

# PURE TRANSLATION IN HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY*

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**Abstract.** *In this essay, I take up what in the section on reason in his Phenomenology of Spirit Hegel calls «pure translation» (rein Übersetzen) or «a pure form of translation» (die reine Form des Übersetzens). Both syntagms address the way an individual becomes actual by means of activity, meant to translate inner inclinations, tendencies, abilities, or talents into things that would be discernible in the world. The context, within which I consider these references, is shaped by the conceptual force field of Wirklichkeit (which I translate as energy-actuality) in Hegel's philosophical project as a whole. Pure translation would signal, then, a passage to actuality, a self-actualizing or self-energizing movement of individuality, in the course of which one's being is made phenomenal as a doing and what is done through it. The 'purity' of such a translation is, nonetheless, dialectically translated into the highest impurity and, indeed, a perversion. The possibilities of mistranslation and contamination crop up not as unfortunate and contingent deviations from the straight path leading from the inner world of individuality to an outer reality; they are part and parcel of the pure form of translation itself.*

**Keywords.** *Pure Translation'; Actuality; Energy; Matter; Betrayal*

Why does Hegel, in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, qualify a translation of the inner markers of individuality into outward reality as *pure*? One is, no doubt, tempted to read the qualification in keeping with a pattern of philosophical or literary critique that dismisses it out of hand as a sign for the conceit of metaphysics<sup>1</sup>. By now, purity is as theoretically suspect a word as could be. But there is no need to

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Houlgate reads the dialectical critique of purity against the grain of metaphysics; for instance, «[d]eterminate being is thus not pure but always the negation of some other determinate being; it is inherently relational» (S. Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche and the Criticism of Metaphysics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 133).

avail ourselves of a cookie-cutter style of judgment. Here is what Hegel has to say on pure translation and its effects: «Whatever it is that the individual does, and whatever happens to him, that he has done himself, and he *is* that himself. He can only have the consciousness of having purely translated *his own self* from the night of possibility into the daylight of the present [*es kann nur das Bewußtsein des reinen Übersetzens seiner selbst aus der Nacht der Möglichkeit in den Tag der Gegenwart*], from the *abstract in-itself* into the meaning of *actual being*» (*PbG*, p. 299)<sup>2</sup>.

Pure translation describes how a virtual, hidden, unapparent, withdrawn essence passes over into existence – how «the night of possibility» gives place to «the daylight of the present». It is an event in dialectical ontology, whereby an «abstract in-itself» acquires «the meaning of actual being». Individual action on and by the individual in question is, obviously, an example for this event, but it is also much more than an example. Given the dual role of self-consciousness as a circumscribed moment in the drama of the *Phenomenology* and a persistent actor in that drama, we may infer here a dialectical distillation of the universal from the singular<sup>3</sup>. A part of being that translates, shapes, or energizes itself, it translates, shapes and energizes all of being, conducted from an essential enclosure in itself to actuality. Through self-consciousness, essence flows into existence as such *and* in a determinate manner; being actualizes itself. There is a surplus of sense folded into pure translation: the individual's «own self» is never just her own, but already a medium for spelling out «the meaning of actual being». And, in

<sup>2</sup> All citations from Hegel's *Phenomenology*, abbreviated as *PbG*, are my translations of G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, vol. III of *Werke*, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and M. Michel, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970. In brackets, I indicate the page of this edition.

<sup>3</sup> This is, notably, the position of Robert Pippin. See his *Hegel and Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Princeton (NJ), Princeton University Press, 2011.

turn, the meaning of actual being is the meaning of spirit (*Geist*), conceived as energy-actuality (*Wirklichkeit*)<sup>4</sup>.

A properly dialectical paradox surfaces as soon as an act of pure translation gets underway. The act's passage to actuality implies bidding farewell to the purity of essence, of the abstract in-itself. The pure form of translation is, therefore, constitutively impure from the standpoint of the essence it drags out of hiding. This impurity is what actuality or energy actually is. But, rather than enabling, the promise to render phenomenal that which shuns givenness in the night sheltering infinite possibilities is received as betrayal. Since every single one of the possibilities cannot be translated into actuality, the meaning of actual being is bound to fall short of the infinite combinations that lie dormant in essence. Put to work, translation is selective or even discriminating: it does not, despite its purity, convey essence *qua* essence. For, how can one shed the light of the present on the night as night without destroying its nocturnality?

