implications of transcendental idealism for theories of the self. Fichte is the premier figure of German Idealism, and his theory of freedom provides a key to understanding ambitions of the self in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. I argue that Hegel's response to Fichte is more appropriate to understanding how we conceive the self, and the nature of its freedom in late modernity.

III. Fichte's Spontaneous Self and Enlightenment Freedom

Kantian self-unity and self-consciousness are key to how Fichte conceives of the self's autonomy. In 1797 and 1798, Fichte gave lectures attempting to provide a new presentation of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, literally "Doctrine of Science" but better understood as "Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge." A collection of Fichte's philosophical writings had been published in 1794 under the title *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*.⁶ These published manuscripts provided only rough outlines of a complete system and the author himself claimed to have been victim to widespread misinterpretation. Fichte's *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre* is an attempt to re-portray the most significant points of his philosophy, and is focused on a distinctive interpretation of Kant's theories of the unified self and self-consciousness. Fichte refers to Kant's presence of self-consciousness as intellectual intuition in order to contrast with Kant's usage of intuitions as always empirical. He writes, "Intellectual intuition is the immediate consciousness that I act and what I do when I act. It is because of this that it is possible for me to know something because I do it. That we possess such a power of

⁶ Foundations of the entire Doctrine of Knowledge. Published English translation entitled *Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

intellectual intuition is not something that can be demonstrated by means of concepts... This is something everyone has to discover immediately within himself; otherwise he will never become acquainted with it at all.”⁷ The common style in Fichte’s philosophical writings can be both liberating and bedeviling. From this passage it is clear that “the I” or *das Ich* will be essential to all forms of acting. For Fichte this acting, or *assertiveness* of all human subjects is necessary to the representation and recognition of *all phenomena* in the world. This is why he refers to it as the immediate consciousness. It is the sense of self-presence that does not only occur alongside the thinking of objects in an environment, but precedes it. Fichte provides a source of self that is deeper than Kant could ever consider because it lies outside what can be demonstrated by concepts. *Das Ich* cannot be provided through logical workings of the categories of the understanding, but instead arises immediately or *spontaneously*. Fichte believes recognition of the spontaneous self is key to understanding our freedom.

This spontaneity of “I” should not be understood as something consciousness receives or is receptive to. Spontaneity of self is rather a component of the “I” positing or asserting itself.⁸ This correlates to what Fichte suggests in the first *Wissenschaftslehre*. “*Das Ich setzt schlechthin sich selbst*” or the I posits itself absolutely. The term ‘absolutely’ (*schlechthin*) should be taken to mean without qualifications, in other words, this positing of the “I” is without cause outside itself. For Fichte, knowledge of the self as self-positing extends or adjusts Kant’s theories of the unified or complete self and self-consciousness. The symbolic form of the self positing itself is I = I or the purity of I. With regard to Kant, I framed the unity of self in terms of operations toward the recognition of phenomena for consciousness. For Fichte, however, the self’s unity is defined by

⁷ Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, trans. by Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1994) 46.

⁸ My expression of the spontaneity of self, and assertion of its recurrence in German Idealism, is greatly indebted to various writings of Robert Pippin. See *Hegel’s Idealism* and “Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 17.2 (1987).

the principle of identity. “I” is the basis upon which consciousness can arrive at a law of identity. This law simply refers to how consciousness configures that $A=A$ instead of $A\neq A$. This is the basis of the principle of noncontradiction, which asserts something cannot simultaneously both be and not be the case. Since the Presocratics, the law of identity has recurrently been explained, reviewed, and debated. Through his argument that *das Ich* is completely self-caused, Fichte asserts the important law of identity can only be acquired through consciousness of our own unity, i.e., self-knowledge.

Fichte’s consideration of how self-consciousness and its unity can be combined to provide the basis of object identification expands on Kant’s demonstration of self-knowledge determining objectivity. A theory of self-knowledge is more essential for Fichte because it denies that Kant’s categories of understanding are a given for the self. Rather, the notion of “I” that all individuals contain must be built upon to arrive at the categories. “The concept of I-hood that arises within ourselves is then transferred to and synthetically united with something which, in the first act of positing, was posited as an ‘it,’ a mere object, something outside of us. It is by means of this conditioned synthesis that a ‘you’ first arises for us.”⁹ These lines show how Fichte’s theory of $I=I$ must be utilized for our knowledge of things (“it”). The self must distinguish itself from all that that is outside it, *das nicht-Ich* or the ‘non-I.’ Self-identification precedes the awareness of difference. An individual is able to posit a thing or object only after it has posited I. Fichte’s analysis of how “You” is produced through the dialectic of “I” and “it” is profound but peripheral to our project. Most significant is that identity and difference are key principles predicated upon (a) the self’s unity (b) self-identity and (c) self-consciousness. I will not be able to offer a full comparison Kant and Fichte’s theory self-consciousness, but it should

⁹ *Introductions to Wissenschaftslehre*, 87.

be noted that Fichte fully agrees with Kant's suggestion that all perception contains self-relation, but wants to emphasize that it is *an effect* of self-positing.¹⁰

The term "self-knowledge" is never substantively used by Fichte, but its application helps to unify three of his important concepts: self-unity or purity, self-identity, and self-consciousness. All three are effects of self-positing. Therefore Fichte asserts what Kant could never agree to, self-knowledge begins with an act. This action is the most indicative element of human autonomy. I would assert that, regarding Fichte, *self-knowledge is human subjects acquainting themselves to their freedom through recognition of their nature as self-positing agents*. This is the fully articulated form of freedom according to German Idealism and therefore shows us the fate of transcendental idealism. In the second *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte goes on to state that the non-I may limit the self materially, but the self's spontaneity must reign in the world of ideas. We can *only* think of ourselves as self-caused and *act* in the world according to such self-knowledge.

There were many accusations of fallacy and extremity regarding Fichte's claims, but I would frame his articulation of freedom as being representative of conceptions of self in the modern period. From Descartes's "I think therefore I am," to Hobbes belief that the human condition can be completely understood through turning inward, to the universal man envisioned in political liberalism, and finally to Kant's transcendental apperception, there are foundations to Fichte's conception of self-knowledge as awareness of metaphysical *and* social autonomy. The ultimate idealistic distinction of I and non-I and of self and environment are a prevalent themes in the essential writings of modernity. It seems, however, that the Fichtean account of self-positing would be unable to satisfy the thirst for self-knowledge in late modernity. My survey of

¹⁰ ". . . the presupposition that self-consciousness is the foundation of all consciousness completely coincides with the thought of the I as originally posited by itself" (*Introductions to Wissenschaftslehre*, 46).

the conceptions of self in late modern period shows that there is a prevalent desire for causation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We are unable to accept the total power of will. Late modern society searches for how the human body, an individual's past or even someone's action's action condition and even constitute her our sense of self.

IV. Overcoming the Pure Self of Modernity

I did not turn to Kant and Fichte only to understand a system of self that is inadequate for the twenty-first century, but to better understand the problems and interests of investigating self-knowledge. German Idealism as movement demonstrates that self-knowledge is essential to comprehending our environment. Cognition of objects outside of us is dependent upon how subjectivity is understood. Self-knowledge, in this sense, serves to begin a movement outward. Looking beyond the self is the fate of knowing who we are as distinct individuals. I would argue that this is one of the few things that theories of self-knowledge in antiquity and modernity have in common.

While the consistent aim of self-knowledge throughout time periods needs to be *going outward*, there is a major difference in the attention antiquity and modernity give to how the community is recognized in self-knowledge. The significant figures of modernity are preoccupied with cognition as the ultimate aim of going outward from knowledge of self to environment. An indicative example of this is Kant and Fichte's theory of self-consciousness as self-relation in our *comprehension* of objects. A complete account of self-knowledge does stop at its necessity for comprehending environment, but considers how the self contributes *value to* objects in its environment. The absence of cultural and normative claims in especially Kant's diagnostic of the self is due to a classic conflict that one sees in theses on self-knowledge. This is between the pure I and the particular I. The former is a theoretical exploration of what conditions

all human subjectivity. The latter is a consideration of the character and personality that are various among individuals but in some way contained by all selves.

One could read my synopsis of late modern conceptions of self in chapter 1 as conflating these different considerations of “I.” It can be claimed that some attempts at self-knowledge are concerned with a particular individuals, i.e., *a self* or *myself*, and others try to grasp the conditions of all human subjectivity, i.e. *the self*. For instance, psychoanalysis has a theory of self in offering individuals pathways to grasp their own characters. Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy may assert how *the self* is divided, but this principally concerns the influences, thoughts, and expressions of particular individuals. Alternatively, introspection theory and neuroscience posit arguments relating to how *the self* is conditioned. That is, the pure “I” preceding the character and values of individuals. Sometimes neuroscientists make genetic or innate claims of our expression and activity, but these would still be addressing a pure “I” because it asserts such characteristics are not dependent upon environment. The German Idealist tradition is focused on this pure “I.” Fichte has arguments about how this relates to particular individuals, but there is an apparent gap in his theoretical considerations of self and individual development of culture and value.

In conveying the arguments about a pure self as presented in German Idealism, I hope to have portrayed the temptation of considering the self’s unity, identity, and reflexive consciousness while at the same time lacking consideration of the formation of particularity. I do not side with pure empiricism as an alternative to this transcendental idealism, but rather hope to incorporate elements of this idealism in accounting for how character and objects of value arise for individuals. Attention to the pure “I” is only one side to the coin of self-knowledge. The other needs to attend to our values and interests, i.e., culture. This attention to character and culture is

perhaps the primary suggestion of *gnothi seauton* printed on the Temple of Apollo. While the condition of late modernity does not allow us to look to culture alone in self-knowledge, I believe there is an opportunity to synthesize the lessons of modernity and antiquity in the twenty-first century. That means having a theory of human freedom and analyzing how our cultural environment conditions it. The primary gateway to such a synthesis is offered, even if opaquely, in the philosophy of GWF Hegel.

Chapter 3: Self-Knowledge in *Phenomenology of Spirit*

In his renowned *Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, Jürgen Habermas asserts Hegel “was the first philosopher to develop a clear concept of modernity.”¹ While Hegel’s interest in the ideas and development of modernity are indisputable, this should not cloud Hegel’s ambivalent stance regarding the rise of this distinct epoch. Hegel was highly critical of the changes to thought and society that modernity brought on, yet he articulated and praised the potential for the future of civilization. Allow me to give one example to portray why Hegel’s restrained commitment to modernity is significant. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit (PhG)* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he criticizes theorists of the Enlightenment who attempt to eradicate theological concepts not grounded in human reason. For deists of the period, such as Baruch Spinoza, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Paine, this meant God should be reduced to a cognitive ideal reinforcing the discoveries of science. Distinct from many of his contemporaries, Hegel asserts that the truth of religions unfolds through their specific content, e.g., divine folklore and theology. Yet, in a subsection of *PhG*, “Unhappy Consciousness,” Hegel criticizes the conception of God in the Middle Ages as a distant figure in opposition to human consciousness. This balancing act regarding religion reveals Hegel is not a philosopher immersed in Enlightenment thought, but rather attempts to reshape the thought of modernity through consideration of the past and practical concern for the future.

Hegel’s restrained commitment to the ideas of modernity means he is a convincing source for unpacking the structure and ideas of late modernity. This is why Hegel is a primary resource for twentieth century philosophies such as the philosophical Marxism of Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukacs, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and Existentialism.

¹ *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), p. 4.

Paradoxically then, Hegel's innovation of Enlightenment ideas often takes the form of injecting classical thought into contemporary problems. One instance of this is Hegel's configuration of the self, and what I would describe as the process of self-knowledge in *PhG*. Hegel *reattaches culture* to a notion of selfhood, something lost in the Enlightenment and modernist attempts to configure a pure and autonomous self. This not only foresees conflicts with cultural alienation in late modernity, but also reinstates interest in *gnothi seauton* as used by the ancient Greeks. This is done through philosophically exploring the significance of *praxis* in human knowledge of the world and self.