Crisply formulated, the paradox is that an outward expression sacrifices the very thing that was to be expressed through it. When it is translated into actual existence, essence is no longer itself; it is beside or outside itself, deranged. We may approach the issue laterally, by resorting to the English verb *to betray*, which means both a breach of trust and a manifestation of something that used to be only latent. (For instance, a schoolboy may betray his friend, with whom he played a prank on a teacher, by divulging the friend's name and, at the same time, his blushing cheeks will betray the sense of shame he experiences due to his behavior). Hegel's pure

<sup>4</sup> «One could not know that spirit is this infinite movement, this ἐνέργεια, ἐντελέχεια. Spirit is energy and does not remain in a state of immediacy; it is the movement and activity that proceeds from an initial state to another state, working through and overcoming the latter, discovering itself in this labor; and only by returning to the first state does it become actual spirit. It is only through this labor that spirit prepares for itself the universal, brings forth its concept as its object, brings it before itself. This production, however, comes last, not first» (G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History; Volume I: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822-23*, ed. and trans. by R.F. Browne and P.C. Hodgson, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 154).

translation is a betrayal in the double sense of this speculative dialectical word.

Nowhere is the paradox felt as sharply as in the idea of the good that relies on virtue for its formulation. One peculiarity of virtue is that it sees in externalization, i.e., in patterns of behavior bearing out (or not) subjective predispositions, a waste of its innermost energy reserve and potential. Within a virtuous mindset, to translate the rich inner life of the soul into phenomena in the world is to do violence to the individual, to betray virtue in the negative sense of betrayal. Needless to say, on a par with logical and colloquial modes of thinking, virtuous consciousness believes betrayal to be entirely inconsistent with fidelity. As a result, its fidelity to a static, abstract, and wholly interior identity produces the greatest betrayal, more severe yet than the expressive sacrifice of pure essence.

The goodness of virtue in itself ultimately flips into its opposite, the not-good. «Insofar as it is *in itself*», the good is «a passive instrument of gifts and capacities, matter shorn of actuality [*ist es das passive Werkzeug der Gaben und Fähigkeiten, die wirklichkeitslose Materie*]» (p. 288). Devoid of finality that would have been indexed to effectiveness in the world at large, the good becomes a means without an end, its energy drastically reduced, its work encapsulated in a piece of equipment (*Werkzeug*), in the service of pure potentiality. It is untranslatable, precisely because it stands for the general translatability of anything into anything – of possibility into possibility.

Virtuous consciousness insists on isolating the essence from the existence of the good in a move that reverberates with the classical, pre-Einsteinian split between (passive) matter and (active) energy. «Matter shorn of energy-actuality», *die wirklichkeitslose Materie*, is the commonsense concept of matter valid in the moral universe of virtue and in classical physics. When a bankrupt notion of matter predominates, the thinking of energy suffers, as well: energyless matter and matterless energy, ‘pure’ materialism and idealism, belong together as remainders of a historically drawn out

process of disengaging matter from energy and of both from the energy-actuality of dialectics<sup>5</sup>.

In the course of translating one's self into the «daylight of the present», the qualities *active* and *passive* lose their applicability. The act of translation has its end folded into itself. It «alters nothing and goes against nothing; it is a pure form of translation of the *not-having-been-seen* into the *having-been-seen* [*verändert nichts, und geht gegen nichts; es ist die reine Form des Übersetzens aus dem Nichtgesehenwerden in das Gesehenwerden*]]» (p. 293). The pure form of translation is a self-translation, moving from oneself to oneself, from who or what one *in potentia* is to who or what one actually is, from the unseen becoming to a becoming-seen. Strangely nonoppositional (we will soon glimpse the nature of this nonoppositonality), pure form recaptures the quiet workings of vegetal life, letting individuality come out of itself, appear in the light, grow, and flourish. It facilitates the backflow of energy to itself in its otherness: the becoming-visible of energy in a phenomenon or a set of phenomena. If translation «alters nothing and goes against nothing», that is because it works on itself, or, more exactly, works on work itself, mediating between energy and actuality, between energy and itself. Its transformative activity passes, as a result, for an apparent cessation of all activity.

Then, again, another hermeneutical option is that a self-actualizing translation *actually* alters and goes against nothing – the

<sup>5</sup> Hegel is anything but virtuous with essence; he refuses to virtualize, sequester, or sacralize it. Speaking of dialectical essence, what we are really dealing with is *essencing*, a verbal connotation of energy, as opposed to its substantive embodiment in the works. A 'simple', stagnant and amorphous essence is uncontainable in itself; speculatively sundered apart, it spills out into the phenomenal realm of works that express it and unavoidably betray its impossible purity locked in mere possibility. The dialectic of the shaping and the shaped (or of shape,) is a dialectic of energy and energies, of the one and the many. Ironically, an energy without synergy is not quite energy but a self-enclosed virtual essence, which has not yet made its appearance in the daylight of the present. In 'actual being', on the contrary, there are only *energies* but no energy. And the absolute, as the most energetically accomplished state imaginable, entails a synergy of energies, in the plural and in the singular, all of them accessible through infinite repetition, such that a substantive difference between their essentiality and phenomenality vanishes.

nothing that confronts it as an object. «...*verändert nichts und geht gegen nichts*» may refer to the nothing that the inner essence of individual gave one to see. The «not» or «nothing» (*Nicht*) in *Nichtgesehenwerden* does not just vanish into thin air (not least, because it is indistinguishable from the vanished); it is what gets translated into the becoming-seen of individuality exteriorized in the world. One must betray nothing (and betray the nothing) in order for translation to work. But also betray being, whether understood under the aspect of essence or that of determinate existence, so as to activate the flow of becoming.

Be this as it may, the circular movement of individuation, which lends translation its pure form, is the movement-rest of *Wirklichkeit*. The global trajectory of energy-actuality is a circle that swirls and reposes in itself, but that least of all connotes isolation, hermetic sealing, or the ideal of independence characteristic of the virtual rather than the actual, of essence statically opposed to existence. Action and actuality, the working and the work, are the two halves of *energeia*, an insight Hegel conveys in a beautifully Aristotelian fashion in his *Science of Logic*: «What is actual can act [*was wirklich ist, kann wirken*]»<sup>6</sup>. An individual's act of self-translation is, therefore, the self-actualization that arises from individual actuality – hence, already, from «what is actual» in the individual (for, otherwise, the possibility of an act would have been foreclosed).

Instead of a straight line pointing from the past to the future, from an undeveloped potentiality to an actuality, or from one meaning system to another, the pure form of translation is circular. It «freely sets itself in motion all by itself in the void [*frei im Leeren sich in sich selbst bewegt*] and, unhindered, now enlarges and now contracts and is completely satisfied in playing only in and with itself [*in und mit sich selbst spielt*]» (p. 293). This is, perhaps, a moment of grace in dialectics, the suspension that carries a certain sense of lightness – almost weightlessness – shorn of resistance and absorbed in play. The respite it affords is brief: the nothing that has been dropped will come back with a vengeance, and, as self-consciousness will soon realize, all its playfulness may boil down to «a

<sup>6</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. by G. di Giovanni, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 482.

*nothing* working its way toward *nothing* [ein Nichts in das Nichts *hinarbeitend*]]» (p. 296). Still, the pure form of translation, the coming-to-light of individuality, and the activation of energy-actuality are all instances of a putting into play that, full of itself and fulfilled all by itself, is free.