It is not my intention to provide a comprehensive interpretation of Hegel's complex system, or to defend all of his ideas. I concede that I sometimes apply Hegel's claims in ways he did not intend. Rather than reiterating the main tenets of Hegelianism, I am interested in exploring his critique of the Enlightenment's conception of self and proclamation of how desire and satisfaction fundamentally define the self. Through these two approaches present in the Preface and first two sections of *PhG*, I hope *elements* of Hegel's philosophy can provide passageways to a satisfactory form of self-knowledge in the twenty-first century. I find these elements to be three things Hegel does early in *PhG*: (a) provide a critique of the pure self and an account of the transition to a particular self, (b) define the subject-object dichotomy not only in terms cognition, but more essentially as activity, and (c) articulate a form of freedom informed by human interdependence rather than autonomy. These three objectives do not stand alone but are informed by each other. For instance, the development of a particular self and freedom are similarly based in the self-activity, i.e. laboring and transforming surrounding objects in order to satisfy desire.

My analysis of the text is not structured thematically, but follows Hegel's chapter divisions sequentially. This is a necessary method of unpacking Hegel's difficult text. Nonetheless, I remain attentive to the three aforementioned objectives throughout my analysis. We must remember that *PhG* goes beyond giving a theory of self and how it conditions our knowledge like Kant and Fichte. Rather, this text provides an account how various concepts of selfhood are part of a cycle which culminates in perfect self-knowledge and knowledge of the world. My analysis stops short of covering what Hegel considers perfect knowledge to be, but ends with an analysis of the master-servant dialectic. From there it is sufficient to see how Hegel argues for self-knowledge as recognition and analysis of one's social environment and, in more developed form, culture.

I. The Preface: *Vernunft* and a New Self

I will begin by explaining two terms crucial to understanding the preface of *PhG*, *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. *Verstand* is usually translated as the Understanding. Hegel uses the term primarily in reference to Kant's transcendental philosophy, which was prevalent in early nineteenth century Germany. Through his usage of the terms *Verstandesgebrauche* (applications of the understanding) and *Verstandesbegriffe* (concepts or categories of the understanding), Kant creates a rigid schema by which the human can apprehend objects. This schematic nature of Kant was also present in the transcendental deduction, where functions and operations of consciousness (e.g. apprehension, reproduction, and recognition) are rigidly broken down. Kant, according to Hegel, essentially turns the human subject into an object with these schematic accounts of how a human being relates to a physical environment.

Hegel describes the capacity to theoretically make an object of our subjectivity as initially a good thing; "This power [to ascribe infallible determinations] is identical with what we

earlier called the Subject, which by giving determinateness an existence in its own element supersedes abstract immediacy. . . . that being or immediacy whose mediation is not outside of it but which is this mediation itself" (*PhG*, para. 32).² Here, Hegel compliments the Kantian tendency to treat subjectivity as objectivity. Kant's attempt to produce *objective* attributes of subjectivity counters any original sense of self as the simple immediacy of consciousness. Denying selfhood as simply consciousness provides the space for self-knowledge. Only by having some distance from our subjectivity, as Kant provides, can we begin to transform what we consider the self to be. Since Hegel understood the nature of human subjectivity to alter with time and space, and hence one's sense of self to be malleable, he cannot agree with Kant's static depiction of the self. Rather, *Verstand* is only a stage in the process of self-knowledge, comprehensively directed by *Vernunft*.

The usual translation of *Vernunft* as reason has always seemed inappropriate to me. Perhaps it is because of the multiplicity of ways the word 'reason' is used. For our purposes, *Vernunft* is an organic way of thinking. To avoid confusion, I will continue to use the German term. Hegel argues *Vernunft* is what ultimately what guides subjective experience. Its principal attribute is that its *purposive activity* (*PhG*, para. 22). Human subjectivity necessarily has this characteristic of containing purpose. This makes the purely cognitive view of Kant and, to some extent, Fichte seem inadequate. Human individuals cannot occupy the position of neutral agents. Hegel goes on (in para. 22) to describe purposive activity as meaning that the subject is self-moving. Hegel's term of art for this is *being-for-itself*.

All this ultimately means the human self is speculative. In other words, it is always considering subsequent moments in its relation to objects. This leads the self always to be self-

² Unless otherwise noted, I will be utilizing the A.V. Miller translation of *PhG* (Oxford University Press, 1977).

reflexive in its subject-object experiences. This should not be confused with a theoretical account of narcissism or yet another form of subjective idealism. Instead, Hegel is suggesting that by relating to its environment, the self is transformed. Put more specifically, as the term *purposive activity* suggests, when the subject *acts* in its environment, a more complete form of self develops. As this *transaction* occurs between subject and object, there is still a place for cognition. As one scholar states, “the service of [*Vernunft*] becomes a process of consciousness wherein the knower meets itself in the known.”³

Hegel’s idea of *Vernunft* provides a conception of subject-object relations substantively different from the transcendental tradition. First, the self as defined by subjectivity is no longer a stable and rigid identity. Second, objects of one’s environment can no longer be viewed as having an immeasurable gap from the subject. Such an account is provided by Fichte with the duality of *Ich* and *nicht-Ich*, but Hegel shows self-knowledge must be related to our knowledge of objects. Though Hegel is sparse on the specifics of the process of self-knowledge in the preface of *PhG*, from this stage the reader can tell it is a process of *going outward*, being transformed by what is found and returning to the self. The first point, the malleability of subjectivity, needs to be called to the attention of those who develop theories of self in contemporary society. One must be careful not to objectify the self in attempting to attain knowledge about it. This seems counterintuitive because knowledge is usually conceived of as ascribing accurate attributes to something. This conception, however, is stuck in thinking of knowledge as applicable to objects. Self-knowledge must go beyond attribution. This mistake is made by the German Idealists and, currently, neuroscience and behavioral psychologists. In either studying patterns of brain activity or previous acts of individuals, sectors of psychology

³Donald Philip Verene, *Hegel’s Absolute: An Introduction to Reading the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2007) 7.

and neurology help individuals to grasp *what they do*, but are lacking in providing knowledge of individuals as *selves*. ‘I’, whenever uttered or thought of, may hypothetically be considered objectively, but in truth ‘I’ cannot satisfactorily grasp itself as object.

II. The Cognitive and Dissatisfied Self of ‘Consciousness’

Even though *PhG* is an odyssey of self-knowledge, the text proper begins with a description of how consciousness navigates the external world. The short section entitled “Consciousness” depicts the self in a habitat absent of culture and value. Consciousness attempts simply to perceive and comprehend the objects around it with certainty. This form of consciousness is a primordial form of the pure self in Kant and Fichte. I refer to it as primordial because this ‘I’ lacks the capacity to think through objects of sensation or reason about them. Instead, all objects simply *are* through them being sensed (para. 90). The ‘I’ at this point of Hegel’s text is still indebted to German Idealism because it is referred to as universal and in quest of nothing but cognition of objects.

The dedication of this ‘I’ to apprehending all objects of its environment soon makes it doubt the significance of itself (i.e. consciousness) and see things in nature as essential to the world. Hegel specifically claims, “. . . [the ‘I’ as] a *knowing* which knows the object only because the *object* is, while the knowing may either be or not be. But the object *is*: it is true what is true, or it is the essence” (para. 93). Even though consciousness is determining the nature of objects by making distinctions based on its sensations, it paradoxically views the object’s disposition as *essentially being without* a subject conscious of it. This means our orientation in completely knowing the world is unconsciously a process of making the self obsolete.

The beginning of Hegel’s *PhG* proper already offers a rebuttal to certain Enlightenment ambitions. In understanding the self and subjectivity as a purely cognitive commitment to our

environment, the ultimate consequence is the self's conviction of irrelevance. This is analogous to a notion of the pure self, where one assumes an individual's knowledge of its environment would be the same if any other individual replaced him. The pure self is a replaceable one. Trying to configure knowledge in this completely objective way necessarily leads to dissatisfaction and nihilism. A pure self cannot inhabit its environment with any certainty or confidence without reference to the specificity of how it and the surrounding objects are positioned.

Based on this and the subsequent chapter entitled "Perception," the reader is left with a self that lacks content or substance and is dissatisfied in its lone attempts to comprehend the external objects of nature. Throughout these two chapters, the reader is provided with a self that attempts to be pure. Only in the next section, "Self-Consciousness", does Hegel depict a self with a particular nature. In other words, a self defined by character, desire, and community. The transition, or bridge, from this abstract self of pure cognition to a self embracing its particularity begins with the concept of *die verkehrte Welt*, the inverted World.

As an epistemological device, the inverted World is similar in effect to Descartes' *dieu trompeur* or deceptive god in the first of his *Meditations*. Hegel believes this is a fundamental experience of human consciousness. It is convinced that everything can be the opposite of how it is being perceived. Hegel notes that with the inverted World, "what tastes sweet is *really*, or *inwardly* in the thing, sour; or what is the north pole in the actual magnet in the world of appearance, would be south pole in the *inner* or *essential being*. . ." (para. 159). This is the condition of consciousness doubting everything it believes to be the case. This conviction of being victim to an inverted world is a consequence of the subject's earlier discernment of being utterly inessential to the world. Through considering itself superfluous to the sensed world,

cognitive consciousness places a gap between itself and its environment. This gap causes consciousness to conceive of its perceptions as erroneous. This is because consciousness is not fundamentally grounded in the environment, but instead delineating components of the pure “I”.

Near the close of ‘Consciousness,’ Hegel places two key points in paragraph 163. These claims flush out the significance and result of the experience of an inverted World. In the distance that cognitive consciousness maintains from its environment in service to *Verstand*, a person becomes self-conscious as an abstract self. “The Understanding’s [*der Verstands*] ‘explanation’ is primarily *only the* description of *what self-consciousness is*” (emphasis added). A purely cognitive approach to one’s environment (*Verstand*) is the condition upon which *self-consciousness* occurs. This is because with the inverted World, the self’s conceptual knowledge of the world begins to feel like consciousness having a conversation with itself. Once a subject no longer takes its perceptions of the world as given, and inevitably opens up the possibility of being deceived by the world in trying conceptually to know it, the self settles on the centrality of consciousness. It needs to be noted that this is a self-consciousness that still holds onto the notion of a pure self. In other words, a self-consciousness that is not referent to feeling or the self’s individual history. I mention this because Hegel will give another account of self-consciousness that accounts for the particular self. In experiencing an inverted World, the Hegelian subject conceives of itself (which is an accomplishment in and of itself), but conceives itself *abstractly*. This means the self understands of all phenomena as determined by consciousness.

In recognizing the self-relation in all cognition, Hegel has shown how one gets to the Fichtean subject. Only through a certain disillusionment with the world do we arrive at Fichte’s thesis of all knowledge being grounded in self-relation. Hegel’s further step, however, is to assert that the discovery of self-relation in all understanding aggravates the self’s sense of an inverted

world. Fichte believes this idea of self-relation causes individuals to be more active in their environment. Hegel suggests this is not the case. Rather, a notion of self-relation in all perception causes an individual to disengage further with the world and become increasingly internalized. In seeing that consciousness is the only necessary element of cognition, at the end of the section entitled “Consciousness,” the subject has no faith in the world and is unwilling to invest in it. At this level, an individual’s self-certainty has closed it off from the world.

This reminiscent to Descartes’ process of concluding *cogito ergo sum*. The existence of everything in the world is left insecure and all that remains is a destitute “I” thinking. Hegel’s process of arriving at self-certainty and abstract self-consciousness, however, carries a key distinction. This brings us to the second important point of paragraph 163. Descartes portrays the process of universal doubt and self-certainty as due purely to epistemological necessity. Hegel points out that this process is compelled by something else, personal gratification. “The reason that ‘explaining’ causes so much self-satisfaction is because in it consciousness, so to speak, is in unmediated conversation with itself, enjoying only itself; in this it seems busy with something else, but in fact consciousness is only occupied with itself.”⁴ This is an acknowledgement that in deducing that I can only be certain of myself, the Hegelian subject has put itself in a position of power. Consciousness is involved in a process of self-satisfaction in addition to the Kantian terms of apprehension, reproduction, and recognition. Self-satisfaction as a necessary component of the self, only revealed at this point in Hegel’s journey of consciousness, is another foundation upon which the self’s particularity develops. One implication is that the self’s attempt to be pure (i.e. remain purely cognitive) is an insincere one. This foreshadows Hegel’s arguments on desire (*Begierde*) in the master-servant dialectic. It shows that the self cannot be a neutral agent, and furthermore, consciousness should not be considered as separate from elements of self that relate

⁴ My translation. *PhG* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 134.

to desire, satisfaction, and emotion. While the Kantian conditions of consciousness *may be* present in all individuals, with Hegel's consideration of self-satisfaction we can be more attuned to how the conscious state of individuals, or the experience of their subjectivity, can be varied.

The effects of Hegel's inverted world are paradoxical. The general concept is that consciousness focuses on self-certainty after realizing its knowledge of the external world could be opposite of true. Significantly, Hegel grounds self-certainty on a notion of self-satisfaction, although at this level the individual does not recognize personal satisfaction as motivating its orientation toward the world. This means that even though consciousness has come to rely on the self more than before, the reader realizes that conceiving of an abstract self with cognitive capacity is insufficient to understand what knowledge for the human self is. In going further inward, the self has realized the non-cognitive aspects of its constitution. Additionally, with the inverted world the self is left dissatisfied with cognition alone grounding its relation to the world. This must be a blow to some figures of the Enlightenment who advocated such an approach. Hegel's argument can be used as a response to the stance of logical positivists in the early twentieth century. The decline of logical positivism leading up to the twenty-first century shows that late modern society is more open to Hegel's remarks on self than modernity traditionally understood.

III. "Self-Consciousness is Desire"

Thus far I have touched on all three primary objectives guiding our analysis of Hegel's text. Hegel reveals how human individuals may have the ambition to be a pure or universal self, but such a conception of selfhood is theoretically inconsistent and dissatisfying. Similarly, Hegel asserts that to conceive of knowledge as primarily conceptual inevitably causes doubt and the subject viewing itself as inessential. Lastly, at the end of 'Consciousness,' the Hegelian subject

attempts to assert its freedom through being completely independent of its environment.

Through part two of *PhG*, 'Self-consciousness,' we are provided with positive ideas concerning the formation of a particular self, the importance of activity or *praxis*, and the development of freedom. All this is given through an in-depth analysis of the section's first two parts, an overview of the section in paragraphs 166-177 and the master-servant dialectic in paragraphs 178-196.

In the overview, Hegel outlines the vicissitudes of what he believes self-consciousness to be. How Hegel concludes this overview is probably how it should have begun. "It is in self-consciousness, Notion of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point, where it leaves behind it the colorful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present" (para. 177). What is clear in this overview is that this solitary form of consciousness is only the *first turning-point* in the self's journey toward Spirit. For our purposes, Hegel's *Geist*, translated as Spirit or Mind, should be understood as comprehensive knowledge of ourselves and the world we inhabit. This section begins with a self-victim of the inverted world, a self more solitary than that articulated by either Kant or Fichte. What is so intriguing about Hegel's method is that he utilizes this solitary form of self (which he disavows) as well as theories by Kant and Fichte to arrive at an account of knowledge that is active and communal.

The "supersensible world" he mentions in the above passage is an indirect reference to Kant; specifically, Kant's epistemological distinction between noumena, the thing in itself, and phenomena, the thing according to us. Kant asserts that we can bracket the noumena and phenomena distinction by recognizing that phenomena are equally accessible to all individuals via the transcendental deduction. For Kant, self-consciousness is significant in giving the basis of

a transcendental deduction. Hegel is similarly interested in how self-consciousness alters our perception and knowledge of the physical world.⁵ The distinction of Hegel's self-consciousness is how it is defined by desire. Since desire, for Hegel, is what ultimately grounds self-consciousness, a dissatisfied desire can also be what brings the self out of a solitary form of consciousness.

“Self-consciousness is Desire” (para. 174)⁶ is perhaps the most quoted line of *PhG* and has inspired entire books.⁷ The line is important for our purposes because in order to understand self-knowledge for Hegel, we must know how he defines self-consciousness. Hegel's attention to desire in regard to self-consciousness leads to a more comprehensive idea of self-knowledge than his modern predecessors. In chapter two I delineated how Kant equates self-consciousness with apperception, and this results in a particular understanding of self-knowledge. Hegel is aware of Kant's usage of self-consciousness as self-relation in all perception, but veils this formulation with desire. This means consciousness's self relation is a *purposive activity*. The process of self-knowledge is therefore a comprehension of this purpose, and more specifically, the desire innate to us. I have indicated that the Hegelian subject's inward turn at the end of the “Consciousness” stage is based on (at least partially) desire rather than epistemological necessity. This reveals that knowledge for the human subject must account, in some way, for its own purpose and satisfaction. But the reader is left asking, what is the brand of this desire driving the Hegelian subject toward (a) skepticism and (b) self-certainty after experiencing the inverted

⁵ One reading of Hegel's task in ‘Self-consciousness’ is providing his own form of a transcendental deduction. As will be seen, my reading strongly disagrees with this Kantian juxtaposition of Hegel.

⁶ At paragraph 167 the line appears in slightly different form; “self-consciousness is desire *überhaupt* [absolutely or in general].” There, the quotation follows an even more prolonged train of thought in the paragraph, making its salience more difficult to discern. Furthermore, I am more interested in the line presence at para. 174 because the very next paragraph acts to moderate the assertion.

⁷ See Robert Pippin's *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

world? A response is given in paragraph 175, “Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object, for self-certainty comes from superseding this other: in order that this supersession take place, there must be this other. Thus self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, it is unable to supersede it; and it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well. It is in fact something other than self-consciousness that is the essence of desire; and through this experience self-consciousness has itself realized this truth.”⁸ The reason why the Hegelian subject’s desire is not clearly articulated on the level of “Consciousness” is because this desire is not lucid to the subject. This passage reveals how desire initially causes the subject to negate objects of its environment in an entirely self-reliant way. Therefore in its basest form, the self understands its desire to have the end of empowerment. More broadly, however, this desire spells out an ambiguous need the human subject has for determination of its environment. The attempt to satisfy this desire only initially takes the form of self-empowerment through a negative relation to external objects. On a basic level, the Hegelian subject is able to determine its environment through total self-reliance. This view is strongly continuous with a Fichte’s account of human subjectivity. As such, it also connotes a prevalent theme in early modernity: the human’s domination and preeminence over nature.

The Hegelian subject, however, finds that this negation is not the true path to the satisfaction of its desire. In this relationship, the self’s satisfaction is dependent upon the nature of the object. In other words, in negating its environment to fulfill its desire, the environment is determinant of the self rather than the self determining its environment. This critique is ostensibly made against Kant’s formulation of subjectivity. If the self is incapable of utilizing the concepts with which it is endowed except when applied to intuitions provided circumstantially,

⁸ *PhG*, paragraph 175.

then, Hegel argues, the self does not have ultimate authority but instead the intuitions do. Thus, although self-relation to all perceptions is motivated by and grounded in human desire, experience proves self-consciousness is not the essence of how that desire is satisfied.

The way I have configured Hegel's argument above is perhaps bewildering. Hegel himself probably realized that this articulation of the self's change in attempts to satisfy desire was not completely comprehensible. I believe this is why he follows the overview of "Self-consciousness" with the master-servant dialectic. The latter demonstrates the points of the former. This includes how "self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" (para. 175), which I did not cover above because it is so much clearer in the relation between the master and the servant. Before turning to an analysis of this allegory, which is crucial to understanding both the fate of our desire and freedom within community, I must further explore how Hegel's thesis on desire relates to self-knowledge.

My exploration of the self according to Kant and Fichte began to assert how self-knowledge is related to self-consciousness. Self-consciousness in its traditional German Idealist form is apperception, and this is the foundation upon which self-knowledge can occur. For Fichte this involves understanding self-consciousness as related to self-unity and self-identity. The problem with this form of self-knowledge is that it reinforced a solitary conception of selfhood. Self-knowledge, in order to be satisfying, has to mean *going outward* and returning to the self with greater comprehension of its nature. Without the support of Hegel's claims, I was unable to articulate *toward what* the self was going outward. Hegel understands self-consciousness *to be* desire. This means, continuing with the assertion that self-knowledge builds off self-consciousness, self-knowledge is grounded in our desire. The quotation above clarifies that in Hegel's framework, desire is not simply a need that is fulfilled, goes away, and may return. The

way Hegel uses *Begierde* is not simply connoting what individuals want. Hegelian desire is better understood as being composed of *drives* rather than wants. Desire causes the self to begin a processes of satisfaction, not resulting in a squelched desire but causing it to transform. This is an appropriate understanding of self-knowledge, *the process of contemplating what one's desires are whilst perpetually attempting to satisfy the self*. Conceiving of desire and satisfaction as a continual and progressive process means an individual can *know oneself* as a human subject and not as object. The latter would mean knowledge as arriving at definite comprehension of what motivates us and what we want, as if the human were a machine with a consistent input for functionality. An essential claim in *PhG* is that individuals often do not know what they want, and usually do not know what they need, but what most essentially binds us as human selves is that *we want*. Therefore the products of these desires, and one's contemplation upon where these desires take one, are a compelling account of self-knowledge. Through an analysis of the master-servant dialectic, I hope this definition correspondence to the three primary objectives of self-particularity, activity, and freedom becomes clear.

IV. The Master-Servant Dialectic: Uncovering the Labor of Self-Knowledge

The effects and movement of human desire begins to be artfully illustrated with Hegel's account of *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*, most accurately translated as sovereignty and servitude. A.V. Miller's canonical translation of *PhG* entitles this chapter "Lordship and Bondage." Colloquially, the chapter is referred to as the master/slave dialectic. The term slave is inappropriate, however, because the German word *Sklave* is never utilized. Therefore I will refer to the section as master-servant dialectic.

This part of *PhG* is most frequently covered in the secondary literature, and also the most contentious. The breathtaking first chapter of Alexander Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of*

Hegel provides an influential socio-political interpretation to the master/servant dialectic. Kojève asserts that the narrative gives an account of how the human subject becomes a revolutionary agent in the world through (a) experiencing the fear of death and (b) transforming its environment through labor. Since that time a distinct movement has developed reading the narrative as providing changes in the self's *epistemological* position based on social interaction. At the forefront of this movement is Pippin's stance in *Hegel's Idealism*.

In that 1989 text Pippin writes, "in short, for many readers, [the master-servant dialectic] presents a kind of parable of social life, an account of what is implicit in modern institutions—their potential violence, their actual domination. . . ." (154-5). And later he counters this frequent misled position with his own, "I am thus committed to arguing that a correct reading of this section does not view it as a wholesale shift to social and ethical theory, that is it much more a continuous development of the idealism/objectivity issues [posed earlier in the text]" (155). Since that time many philosophers have utilized the master-servant dialectic to make epistemological claims deconstructing the "objectivity/subjectivity" dual.⁹ I would assert that this hermeneutic is currently prevalent enough among Hegel scholars and taken as authoritative. Hegelian scholarship has substantially altered since Pippin's assessment of the literature in 1989.