At the source of energy's work is play, which sets energy to work, rerouting it from itself to itself. A replica or a replay of the Aristotelian *energeia*, it comes to denote the actuality of accomplishment, the plenitude of self-satisfaction and freedom not only in the sense of autonomy but also in the sense of having left behind the contingency of the yet unfulfilled potentialities. To work on work is to play, freely. To translate. Nothing changes and everything changes in light of the act that brings to light what has been shrouded in the night of the possible. Circularity goes hand-in-hand with the rift of a new beginning, in which consciousness «springs afresh *from itself* and aims not at *an other* but *at itself* [*geht frisch von sich aus, und nicht auf ein Anderes, sondern auf sich selbst*]]» (p. 293). Just as play is crucial for the effectuation of work, so a rupture with the first beginning (the energy supplied by unmediated being) is needed to produce the circle in the second, fresh beginning (the energy provided by the concept or by self-conscious individuality). The circle both interrupts a straight line and elaborates it, bending the line so that its two ends meet. An open closure of the kind is our best approximation to the figure of energy-actuality *as such*.

The interrupted continuity of pure form means that the translation of individuality is never seamless; it is not a steady and assured transition from not-having-been-seen to having-been-seen. Nor is the coming into its own of *Wirklichkeit* a predetermined, formally repetitive procedure or a mechanical process. The work of energy, its *ergon*, is often performed by means of a counterwork – for instance, play. We might say that dialectical work and workings follow the principle of *delaboration*, a playful coinage that at once negates elaboration and suffuses the actuality of labor with deliberation (and, therefore, a certain withdrawal from the actual). Delaboration is the privileged site of betrayal, reflecting the pure form of translation at a distance and undoing its purity from within.

It affects the transition of individuality to the daylight of the present as much as the so-called «law of the heart».

Like the self-actualization of individuality, the law of the heart is at home and free in itself, in a seemingly complete coincidence with its concept. And, again like individual self-actualization, it slides into the depths of alienation all the faster, the more it revels in itself: «Instead of achieving *its own being*, it achieves within this being the alienation *of itself from itself* [*statt dieses seines Seins erlangt es also in dem Sein die Entfremdung seiner selbst*]» (p. 276). The downfall of the law of the heart is its «immediate individuality [*unmittelbare Einzelheit*]», its existence in and as *this* individual; the demise of individual self-actualization is its hypermediation with itself alone. Dialectical translation is inconceivable without undoing previous labor (of the negative) and carving a niche for a reflection (on the hither side of ‘actual action’) on what has just happened. In other words, it is inconceivable without delaboration.

The work of pure translation parallels energy conversions and exchanges in physics. This work and these conversions do not run smoothly, seeing that delaboration is, far from an external negation, inherent to every elaboration. The ground zero of delaboration is the noncorrespondence between the content and the form of a phenomenon. So, in the case of pure translation, the purity of form contrasts with the impurity of the content that consists in a betrayal of essence. As for the law of the heart, Hegel writes that «the nature of actualization and that of effectiveness are unknown to it [*ist ihm die Natur der Verwirklichung und der Wirksamkeit unbekannt*]» (p. 278), which is nearly the same as concluding that the law of the heart does not know itself, that it fails to recognize itself in its outcomes. It works without being aware of the meaning of work, buttressed by actualization (*Verwirklichung*) and effectiveness (*Wirksamkeit*). Consequently, «for this shape of self-consciousness, what emerges from its experience as the truth *contradicts* what it is *for itself*» (p. 279).

Wherever delaboration sets itself to work, things become unworkable, jarring, no longer fitting the molds they belong to. That is how they become thinkable. Pure translation of one’s own self from the darkness of possibilities to the light of actuality elaborates an abstraction, which it renders dialectically concrete. In so doing,

it also delaborates, frustrating, stopping the movement of the actual in its tracks, and attending to the untranslatable bits that stick to translation – above all, possibility *as* possibility, purity, and essence. But dialectical failure is a badge of success, provided that contradiction («the truth *contradicts* what it is *for itself*») instigates the movement of the concept across its stoppages. The noncoincidence of form and content imbues dialectics with energy.

Later on in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel will relate the act of translation to being-for-others, or the moment of recognition by others. This being is tied to *Wirklichkeit*, absent from moral self-consciousness and present in conscience, whose *existing actuality* («*seiende Wirklichkeit*») is «*as self*, i.e., an existence conscious of itself, a spiritual element of coming-to-be-recognized». In the same paragraph, Hegel continues: «Therefore, the act [*Tun*] is merely a translation [*das Übersetzen*] of its *individual* content into an *objective* element, in which it is universal and recognized, and it is precisely in the content's being recognized that the deed is made into actuality [*macht die Handlung zur Wirklichkeit*]» (p. 470).