This shift in scholarship on the Lordship and Bondage section is ultimately a good thing, most importantly because it attempts to understand how the chapter operates within the whole of *PhG*. I believe the section serves a response to conceptions of subjectivity and objectivity provided in Kant and Fichte, including an analysis of the transcendental deduction. Therefore I

⁹ I have the writings of a couple of prominent scholars in mind. First, John McDowell's arguments on the section, indicatively captured in "The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*" in *Having the World in View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009; essay originally published in 2003). Second, the position advanced by Robert Brandom, a good example being "Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel's Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms" (*European Journal of Philosophy* 7: 164-189).

largely regard the dialectic as concerning knowledge. One thing, however, that is disconcerting about recent scholarship on the master-servant dialectic is its unequivocal assertion that freedom is not a theme relevant in the chapter. A notion of social freedom, however, is not incapable of being produced from epistemological claims. As has been shown, Fichte is one figure who ties epistemological certainty to the root of freedom with political consequences. This is one element of Kojève's interpretation that needs to be integrated into a full analysis of the master-servant dialectic. An exploration of a theme like freedom in this section may lead to discontinuation with the whole trajectory of *PhG*, but that does not mean arguments made based on images and terms Hegel utilizes in the section by are inappropriate. My hermeneutic does not concede the themes of battle to the death, labor, independence, and dread of death as rhetorical flourish, but considers these ideas as problems and implications of knowing.

In order to understand the theory of self-knowledge provided in the Lordship and Bondage dialectic it helps to work from the conclusion of the allegory back to understanding how Hegel's position is justified. At the end of the chapter the reader is left with two individuals of distinct status. One, the Lord, satisfies all of his needs by consumption, or *negation*, of things labored over by someone else. This master has submitted to that initial drive of self-consciousness as positing dominance over one's environment through lacking engagement with it. Power, according to this individual, is *taking away* from the world and having the capacity to give nothing to it. The provider of all goods for the lord is the bondsman. Although this individual is essentially a servant to someone else, the individual has achieved "*der eigene Sinn*." That is, a sense or mind that is distinctly one's own. Hegel equates *der eigene Sinn* with "*Eigensinn, eine Freiheit, welche noch innerhalb der Knechtschaft stehenbleibt.*"¹⁰ *Eigensinn* has an equivocal meaning, suggesting both to be self-willed and, more colloquially,

¹⁰ Page 155 in 1973 German edition; paragraph 196 in Miller translation.

intractable or stubborn. Both of these attributes apply to the bondsman, he is self-willed and strong-willed. This is the bondsman's source of "a freedom, which stands still inside servitude."

In contrast to the bondsman, the master can in no sense be considered free. His only form of activity is consumption of goods produced by someone else. As with the theoretical version of this argument provided above, the master becomes absolutely dependent on the environment through mere negation as means to satisfy his desire. The pure negativity prescribed to the master means the master has not been able to transform desire into *Eigenschaft*. This is the virtue of individualism or of being distinct, and is what the bondsman has achieved. The essential contributor to the servant's freedom and individuality is his labor. The momentous final paragraph of "Lordship and Bondage," details how this labor that produces freedom is the also the transformation of desire. "For, in fashioning the thing, the bondman's own negativity, his being-for-self, becomes an object for him only through his setting nought the existing *shape* confronting him... Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the bondsman realizes that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own" (Paragraph 196). Labor is the activity of transforming one's environment. The work done by the servant is an exertion of self upon the environment. The desire of the lord is the pure expression of being-in-itself, but through being in the position of servitude, the servant experiences what it means to be for another. The position of being-for-other can only be expressed through serving as mediator between the state of nature and the pure selfhood the master seeks to inhabit. Since the sole responsibility of the bondsman is mediation, his sense of self is loss (the bondman's loss of selfhood is also due to a near-death experience, discussed below). The above passage, however, indicates how selfhood is recovered for the servant. Labor as an exertive activity allows the bondsman to begin the process of *Wiederfinden*, literally

finding-again but translated as rediscovery, of self. The bondsman originally thought the activity of self-exertion upon the environment would be an alienating one, but the opposite is the case. The self-alienation that occurs through complete subservience to another and the dread over death is only overcome through activity of transforming nature and materializing what was encaged by the self.

Hegel claims that laborious activity, no matter how strenuous it is, has no redemptive power for individuals if this work is not preceded by absolute fear or dread.¹¹ The bondsman experiences this absolute fear at the moment where the bondsman converts from pure self attempting to be without the world into a servant completely committed to it. The Lordship and Bondage dialectic begins with an ideal meeting of two individuals who are abstractly self-conscious and assert dominance over their environment through a primitive form of desire. This encounter with an equal is in contradiction with how these two individuals take their sense of self. In switching from consciousness to self-consciousness, selfhood has developed so as to be understood as epistemologically central. Both selves are unable to accept the idea of equality or a collective. As Hegel asserts, one self “must proceed to supersede the *other* independent being in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the essential being. . .” (para. 180). This leads each person to attempt to destroy its competition. “In so far as it is the action of the *other*, each seeks the death of the other. But in doing so, the second kind of action, action on its own part, is also involved; for the former involves the staking of its own life” (para. 187). In being willing to struggle with its other to the death, the self must be willing to stake its own life.

¹¹ The reciprocal relationship of fear and labor for self-development is most concisely put in the middle of paragraph 196, “Without the formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness does not become explicitly *for itself*. If consciousness fashions the thing without that initial absolute fear, it is only an empty self-centered attitude, for its form or negativity is not negativity *per se*, and therefore its formative activity give it a consciousness of itself as essential being.”

The only reasoning available for an individual to stake its own life is the belief that it is victim to no particularity of embodiment. What drives self-consciousness to struggle to the death is its belief that “I” transcends all. “The presentation of itself, . . . , as the pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific *existence*, not to the individuality common to existence as such. That it is not attached to life” (para. 187). This means that the switch from pure “I” to particular “I” noted with the inverted world was only partial. This dominating, self-absorbed consciousness has the ability to recognize its desire and seek satisfaction, but this only negates one element of the pure self, that which involves obsession with cognition. The other, and more primary, element of the pure self is the incapacity to recognize elements of its existence that are not universally applicable or essential to the human condition. Two individuals go into the struggle to the death believing *he is* essential to human selfhood, and there is none equal to him. It is easily understood that such a framework of selfhood, which I think Fichte is susceptible to, stops the formation of community or any brand of collective. Hegel’s rebuttal to the German Idealist trend of focusing on the self as a cognitive principle is significantly rebutted through his articulation of desire *being* self-consciousness. But I find it even more important to overcome the tendency of essentializing the self to which human individuals are easily susceptible. This is because social interaction, group formation, and the development of culture that is the basis of self-satisfaction all depends on the notion of this sacrifice.

Since I started from the end of the dialectic, the result of this struggle to the death should already be evident (besides one person actually dying and the other being left with the same characteristics). The master refuses to sacrifice the notion he has of himself, and continues to inhabit the notion of a pure I. The bondsman, however, makes this sacrifice. This occurs after the

individual has “learned” that life is essential to self-consciousness (I admit to be unsure of the precise mechanism of this realization). The bondsman saves his life through submitting to the desire and arbitrary will of the other. To some extent, the Lordship and Bondage dialectic is open to a social contact interpretation, especially since narrative includes the themes of Life (*Leben*) and Freedom. One must insist, however, that the bondsman’s submission principally concerns a shift in his understanding of self. The bondsman accepts “I” as a particularity and equal to selfhood grounded in something universal. Life is experienced and understood through an acknowledgement of the particulars that define us. All of this gained through Hegel’s concept of absolute fear in the face of death.

For me to close my analysis of Hegel with the Lordship and Bondage dialectic may seem deplorable to the student or scholar of Hegel. The servant’s form of self at the end of the dialectic is obviously an incomplete one. I, nonetheless, believe that essential elements of the three primary objectives I delineated at the opening of this chapter are present in Hegel’s account of the master and servant. My synopsis of the dialectic briefly discussed the particular self, the significance of human activity, and freedom. Now I will systematically review how the master-servant dialectic addresses these objectives, as well as their relation to and my definition of self-knowledge.

The servant’s conception of death’s reality causes him to abandon the notion of an abstract or pure self. This is in addition to desire becoming determinative to its self-expression and approach toward physical objects. In order to negate the ambition for a pure-universal self, the individual’s sense of self must be completely let go, it must feel as if it is a thing. A whole new, *particular* form of self is attained for the servant through work in its environment. For as Hegel states, this individual has acquired “a mind of its own.” As opposed to Fichte’s notion of

selfhood being sensed spontaneously, Hegel argues a genuine (i.e. particular) sense of self must be earned through work. At the end of the dialectic, the servant is still mediating between nature and the master. Work in the world is not based on the servant's own desires, but on that of the master. For Hegel this serves as a passageway to the self working in the world based on its own desires, and furthermore, the desires of the community he inhabits. Therefore the particular self is able to build outward, and consider the needs and desires of others in its labor.

In terms of epistemology, the way the self relates to objects has fundamentally altered in the master-servant dialectic. This is perhaps the most fundamental epistemological shift in *PhG*. For the servant, subjectivity does not mean simple cognition of objects in the world. Rather, subjectivity carries with it the burden of being engaged to and capable of transforming objects in the world. This new possibility of knowing stresses the value of *praxis* or practice as opposed to theory and concept alone. Through a physical relation to objects in its environment, the self develops an artistry of handling surrounding material. This element of familiarity is not to be discounted, but is essential to any full account of knowledge. This is especially the case with knowledge of self, where it is not a question of ascribing attributes to ourselves, but being familiar with and contemplating how we satisfy our desire. In its most advanced form, this work of individuals takes the form of culture, to be investigated in the next chapter.

This finally brings us to the theme of freedom. Obviously freedom “at a standstill in servitude” is not ideal for the human subject. The chapters following the master-servant dialectic are on stoicism and skepticism, the servant's subsequent approaches to the world. These inward-looking forms of self are obvious retractions from a self that actively transforms its environment. Hegel's concept of a laboring individual successfully projecting itself onto the surrounding environment is a necessary element of freedom throughout *PhG*. The point at which this freedom

is no longer enmeshed in servitude is when the self can reap the benefits of its own labor. I should note that this does not mean “freedom from” influence of others, but rather “freedom to” produce objects that satisfy the desires of myself *and* others. This conception of freedom is a precondition to community. My definition of self-knowledge and this conception of freedom ideally complement each other. We are free to satisfy our desires, and furthermore free to seek satisfaction of our desires through the work of others. This allows for self-knowledge to be a collective activity, which will be further explored in the next chapter.

The Preface and first two sections of *PhG* provide a form of self-knowledge that utilizes both what is inside and outside an individual. Hegel provides a philosophical account of not only cognitive principle Kant does, but convictions and desires that emanate from the self. These desires do not motivate us to conceptually know our surroundings, but to transform aspects of our environment in an attempt at self-satisfaction. Hegel’s delineation of labor and material self-projection as fundamental components of self provides a philosophical basis for the development of culture. *PhG* provides my project with immeasurable benefits, but lacks contextualization of its arguments on desire, self-knowledge, and labor within a historical milieu. An historical manifestation of Hegel’s arguments is needed to extrapolate how his theory of self-knowledge can benefit the twenty-first century. From this perspective we can understand the significance of Hegel’s particularized self, emphasis on human *praxis*, and conception of freedom.

Chapter 4: The Basis of Culture and its Dilemma in Late Modernity

I. Culture's Definition and Position in Late Modernity

My analysis of Hegel revealed the significance of productivity and contemplation for self-knowledge. Hegel's reflections on desire and labor as elements of self-expression rather than self-preservation are representative of how human beings have engaged in their environments throughout civilized history. Culture is broadly defined as products of human activity that is not determined by biological necessity. Therefore what is cultural is understood as peculiar to human nature. Under this notion of culture can fall not only art, music, and literature, but also science, law, government, and science. This reflects Edward Tylor's description of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."¹ This is conventionally considered the first modern definition of culture.

A conception of culture that is as broad as Tylor conceives is unquestionably significant to the self. No one could deny that throughout historical time the self has in some way been defined or conditioned by morals, law, and government. Tylor's inclusion of belief and knowledge as elements of culture is not only perplexing, but in tension with the ideal he and others as remnants of Enlightenment thought have for knowledge and belief. Since belief and knowledge are conditionally understood as governed by truth, rather than being self-consciously contingent like custom and government, then Tylor's definition erroneously suggests that culture attempts to correspond to something outside itself. I argue that once appeals toward truth, reality, and *nature* are made then one has left the cultural arena.