Even if the pure form of translation fleshes out individual propensities, dispositions, talents, or character traits for the individual herself, their actualization in action transforms them into objective evidence for others<sup>7</sup>. Whether or not recognition by others was intended from the get-go, a 'mere' translation of individual content into actual and actually recognizable structures prompts this content to overflow its initial (also individual) form. The pure form of translation gets elaborated and delaborated in the divergence between that which is translated and that into which it is translated, or, better, between the translated content and the form translation bestows on it. Actualization simultaneously does less and more than it is supposed to: subject to betrayal, it falls short of a strictly

<sup>7</sup> Terry Pinkard sweeps the ambiguities of expression aside when he concludes that «*the whole function* of the expressive act is to place oneself in the public world, to translate one's subjective point of view into an objective setting» (*Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 121; emphasis added).

faithful expression of the possible and, introducing a chance to be recognized by others, it carries the bonus of universality<sup>8</sup>.

In addition to the unavoidable confusion of the singular and the universal in pure translation, there is also the conflation I've already noted, namely of the possible and the actual. If only the actual can act, then an act of translation must be carried out on the basis of a past actuality, which one takes to be virtual, a set of still unrealized possibilities. In the incipient gesture of self-translation, it is unclear what (or who) gets translated into what (or into whom), which is why translation is always a mistranslation over and above traditional concerns with fidelity to the original. The individual at-work and individuality in-the-work must appear at odds with one another for pure translation to begin; they must give off «a *semblance* of opposition [*Schein des Gegensatzes*]» inviting comparisons between the intended and the realized (p. 299). A *semblance* of opposition is, for a dialectician, a serious glitch in the dialectical process, so much so that it yields «a *semblance* of form [*ein Schein der Form*]», which is none other than the form of a *semblance*, an illusion (p. 299). It reveals that the *form* of pure translation is a sham – an insight that extends to and covers the state of self-satisfaction and unadulterated joy the individual feels in himself at the activation of energy-actuality.

The *semblance* of opposition percolates from fissures in *Wirklichkeit* to contrasts between the unapparent and what appears, the virtual and the actual, desire and the thoroughness of its fulfillment. Why is this a *semblance*? Because the shaping impulse must be treated as an abstract and hollow shape, congruent with that of

<sup>8</sup> This reminds me of a phenomenon plant scientists call 'eavesdropping'. When a part of a plant communicates with distal (or faraway) parts of the same plant using airborne biochemicals, other plants in the vicinity pick up the signal and use it to their advantage – obtain information about environmental stressors or dangers, for instance. Nevertheless, it is unclear if the airborne substance is meant only for parts of the plant that initially released it, for its neighbors, or for both (perhaps, the first *as* – or at least *on the same footing as* – the second). Externalized action that gives actuality to a human individual is similarly indeterminate with regard to its recipients.

possibility, for translation to take off the ground. In lieu of an acting existence and an existent act, we have an imagined, potential actuality on the one hand and an accomplished, actual actuality on the other.

Whereas every translation betrays the translated in the translating, pure translation is a perversion (*Umkehrung* or *Verkehrung*) of translatability lacking the opposite pole of a straightforward and faithful rendering, which is this same betrayal or perversion simply unaware of itself as such<sup>9</sup>. Along with the instability of the dialectical procedure saying and unsaying – contra-dicting – its previous affirmations, the concept of betrayal (for instance, the realization of individuality in a universally available work) endows dialectics with the noncorrespondence theory of truth, or in modified Scholastic terms, *inadaequatio rei et intellectus*. The double frame of energy-actuality is that of truth *and* untruth, as well as of truth *as* untruth: the work unworks (delaborates) itself in the workings and the workings dissolve in the work. To spot in this duplicity the very truth of truth is to occupy, if transiently, the standpoint of the absolute. It is on the basis of the absolute, so understood, that one can distinguish a transcendental deception, according to which truth is univocal and entirely opposed to untruth, and an operative deception, factored into every act of translation and energy conversion.