¹ Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches in the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (London: John Murray, 1871) 1.

Margaret Mead, a central figure in cultural anthropology, attempts to avoid Tylor's shortfalls by not providing a laundry list of what falls under culture. Instead, she argues culture is defined by community. Culture, Mead asserts, is the "total shared, learned behavior of a society or a subgroup."² This behavioral notion of culture, which is less concerned with human productivity and more with human tendencies, leaves strikingly little room for the arts as an essential element of culture. The arts, nonetheless, are what often comes to mind when culture is considered in a contemporary setting. The tendency to enlarge the notion of culture so it encompasses the way we think, as well as our tendencies and habits, instead of focusing on human production and creativity, is a main tenet of anthropology. It is practiced by Tylor, Mead, and the highly influential Clifford Gertz.³ The alternative understanding of culture I want to advocate is not primarily original, but is a retraction from the emphases of social scientists and affirms culture as empowering rather than simply determining human individuals.

It is not my task to provide a comprehensive definition of culture. Instead, I have the temperate goal of conveying how the idea of culture is informed by Hegel's concept of desire. This means Mead's conception of culture as referring to communally determined attributes of the self is misplaced. Rather, culture is what emanates from human desire, understood in terms of both a singular person and multiple individuals acting in unison. This orientation toward the term means culture is not how a society determines individuals, but also concerns how the individual can work from desires to alter society. The latter claim implies that culture is dynamic and necessitates innovations. As outlined in chapter three, this dynamism is guaranteed by the nature of human desire, not to be satisfied but to be transformed.

² Margaret Mead, "The Study of Culture at a Distance," *The Study of Culture at a Distance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 22.

³ See chapter two of Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), "The Impact on the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man."

The consistently new movements that arise in the arts as opposed to law, government, and (by definition) custom, means visual arts, music, and literature are nuclei of human creativity. Through being the most felicitous expressions of human desire, the arts are at the forefront of culture. Arts as the essential element of culture should be more apparent in modernity than previous epochs. The term modernity (*modernité*) was first coined by Charles Baudelaire in his essay, “The Painter of Modern Life.” He defines modernity as “that which is ephemeral, fugitive, and contingent. . .” and asserts artists must incorporate these characteristics into their work.⁴ The contrary approach for an artist to take is to only capture what is “eternal and unchangeable” because this is an unsustainable grasping for the art of Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. Expanding on Baudelaire’s suggestion, the arts are the primary component of culture that is malleable and contingent in modernity. The other (potential) spheres of culture, such as government and science, are more rigid in late modernity than ever before. The democratic nation-state continues to expand on the globe, tenets of liberalism inform legal systems around the world, and the information and experiment sharing of science has become globalized. In modernity these elements of culture are increasingly unable to be modified and transformed by reorientations in human desire. It is at least conceptually easier to see the arts as avoiding the fate of being globalized. Even if the fine and popular arts have been globalized in late modernity, the creation and reception of great art is susceptible to being localized again.

With this in mind it is the principal goal of the next chapter to explain how the current posture of the arts, and the visual arts especially, can be a source of self-knowledge in the twenty-first century. In this chapter, however, I will explore why the arts are significant for culture, and how culture can precisely be the source of self-knowledge. This exploration will not

⁴ In *My Heart Laid Bare and other prose writings*, trans. Norman Cameron, ed. Peter Quennell (Haskell House, 1974), 37-8.

be primarily theoretical, as was my method of analysis in the two previous chapters, but grounded in a historical milieu. One can turn to various points in history to find a connection between theories of self and analyses of culture. It is more beneficial for our purposes, however, to study a period in time where the relation between self and culture that I have articulated is put into limbo. The most fecund theories attentive to such a context arise in twentieth century Germany, preceding and during WWII. I am referring to theorists in and associated with the Frankfurt School. To analyze this time period through these writers is part of my larger mission to survey what self-knowledge looks like in the twenty-first century. With the latter effects of the industrial revolution and early implications of technological advancement, the beginning of the 20th century is a source for contemporary conflicts around self and culture.

For my purposes, the most prominent writings of the Frankfurt School come from Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Siegfried Kracauer. They provide provocative accounts of how the self *does* and, furthermore, how it *should* relate to the culture its exposed to. This provocation is based on an arising orientation of culture in the twentieth century toward amusement and ephemeral entertainment. The cultural condition of today had its beginning in in the 1920s to the 1950s. This is the initiation of what I refer to as late modernity. Adorno, Horkheimer, and Kracauer are able to critically demarcate crucial change in culture that still hinders self-knowledge in the twenty-first century.

While ideas of the Frankfurt School were usually grounded in Marxist ideology and psychoanalytic theory, I will attempt to revive some claims of Adorno and Horkheimer without much reference to Marx or Freud. It does not seem beneficial to provide scrupulous readings of Frankfurt school theory with consideration to endlessly studied movements and ideologies. I prefer to utilize their analysis of culture through Hegel and those influenced by him at the turn of

the twentieth century. Currently in German universities, the field of study *Kulturwissenschaft* (science of culture or cultural studies) is more prominent than any potential United States equivalent. While the writings of Frankfurt School members constitute the discipline, its foundation is *Kulturphilosophie*.⁵ The primary philosophers in this movement were Georg Simmel and Ernst Cassirer. Both, albeit often in different ways, are interested in reading or extracting arguments from Hegel significant for cultural theory. Utilization of these thinkers will help to moderate many claims made by those in the Frankfurt School.

One element of Frankfurt School thought I find unappealing is its disparaging view of the possibility for individuals to become reconnected to culture in the late modernity. These claims are especially evident in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in 1947. According to this text, the only potential avenue toward an authentic culture is based on a Marxist framework of culture becoming so alienating that individuals eventually revolt against the capitalism fostering cultural alienation. Rather dauntingly, I hope to get around this argument and read Adorno and Horkheimer through a different lens. Conditioning Frankfurt School ideas on early twentieth century German culture through *Kulturphilosophie* as expressed in Simmel and Cassirer makes the revelations of that period more pertinent for today than relying on a Marxist framework. I will close the chapter is suggesting how Kracauer, Adorno, and Horkheimer do not provide needed analysis of the classically visual arts, which will lead me into the next chapter. There I suggest that there are contemporary artists providing cultural sources for self-knowledge and avoiding the pitfalls Frankfurt School theorists fear. Perhaps, this form of art can get the human self back on track to being active and contemplative in relation to its changing desire.

⁵ For more on how *Kulturphilosophie* influenced *Kulturwissenschaft* as represented through various ideas of the Frankfurt School see the chapter one of *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft* by Ralf Konersmann (ed. Thomas Düllo; Münster: LIT Verlag, 1998).

II. The Culture Driven Life: Cassirer on Self-Knowledge and *Werke*

Ernst Cassirer developed a philosophy of symbolic forms to articulate the different means that humanity develops to move from sensible content to knowledge. The collected volumes of *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* were written in the 1920s and became highly influential for *Kulturphilosophie*. As a Jewish citizen of Germany, Cassirer emigrated from the country in 1933 as Hitler became Chancellor. Throughout his writings, Cassirer displays a conviction to synthesize varied ideas in the history of philosophy while being wary of metaphysics. His hesitancy toward metaphysics and claims of absolute truth informed his openness to analyzing all forms of culture to understand the human condition.

In 1940, Cassirer wrote “On Basis Phenomena,” an essay that extrapolates three essential elements of human existence found in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s maxims.⁶ These impulses are (a) to nurture the life that we hold, (b) be interested in intervening with things outside of us, i.e. our environment and (c) to act in and change the state of our environment.⁷ Cassirer recasts these three fundamental impulses as basis phenomena, those intrinsic elements of human experience that are given, i.e., not grounded in explanation. Furthermore, he attaches philosophical terminology to Goethe’s impulses: (a) *Das Ich Phänomen* or the phenomenon of ‘I,’ (b) *Das Wirkens Phänomen* or the phenomenon of action and (c) *Das Werk Phänomen* or phenomenon of the work. The last of these should not be confused with simple labor. *Werk* refers to a piece or individualized product available to a community subject to prolonged human activity.⁸

⁶ English translation published as *Maxims and Reflections* (Penguin Classics, 1999).

⁷ According to a footnote of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms; Volume 4: The Metaphysics of the Symbolic Forms*, the edition of Goethe’s *Maximen und Reflexionen* that Cassirer probably utilized was *Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, vol. 21, ed. Max Hecker (Weimar: Verlag der Goethe-Gesellschaft, 1907) 76-7.

⁸ *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms; Volume 4: The Metaphysics of the Symbolic Forms* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996) 128-130. Subsequently referenced as *PSF4*.

While Goethe may be the source of Cassirer's basis phenomena, one can see their correlation to attributes of Hegelian thought. Hegel would disagree, however, that these phenomena are intuitive or immediate to human consciousness. Rather, a phenomenon appears to consciousness through the internal tension or lack in another phenomenon. *Das Ich Phänomen* corresponds to where "Consciousness" starts in *PhG*, having a sense of self and dedication to life. *Das Wirken Phänomen* matches the stage of 'Self-consciousness' at the start of the Lordship and Bondage dialectic, i.e., the individual who meets another self-consciousness for the first time and realizes it wants dominance over it. This is the individual's impetus to *think of* intervention into the world. Lastly, *Das Werk Phänomen* correlates to what the servant has achieved at the end of the dialectic, laboring to transform the environment and create new "things." It should be noted that if someone lacked the basis phenomenon of *Werk*, they would be in the perpetual state of the master. By this I mean an individual would be perpetually attracted to the idea of intervening upon the environment but never actually achieving it.

Cassirer makes explicit mention of self-knowledge regarding this realization of the human's basis phenomena. In the following passage he is able to contribute to the broad theme in this paper on how to conceive a knowledge that can be attached to the self. When summarizing Goethe's impulses of the human, Cassirer immediately notes, "Here [we have the] attempt to reconstruct life according to the character of its being and the way in which we ourselves and others can come to know it according to the kind of knowledge we can have of it. Both questions belong together inherently, for human life is conscious of itself. It does not simply exist; rather, it "knows of itself" and this "knowing of itself" is constitutive for it, defines its specific difference" (*PSF4*, 128). Cassirer describes how the process of finding the conditions of knowledge correlates to any metaphysic of the self. This is very close to Kant, who attempts to constrain

metaphysics through what is possible for human cognition. Cassirer goes a step further, however, in suggesting that not just self-consciousness, but self-knowledge is the specific difference of human individuals. Hegel's *PhG*, in providing a full account how the human develops to the point of comprehending and eventually transforming how it is "conditioned", harmonizes very well with Cassirer's claim. Questions of "how we are?" and "how we know?" must always be combined, with Hegel attaching the question of "what we desire?" Nonetheless, Hegel and Cassirer agree that this meshing the human self's being and knowledge leads to an analysis of culture, with Cassirer being more explicit on this point.

Cassirer perhaps emphasizes the relationship between self-knowledge and culture more than any other intellectual thinker. Allow me to discuss two significant places in Cassirer's writings where this relationship is born out. The first comes from what is perhaps Cassirer's most often read text, *An Essay on Man*. Published in 1944, this essay was supposed to be a synthesis of the philosophy of symbolic forms for an English speaking audience. Cassirer's commitment to theorize culture and self-knowledge in substantively connected is more apparent here than in any of his other writings. *An Essay on Man* is subtitled *An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, and begins with the statement "that self-knowledge is the highest aim of philosophical inquiry appears to be generally acknowledged."⁹ The primary objective in the history of philosophy has been to achieve self-knowledge, and for Cassirer this can only be achieved through an analysis of the forms of our cultural life.

A key second instance of Cassirer's exploration of self-knowledge and culture is lesser-known but key to relating Hegel's approach of grounding selfhood in productive activity to Cassirer's thought. At the end of "On Basis Phenomena," as he extrapolates the notion of *Das Werk Phänomen*, Cassirer interprets what *gnothi seauton* meant to Socrates and Plato. Returning

⁹ Page 1. First Edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944).

to these ancient thinkers, Cassirer argues, helps us to rethink the overemphasized distinction between theory (*theoria*, θεωρία) and practice (*praxis*, πράξις) in the modern period. An amalgam of theory and practice is needed for self-knowledge to become a process convincing and fulfilling for modern individuals. Reflection on the products of our labor while still being active is what creates a new sphere that is characteristically distinguished from that of mere ‘theoria’ or ‘praxis.’ Cassirer states, “In this sense Socrates’ observation is neither one-sidedly theoretical nor practical, neither intuitive nor active, but genuinely *contemplative*. ... Socrates begins with the Delphic oracle’s call of γνῶθι σεαυτόν [know thyself]. ... He does not call for ‘self-knowledge’ in the sense of some pure (monadic) looking inward (intro-spection, intuition of the I in the pure act of the *cogito*); instead it means something completely new and unique for him. This call now means: know your *work* and know ‘yourself’ *in* your work; know what you do, so you can do what you know” (*PSF4*, 185-6). This passage contributes to a couple of topics that have been tracked in the entirety of this paper. The first concerns the dual of self-knowledge as cognition versus as activity. In chapter two I analyzed the shortfalls of Kant and Fichte’s primarily cognitive approach to self-knowledge, and in chapter three suggested how Hegel inserts the importance of activity or *praxis* in the German Idealist framework. Here, Cassirer is artfully emphasizing the substance of Hegel’s dialectic between theory and practice as the best form of self-knowledge. In terms of resolving the problem of the pure versus particular, Cassirer is also following the track of Hegel in arguing that self-knowledge cannot be introspection that leads the notion of what the self is. It would therefore be preferable for Cassirer to acknowledge his source of resolving the dichotomy of theory and practice to Hegel rather than Socrates. Through aligning contemplation with self-knowledge, this passage should be read a reiterating

the definition I give to self-knowledge in chapter three via Hegel: the process of contemplating what one's desires are whilst perpetually attempting to satisfy the self.

Cassirer's *Werk Phänomen* reveals that the human reaches greatest height in *working* to satisfy its desire to intervene in the world. Self-knowledge begins only after this work is done and a *Werk* produced, and thereafter contemplated. Human *praxis* never comes to an end, but knowledge of the self can be achieved in theory being concomitant to this work. For Cassirer, human *Werke* are the expressions of culture. His very usage of the term "*Werk*" reveals an interest in art and written *works*. Thus, I suggest his claim of self-knowledge meaning to "know your *work* and know 'yourself' *in* your work" be replaced with "know your *culture* and know yourself *in* your culture." I would suggest that Cassirer puts "yourself" in quotations because this process should not be understood as overly individuated. This claim, however, cannot be confidently made based on what Cassirer gives us. I now turn to Georg Simmel, who attempted before Cassirer to understand the intricacies of this idea of self-knowledge (that I take as an essentially Hegelian one), i.e., of knowing your *Werk* or culture and yourself in your *Werk* or culture. I especially use Simmel to figure out how this definition is operative in a communal environment. In other words, an individual contributes to her culture but does not own it, so how can it be argued that in contemplating the culture of my community I am beginning the process of self-knowledge?

III. Culture and Community: Simmel on the Value of Cultural Expression by Self and Other

As one of the founders of sociology, Georg Simmel's produced a huge corpus. Writing and living in Berlin at the turn of the century, he was interested in changes to individual consciousness as a result of increasingly intricate capitalism and industry and technology in permeating urban areas.

In the second edition to his *Philosophie des Geldes*, Simmel inserts a chapter on “The Concept of Culture” (*Der Begriff der Kultur*), which reflects the themes of Hegel’s Lordship and Bondage dialectic. “The material products of culture- furniture and cultivated plants, works of art and machinery, tools and books- in which natural material is developed into forms which could never have been realized by their own power, *are our own*, produced through desire and feeling [*Wollen und Fuhlen*]. . .”¹⁰ Simmel clearly sets up the framework of culture as self-expression. Culture must be understood as that which emanates from us as individuals. Furthermore, the act mediating between self and culture is labor. Our human condition is the impetus to develop materials beyond their natural capacities in order to make these material *our own*.

Simmel’s claims correlate with my interpretation of *PhG*’s argument for the relation between self and culture. Simmel read Hegel and his thought was extensively influenced by him.¹¹ Through expanding on ideas nebulous in Hegel’s account of self and culture, Simmel is able to provide the most substantial perspective on the basis of culture at the dawn of late modernity. This is exemplified in his claim that culture is the mediating point of self-knowledge, encapsulating my argument that self-knowledge need be a going outward and return to self. Simmel, specifically states, “By cultivating objects, that is by increasing their value beyond the performance of their natural constitution, we cultivate ourselves: it is the same value-increasing process developing out of us and returning back to us that moves external nature or our own nature.”¹² After transforming material due to self-desire or feeling, we can come better to know ourselves through contemplating the return. By this I mean the object initially constituted by the

¹⁰ *Philosophie des Geldes* (Munich and Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker and Humblot, 3rd edition, unaltered, 1920) 503. My translation; emphasis added.

¹¹ One of the few monographs on this relation is Petra Christian’s *Einheit und Zwiespalt: Zum hegelianisierenden Denken in der Philosophie und Soziologie Georg Simmels* (Berlin: Verlag von Duncker und Humblot, 1978).

¹² *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1978), 447.

self, then acts to transform the self's orientation and desire (or drives). Through the work they do upon material of the environment, individuals are able not only to transform nature but also change themselves.

This is a reiteration of the process of self-knowledge presented in chapter three. I hold that Simmel consents to Hegel's framing of an individual achieving freedom through its labor to institute culture. The servitude of an individual in a pure natural state is overcome through cultural activity, and from this self-knowledge is possible. The claim of how self-projection into the material of the world allows for self-knowledge is, for the most part, unlikely to be disputed. The key and more contentious question for this project, however, is how self-knowledge is achieved through the "returning back" of products in culture not constituted by that particular individual?

One year after the second edition of *Philosophie des Geldes*, Simmel wrote an article for the journal *Österreichische Rundschau* entitled "Von Wesen der Kultur," or "On the Essence of Culture." In this article he unpacks self-knowledge as attained through the cultural expression of another individual. We must first review the previously established definition of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is a process that incorporating technical knowledge alongside *praxis* in terms of contemplating attempts to satisfy the self. Every individual should recognize, however, that others are equally self-conscious as 'I'. Once this is accepted, an individual comprehends that everyone has desires they are attempting to satisfy. All of this is present in *PhG*, but Simmel suggests culture must be considered the compilation of attempts to satisfy desires of various individuals. Objects of culture, especially in the arts, are generally understood to address the desires and please a collective of people. The fact that such a compilation exists means that something must be transpersonal about our desires and the nature of us as selves.

I am not suggesting self-knowledge via culture leads to the notion of a universal self present in Enlightenment and German Idealism. Rather, the fact that a culture belongs to a collective (we usually do not understand what is produced by a lone individual without recognition from others to be a cultural expression) means something about the desire motivating the self toward activity is communal. This idea is most astutely given in “Von Wesen der Kultur,” “The more distinct a product is from the subjective spirituality of its creator, the more it belongs to an objective order with its own validity, then the more specific is its *cultural* significance, the more suitable it is to play a general part in the spiritual development of a large number of people.”¹³ An analysis of artistic processes best illustrates this element of culture.¹⁴ Artistic expression paradoxically operates through the notion that the artist should practice the utmost creativity and innovation. A community, nonetheless, expects the artistic object to be comprehensible and its value recognizable. An object labored over by a human being without any recognition from the community is usually not considered art and certainly does not constitute culture. Simmel’s suggestion is that the artist does not sacrifice or negotiate elements of his or her art in acquiring the recognition of the broader community. If an artist’s self-projection onto the object is entirely idiosyncratic, then one is not accessing his or her “subjective spirituality.” Simmel’s idea seems to be a very Hegelian one. They both suggest that a “spirit” grounds subjective experience, and it is informed by the activities and values of a larger community. While in the German Simmel uses *Seele* (also translated as soul) and Hegel uses *Geist* (also translated as mind), meaning Hegel’s focus is slightly more epistemological than Simmel, they agree on how *self-exploration reveals the nature of a community*, and an

¹³ *Georg Simmel: Sociologist and European*, ed. P.A. Lawrence (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1976), 248.

¹⁴ Simmel would agree with this because he first turns to art and painting as the examples clarifying the basis of culture in “Concept of Culture” in *Philosophie des Geldes*.

exploration of community unpacks the self. The former exploration takes place through an individual stepping up and creating objects of culture, and the latter happens through individuals analyzing cultural material.

Simmel contributes to the completion of Cassirer's theory of self-knowledge via culture through arguing for the self's inherent relation to the community. This innovative argument has foundation in Hegelian thought. The Lordship and Bondage dialectic provides the notion of progress in self-knowledge through the presence of another self-consciousness. If one reads further in *PhG* (sections I did not analyze), Hegel's aim of self-knowledge and self-formation being grounded in community and culture is apparent. Cassirer and Simmel provide needed clarity to Hegel's position. Through their focus on labor and the prospects for self-knowledge that culture provides, Cassirer and Simmel can be utilized in addressing the three conflicts of self-knowledge tracked in the entirety of this work. In emphasizing how knowledge is achieved through practice rather than theory alone, Cassirer shows how both cognitive and active approaches must be used for self-knowledge. It must once again be noted that the activity does not begin once phenomena have been completely understood, but instead *theoria* (contemplation) must often take place in the procession of and after practice. Cassirer's emphasis on self-knowledge as contemplation of *praxis* means it is the perpetual balance of activity and our cognitive capacities.

The focus on how self-knowledge as built off the recognition of other individuals goes beyond what the servant was ever able to achieve in Hegel's dialectic. Through not earning the recognition of the other, the self moved on to scepticism and stoicism. Simmel's conception of culture is a resolution of this conflict. Through culture individuals are perpetually recognizing the work (*Werk*) of other persons. The capacity of these *Werke* to fulfill some desire in that

individual reveals commonality between various persons. I would argue the power of those cultural products to fulfill desires in multiple individuals is a key component of how community is formed. I point all this out to suggest we no longer suffer from the duality of pure and particular selves. All human beings are not the same or have the same orientation toward the world. Rather, through work toward culture that some (not all) individuals are willing to initiate, the condition is available to understand the desires we share. Through culture, the human self is able to realize what it shares with other individuals.

The last of our three major conflicts concerning self-knowledge is the issue of freedom. The end of Hegel's Lordship and Bondage dialectic revealed how a certain form of freedom is achieved for the human self in projecting itself and the forming of material objects. Hegel calls this a freedom "enmeshed in servitude" because *das Werk* of the servant has not been valued but only negated by the other, in this case, the master. Simmel puts forth a social situation where this is no longer the case, where self-expression is no longer imprisoned. Instead, the artistic self has attained a complete form of freedom in not only (a) projecting itself onto the objects of the world in transforming them, and furthermore (b) having that cultural work influencing the knowledge and value of other individuals. The latter is the defining element of what Simmel calls "objective culture." The concern at the dawn of late modernity is how individuals still have the freedom to both contribute to and learn from objective culture. At the end of "Von Wesen der Kultur," Simmel makes a brief suggestion for what thinkers of the Frankfurt School will run with. "The disharmony of modern life, in particular the intensification of technology in every sphere combined with deep dissatisfaction with it, arises largely from the fact that things become more

and more cultivated but people are capable only to a lesser degree of deriving from the improvement of objects an improvement of their subjective lives.”¹⁵

IV. The Isolated Self: Kracauer and *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* on the Dilemma of Late Modern Culture

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s prominent *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* was published directly after World War II, as human atrocities committed by the Third Reich began to become widely known. A corollary idea of the text is how genocide such as the Holocaust affects our notion of the human condition. This is most apparent in the book’s last chapter, “Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of the Enlightenment.” Although it would be fruitful to analyze Adorno and Horkheimer’s primary critiques of the Enlightenment, especially in light of our review of Kant and Fichte, I will focus on a single chapter of the book that deals with the state of culture and art well into the twentieth century. This chapter accepts Simmel’s idea of culture’s increasing distance from self-formation. The consequence is a lack of freedom for the individual.

Before considering this allow me to discuss a significant predecessor to the Frankfurt school. Siegfried Kracauer was a film and cultural critic writing in Berlin during the Weimar Republic. Being Jewish, Kracauer migrated to Paris in 1933, and then to the United States in 1941. His essays during the Weimar years were influenced by founders of sociology such as Simmel and Max Weber. One essay, “Die Wartenden” or “Those Who Wait”, was published in 1922. In it, Kracauer expands on Weber’s famous notion of disenchantment. He asserts that the loss of spirituality or an intellectual grand narrative in people’s daily lives makes them feel isolated and individuated.¹⁶ This lack of wholeness means we are remote from an idea of

¹⁵ Ed. Lawrence, *Georg Simmel: Sociologist and Philosopher*, 249.

¹⁶ *Siegfried Kracauer Schriften: Aufsätze 1915-1926* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 161.

community. There are three options left for the self in this condition of lost religiosity and tradition that are severe, according to Kracauer, in late modernity. The options are a principled skeptic, someone who attempts to hold on to the value of faith, and those who are waiting. The last of this group Kracauer finds the most admirable, as they neither reject faith in any metanarrative, nor are insistent on the world being governed by a higher power. Instead, these individuals have a “hesitant openness.”¹⁷ As will be seen from Adorno and Horkheimer, Kracauer has a more optimistic stance on the potential for self-satisfaction in late modernity than his contemporaries and followers. At the end of “Die Wartenden,” Kracauer suggests this hesitant openness of late modernity is preferable to the Enlightenment self. “What can best be said, in any case, is that what is at stake for the people [waiting] is an attempt to shift the focus from the theoretical self to the self of the entire human being, and to move out of the atomized unreal world of shapeless powers and figures devoid of meaning and into the world of *reality* and the domains it encompasses.”¹⁸ The pure self has been in search of a specific, *entire* self in late modernity. This entire self is not completely particular because it wants to relate to and discover itself in others. Late modernity, as opposed to the Enlightenment, represents a greater commitment to material reality, with ideas not being the basis of how we understand the world. This, on the whole, means a fulfilling form of self-knowledge is more possible in late modernity. The period also, however, features many who are waiting and uncertain. This existential position can either be damning or result in the most encompassing project of self-knowledge.

So what was the material reality of the twentieth century that was unavailable or unattended to in the Enlightenment? The prevalence of Christian faith in the medieval and early modern period had to be replaced by some material condition. For someone like Kracauer it is

¹⁷ Ibid, 168.

¹⁸ Ibid. 169. This translation offered in *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) 139.

not clear if the rise of technology in the early twentieth century is causal or correlative to the loss of spirituality and trust in tradition at the time. In his essay, “Cult of Distraction: One Berlin’s Picture Palaces,” he suggests that the radio, film, and advertising industry rushed in to inform the material reality to which millions turned in the beginning of twentieth century. These forms of “popular culture” came to be the primary source of self-discovery in the period, but ultimately led to a fragmented form of self-knowledge. “Here, in pure externality [glamor, spectacular shows], the audience encounters itself; its own reality is revealed in the fragmented sequence of splendid impressions. Were this reality to remain hidden from the viewers, they could neither attack it nor change it; its disclosure in distraction is therefore of moral significance.”¹⁹ The material reality of late modernity, which the self most turns to for satisfaction, is imbued with glitz and glamour but at the cost of substance or prolonged narrative. This form of “art” does not try to relate to the experiences of a human self but purposefully attempts to avoid them. This fragmented culture of the 1920s Germany is unsynthetic and does not serve as *the return* for the self but continues to *go outward*.

The idea of a culture alienated from self is even clearer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Therefore I will utilize the chapter entitled “*Kulturindustrie: Aufklärung als Massenbetrug*” translated literally as “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” Adorno and Horkheimer argue that technological innovation acts to alienate society from itself as a various forms of culture are given to different communities and groups without discrimination.²⁰ Film, advertising, and popular literature replace forms of art that attempt to capture the culture of a particular village, city, or nation. “Nevertheless the culture industry remains the entertainment business. Its influence over the consumers is established by entertainment; that will ultimately be

¹⁹ *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Levin, 326.

²⁰ *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 121.

broken not by outright decree, but by the hostility inherent in the principle of entertainment to what is greater than it” (p. 136). Culture becomes defined by entertainment and amusement. The individuals who engage in it erroneously believe it will provide a form of self-knowledge, but the culture industry constantly cheats them of this promise.

Perhaps the most insidious form of the culture industry is that it lacks innovation. Whatever an audience finds to be the most appealing in a particular point of time becomes the object of repetition. Whatever does not fit this repetitive ideal is marginalized. This is why the authors assert that “. . . industry robs the individual of his function” (124). Instead of providing the space where individuality can be expressed as Simmel outlines, culture becomes a “machine that rotates around the same spot” (134).

Adorno and Horkheimer briefly, and rather simply, outline the conflict with self-knowledge had in late modernity. The culture industry they spoke of is very much pertinent in the 21st Century. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* shows how large divisions the cheapening of culture lead to conflicts in the self. There is one aspect of this argument I find incomplete. They lack appropriately to consider the bounty of creative artistic movements in the early twentieth century. Members of the Frankfurt school are so concerned with what the masses are engaged in (“popular entertainment”) that they ignore the changes occurring in “high culture.” Although, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* provides some key concepts regarding cultural alienation, by ignoring what’s happening art scene, it ignores key elements of distinction in the late modern period. Clement Greenberg, one of the most remarkable art historians and critics of the twentieth century, provides an account of how high culture is changing in relation to popular culture in late modernity. With Greenberg’s analysis we will have a more nuanced notion of what’s occurring

with the classical visual arts in late modernity. From there we can determine what cultural expressions are available for self-knowledge in the twenty-first century.

Chapter 5: Avant Garde, Kitsch and Self-Knowledge through Art

What could one convincingly argue is the art most indicative of the late modern period? Since the productions of popular culture are usually seen as providing fleeting amusement to their audience, most individuals would be unwilling to maintain that these expressions are at the core of culture. In the last chapter, I argued that Frankfurt School theorists would surely agree with this. Adorno and Horkheimer persuasively assert that the ability of the self to produce a sincere artistic work, i.e. one that serves the purpose of Hegel's notion of self-expression of desire, is very difficult in late modernity. This does not mean that there are not attempts at it in contemporary times or that they are doomed to be ineffective. One alternative to the approach of Kracauer, Adorno, and Horkheimer, is to turn to cultural objects with authorial force in single individual's rather than artistic expressions grounded in technology. This is provided through looking at what is being done with the classical visual arts of painting, sculpture, and design in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

I. Greenberg on the Challenge in Contemporary Art

One art critic to argue that a type of alienation is occurring at this level of 'high art' and 'high culture' is Clement Greenberg. He was born and died in New York City, witnessing and analyzing most of the art movements of the twentieth century. Greenberg is most known in the discipline of art history as the inspiration of T.J. Clark's polemical article, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art,"¹ which sparked a lively and implicative debate with Michael Fried on what the defining element of modernism in art was.² Clark was interested in how Greenberg discusses the elements of negation in the Avant Garde movement, and wants to make these "practices of

¹ In *Critical Inquiry* 9.1 (September 1982) 139-156.

² For introduction into this debate and an outline of its implication for art criticism, see Introduction to *Writing Back to Modern Art: After Greenberg, Fried, and Clark* (Routledge, 2005) by Jonathan Harris.

negation” into an attribute of modern art more broadly (p. 149). While Clark wants to conflate techniques in Avant Garde art with movements like Impressionism and Expressionism, I am interested in exploring and preserving Greenberg’s distinction between these movements.

Greenberg asserts that the Avant Garde movement is distinct to late modernity because it arises out of a stagnant culture. He sees culture as stagnant similarly to Adorno and Horkheimer’s theory of cultural alienation, i.e. culture is so determined by economics and technology that it lacks being the expression of individual initiative. Avant Garde art as opposed to kitsch, which is explained below but for now should be taken as products of popular culture, does not revive art as providing the content of self-knowledge but provides an important alternative to popular culture. Greenberg explains that, “Hence it developed that the true and most important function of the avant-garde was not to ‘experiment,’ but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence. Retiring from the public altogether, the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his art by narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities or contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point.”³ Artists within the Avant-Garde movement like to define themselves as experimental artists, but this fails to explain why Avant-Garde artists have *chosen* the styles they do. Greenberg provides us with a response, the Avant-Garde movement represents an abstraction from all specific content and avoids the expression of values. Since this artistic movement lacks content that is specific to an individual or community, how can it argued to “keep culture *moving*?” Greenberg’s claim of Avant-Garde art being at the forefront of culture in late modernity is especially perplexing due to the basis of culture articulated in chapter four. That is, culture must help articulate a particular self and earn

³ “Avant Garde and Kitsch,” *Partisan Review* 6 (Fall 1939). Reprinted in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston Beacon Press, 1961), 5.

the recognition of others as being a valuable attempt to address human desire. The Avant-Garde movement is not about content, but various meditations on form. The above passage indicates that this move is made in order to distinguish ‘high level’ art from the productions of popular culture. Artists still interested in art’s value for a community, must paradoxically extradite that community enmeshed in the representations of popular culture. But why is ‘popular culture’ or, as Greenberg refers to, kitsch so encompassing for a culture. Why are the individuals of a community so attracted to Kitsch art?

Greenberg’s account of how the masses appropriate culture is influenced by Marxism, but Greenberg is not deeply imbedded in the ideology. His primary thesis in the essay “Avant Garde and Kitsch”, is that the popularity of kitsch signifies a concession of culture by the bourgeoisie to placate the masses. In his essay, however, he does not express belief in the notion of a proletariat cultural revolution. Nor does he understand the bourgeoisie to conjure up a plan of sacrificing high culture to satisfy the masses. Instead, as more individuals become literate and capable of writing in late modernity, then these skills “no longer serve to distinguish an individual’s cultural inclinations, [as they are] no longer the exclusive concomitant to refined tastes.”⁴ The problem with Kitsch is not that it allows more individuals to engage in the labor of self-expression, but quite to the contrary, individuals who compose the masses are not practicing creativity from their desire, but remain a mass in allowing their desire to be suppressed through flimsical and repetitive sources of culture. This brings out the worst part of Kitsch, its inability to foster contemplation of self, which I defined as the primary responsibility of culture. Kitsch has no aim beyond itself, and communicates little to be contemplated. The result is the “crowding

⁴ Greenberg, *Art and Culture* 10.

out and defacing native cultures in one colonial country after another, so that it is now by way of becoming a universal culture, the first universal culture ever beheld.”⁵

Avant Garde is a movement to respond to the abandoning of an authentic culture from both the masses and the ruling class. It attempts to be an innovative voice keeping culture moving when it appears to be stagnant. Avant Garde artists do this not through being inspired by common experience for their art, but through being inspired by the medium of their own craft (p. 6). Greenberg’s praise of the Avant Garde is equivocal, as he asserts it to be the best source of culture available in late modern society, yet also seems nostalgic for the days when art turned to common experience for its content and value rather than play with form. He recognizes the days when culture via art could be the source of self-knowledge as bygone. To some extent I am in agreement. “High Art” cannot take the same form it had in the Italian Renaissance or even late nineteenth century France. This does not mean the concept of culture and the arts serving as passageways to self-knowledge is completely obsolete by the 21st century. The times have changed the nature of human desire, causing art that can serve as a passageway to self-knowledge to be dramatically different. One may want to turn to the innovation in the Avant Garde movement as the substantial form of culture guiding the self in late modernity. Greenberg, however, reveals Avant Garde does not provide that sort of substance to its viewer. The values and concerns of the Avant-Garde do not relate to a specific self or community, but stresses play of form and negation.

That Greenberg is the most recent theorist whose writings were extensively concerned with this project leaves the issue wanting. I think the conflict he articulates between the Avant Garde and Kitsch art is still mostly apt for today. Traditionally understood Avant Gardism does not have the prominence it did in the mid and late twentieth century, but its values of form-play

⁵ Ibid., 12.

and negation still configure debates in the art community today. Kitsch is alive today not just in film, television, and advertising, but surprisingly in painting and sculpture as well. As opposed to Greenberg's time, Kitsch has found a way to invade the art scene of "high culture." This is most acutely seen in the work of Jeff Koons, which I will survey below. Nonetheless, I have hope that an artistic form substantially drawing from and contributing to a particular community is possible in late modernity. This hope is not illusory because it is grounded in small art movements occurring around the world. I will look at one in southern United States, not far from Emory University. The work of Thornton Dial has been influential and is an appropriate ground for hope in late modernity.

II. Kitsch at its Best: The Attraction and Dissatisfaction of Jeff Koons' Artwork

Jeff Koons is an American artist with a long and varied career. He broke into the art scene with his *The Pre-New* and *The New* exhibits in 1980. This series expanded on the Marcel Duchamp model of making art out of everyday products. Koons, however, focused on consumer products such as vacuums and toasters. This meant he attempted to blur the line between art and advertising. Koons was able to achieve more fame with his *Equilibrium* exhibition in 1985. The most famous object in this series was a basketball held static in a large fish tank (*One Ball Total Equilibrium Tank*). My analysis will focus on two exhibitions in the middle of Koons' career. I believe they best represent the contemporary nature of Kitsch, debuting at the end of 20th century and being highly implicative for the twentieth century. *Banality* and *Celebration* both contain attributes that are highly attractive for the viewer, yet are also dissatisfying in attempting to contain objects constitutive for the culture of late modernity. They betray the account of art's relationship to culture according to Simmel, and further the cultural alienation of the self as accounted for by Kracauer, Adorno, and Horkheimer.

Exhibitions of *Banality* debuted in 1988, simultaneously in New York, Chicago, and Cologne. In the pieces contained in this exhibition, the attributes that Greenberg gives to kitschy art can be noticed. More than his previous exhibitions, these objects feature definite content and can by no means be held to be abstract. This content can generally be asserted to be joyful; a middle age and older man holding four puppies on a bench, a colorfully clothed bear being friendly with a police officer, and a child dressed as a bear with a pin stating “i ♥ you.” A viewer would undoubtedly find such objects pleasing to behold. In a classic approach of Koons, sexualized images are added to the mix, meant not to be disturbing but desensitize sexuality and compel a form of joy in the viewer. Pleasure and joy should not be equated with satisfaction. I hope the difference between these concepts is clear based on my analysis of Hegel. Satisfaction is what compels transformation and contemplation in the self. Koons’ artistic objects cannot foster contemplation in its viewer. The reason relates back to Hegel’s emphasis on labor and Cassirer’s articulation of *Werk*. *Banality* intriguingly portrays Koons’ method of making art by taking things sensed in our everyday environment. This was surely the case with *The Pre-New* and *The New*, and is distinctly on display in *Banality*. People do not see a penguin next to a pig or bears conversing with human beings in their everyday environments. These objects are informed by fantastical ideas people have (also present in hollywood film and advertising) that require the minimal amount of human creativity and labor. The objects of *Banality* are essentially a juxtaposition of things we see or quickly imagine but is not a process of self-projection. The way broadly quirky nature of these objects show that Koons is reaching for the ephemeral amusement of people rather than engaging in self-expression based on desire. The materialization of such images corresponds to only the lowest forms of desire.

The labor of culture, as opposed to other forms of labor, is grounded in self-expression. The lack of cultural labor in Koons' artworks is more transparent in his *Celebration* exhibition, perhaps his most famous. The series began in 1994 and continued well into the twenty-first century. The culmination of this series' popularity was its various pieces being prominently installed at Versailles Palace in 2008. The most written about and reproduced object of the series is the *Balloon Dog*. This figure has been recolored in every possible way and has been placed an incalculable number of locations. One art critic writes of the piece positively, noting that, "the sculpture's monumentality relates to Koon's intent to create a visual archetype, an expression of the blind optimism he associates with objects in our commodity culture."⁶ Here is a concession from an art critic that culture has become one defined by commodity. What does that mean, what precisely is a commodity culture? If Koons' *Balloon Dog* is the embodiment of commodity culture, then it should be understood as shiny, glitzy, and simple. An important aspect of commodity that *Balloon Dog* exemplifies is mass reproducibility. The piece requires no labor to be created, and can just as simply be reproduced. Through its reflective surface, one may come to believe that *Balloon Dog* has a substantive claim to make. This reflective capacity should not be confused with the mediated reflection that occurs in genuine art. As Simmel explained, art should dig deep into our subjectivity in order to transmit something profound for other individuals. Another element of *Balloon Dog* the critic mentions is its blind optimism. What does it mean for an artistic object to foster such blindness? The critic reveals an intuitive evaluation Koons based on my analysis of Hegel, Cassirer, and Simmel. I mean the kitsch quality of his art limits the self's capacity to engage in contemplation through not being a sincere form of self-expression. Therefore one could assert that such art imprisons the self. In being unable to

⁶ *Jeff Koons* (New Haven: Yale University Press and MCA Chicago, 2008), 80. Edited by Francesco Bonami.

recognize anything with communal content and of value in the artwork, Kitsch is the denial of human freedom.

III. Particularity, Freedom, and Knowledge in the Work of Thornton Dial

Not only is the art of Thornton Dial wholly different from Koons, but their lives are also quite different in an informative way. While Koon's first exhibition appeared when he was twenty-five, Dial was 'discovered' at age of fifty-nine.⁷ As Koons has spent most of his life in New York, Dial was born, raised, and still works near Birmingham, Alabama. This fact becomes especially significant when noting that Dial is African American and was both the victim of severe prejudice and an activist in the civil rights movement. Dial has self-consciously recognized the importance of ethnicity in his work, stating, "Black folks know what they got to do to live, and they will do it. . . . They want to have their own strategy too for working, to use their own energy and spirit the way it come to them to do it, not do something because someone else make you do it. That's freedom. My art is the evidence if my freedom."⁸ Dial has no formal education in art and, perceivable from this passage, is alleged to be barely literate. One would not want to read too much into Hegel's Servant, to make an analogy with the African-American ante- and post-bellum experience, but Dial suggests the process of cultural expression and recognition has often been a reprieve to black struggle in the United States.

Since Dial has had a less exuberant career than Koons, I will not analyze his work by exhibition, but articulate the cultural significance of a few of his works. When I use the term "works," I mean it in Cassirer's sense of *Werke*. I gave a synopsis of Dial's biography to communicate he has much to express, and is one of those gifted souls who provide individuals

⁷ "Bits, Pieces, and a Drive to turn them into Art," *New York Times*. February 05, 1997.

⁸ Arnett, William and Paul Arnett, ed. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South* (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books, 2001) 201.

with art that compels contemplation. My analysis of Dial's artworks will focus on the three significant themes of self-knowledge outlined at the very beginning of this project. I have expressed these three themes as questions, conflicts, and assertions, depending on the chapter. In my final usage of these three things, the one that most directly deals with resolving self-knowledge in the twenty-first century, I will refer to them as attributes of particularity, freedom, and practical knowledge in the art of Thornton Dial.

The first artwork is *Veterans' Day*, completed in 1993, relatively early in Dial's career. The first thing to note about Dial's artworks is that all have titles and therefore a theme attached to them. This is in contrast to the practice of many Avant Garde artists. Perhaps the most memorable of these is Jackson Pollack, who refused to provide titles to his paintings and are only distinguishable by number. The name of *Veterans' Day* of Dial's piece informs the viewer that the crosses demarcated across the structure represent the grave of soldiers. Dial explores the theme of memorialization with solemn abstraction as opposed to classical memorials that display soldiers at their most valiant moments. This reminds us of Greenberg's thesis of being incapable to return to the practices of classical artists for self- and collective expression. Dial preserves particular styles of late modern art, such as the contours of the scattered faces not being clear cut and the presence of indiscernible shapes. The work, nonetheless, is imbued to definite content and themes to foster contemplation. Reminiscent of the Hegelian servant, Dial transforms a large variety of natural material (fabric, wood, oil, paper, pebbles, oil) to innovatively project a desire he holds within. This practice of self-expression, concomitant to the artwork questioning traditional forms of fallen soldier memorials, means the piece signifies human freedom. One may notice the two roses and the hooded figure are lightly tinged with red, blue, and white. This slight

move gives the piece a transparent sense of national (or community) origin. Giving clues to an artwork's place of origin relates to the idea of particularity.

The next piece is more vibrant and recent. Completed in 2004, Dial's *Stars of Everything* is slightly more enigmatic than the previous piece. The work is still able to communicate values, something the Avant Garde movement is always reticent to argue art should do. With this artwork Dial is able to execute Koons' commendable idea of utilizing objects in everyday experience with human creativity. The 'stars' are composed of (spray) paint and plastic cans, items we may encounter on a daily basis. Dial, however, is unwilling to place some cans on a pedestal and call it a cultural expression qua Andy Warhol. He transforms the very idea of what individuals associate with cans making them into something exalted and magnificent like stars. Dial's method is obviously not imitative, he does not expect or want the cans to be mistaken for actual stars. Rather, the Dial's labor with the cans is somehow viewable in the art. This is the essence of the idea of art as self-expression and particularized exploration. The material that is transformed does not simply become another object already recognizable by individuals. Instead, the artistic self is able to constitute a new, *particular* object, one that other individuals are initially unfamiliar with, but through reflection these individuals begin to determine how this creation is sourced to a self it is sympathetic to. This analytical exploration of the particularity of the cans/stars in the structure also applies to the figure in the middle of the structure. The viewer cannot help but assume that this is an alter ego of the Dial. This figure is quite literally a self-projection of the artist. What makes this artwork a potential contributor to culture is that there is something in this enfeebled figure that many individuals in a community can self-identify with. The broader reach of the artwork occurs through Dial tapping deeper into himself, expressing his particularity.

The last work I will analyze returns to the idea of nationalism held within an artwork. Dial's iteration of the United States flag, *Don't Matter How Raggy the Flag, It Still Got to Tie Us Together* is the ideal representation of how a cultural significant artwork must relate to community. Art that is most implicative for a culture is the most grounded in community. Art that is careless to the character and background of its viewer, and essentially engages in the artistic process of imagining a pure self, is the art often doomed to be unsubstantial for an individual. This is the fate of both Avant Garde and Kitsch art. They produce a work either with no content or a subject matter too broad to implicate the self. Dial's flag is messy and tangled just like America's history and populace. The shredded nature of the fabric reminds the viewer of the United States' history of slavery and discrimination. Yet, the work is not completely solemn. The vibrant red, white, and blue, as well as the well-formed edges of the structure, show that Dial is still committed to American principles. The fact that Dial's labor is so conspicuous means the viewer is more likely to find the artist's position and values sympathetic.

Dial is only meant to be an example of how art can be the passageway to self-knowledge for individuals. Dial's artworks may not embody the ideal exploration of human desire and contemplation, but he signifies a huge shift from the Kitsch art of Jeff Koons. I ultimately hope that my analysis of Dial shows that the culture of late modernity is not doomed to be alienating for the self. This is done through Dial's conspicuous attempts for his art to be particular, free, and having an element of labor or *praxis*. Dial undoubtedly transmits the values of Hegel, Cassirer, and Simmel concerning the self, community, and culture to a visual form in the twenty-first century.

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