Consciousness, for its part, arrives at the insight into the nature of truth phenomenologically, by living through the tearing asunder of self-realization, that is, by translating itself into itself. It «experiences this *inadequateness* of concept and reality [Unangemessenheit *des Begriffs und der Realität*], which lies in its essence» (p. 302). Inherently disjunctive, schizophrenic even, this experience breaks through the quasi-tautology of an actuality not yet realized and the already realized one. What it finally grasps is

<sup>9</sup> Here, I am following Slavoj Žižek's line of argument, insisting that perversion is integral to dialectics, psychoanalysis, and Christianity. See S. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2003; Id., *The Parallax View*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2009, esp. pp. 303-304; and Id., *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, London-New York, Verso, 2012.

that, over and above the material contingencies that make it impossible to implement an idea exactly as it has been drawn up in imagination, energetic expression is self-subversive: faithfully accomplished, the concept betrays itself in the work open to others. And in the experience of this «fundamental contradiction», *Grundwiderspruch* (p. 302), individuality real in and for itself «becomes as it is in truth [*wird es sich also, wie es in Wahrheit ist*]» (p. 302).

The fundamental contradiction of a realized self-consciousness echoes the inner perversion of the law of the heart, «this inner perversion of its own self [*diese innere Verkehrung seiner Selbst*]» (p. 280). Perversion shadows essence, be it the essence of individuality led toward actualization in pure translation, the essence of the law ensconced in subjective interiority, or the essence of self-consciousness in general. Essential perversion verges on madness (*Verrücktheit*)<sup>10</sup> when the essence of self-consciousness «is immediately a nonessence, its actuality – immediately a nonactuality [*sein Wesen unmittelbar Unwesen, seine Wirklichkeit unmittelbar Unwirklichkeit ist*]» (p. 280). Madness is an attempt to hold these mutually exclusive elements as valid at the same time, in one and the same heart, in blatant violation of the principle of noncontradiction. It no longer names a deviation from the norm of sanity in force for a vast majority of reasonable people, most of the time. Rather, madness is the essence-nonessence, the energy-nonenergy of self-consciousness and, more than that, the energy-nonenergy of energy. Self-consciousness is thoroughly unhinged and delaborative; it works by not working and doesn't work by working. What it perverts is its self; the 'self-' of self-consciousness is generated, via translation, in and as this perversion.

Pure translation is an act of pure madness, and the madness of self-consciousness is that of dialectics as a whole. To be sure, the form of translation in individual self-realization undertakes to mediate the immediacy plaguing the law of the heart. But its mediations are indeterminate, complicating a straightforwardly pragmatist reading of Hegel. Instead of surpassing the dilemma the

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed study of madness in Hegel, consult D. Berthold-Bond, *Hegel's Theory of Madness*, Albany (NY), SUNY Press, 1995.

law of the heart has faced, pure translation only modifies it: «consciousness knows *itself* in its law as this actual and, at the same time, because it is this very essentiality, its actuality is *alienated*, both as self-consciousness and as absolute actuality that knows its own nonactuality [*ist aber das Bewußtsein in seinem Gesetze sich seiner selbst als dieses Wirklichen bewußt; und zugleich, indem ihm ebendieselbe Wesenheit, dieselbe Wirklichkeit entfremdet ist, ist es als Selbstbewußtsein, als absolute Wirklichkeit sich seiner Unwirklichkeit bewußt*]» (p. 280).

When it comes to the law of the heart, consciousness knows itself as actual in something that has neither actuality nor the awareness of external effectiveness. Individual self-actualization, in turn, entrusts whatever it has hauled into the daylight of the present more to others than to itself. Perversely, both shapes of consciousness attain their 'self', growing self-conscious, in a failure to retrieve themselves. The self that comes to fruition by way of alienation from itself is the madness of dialectics, the madness that is dialectics. The absolute is not exempt – it is not absolved – from this development: absolute form and absolute content are absolutely unhinged, madness absolutized, *Wirklichkeit* at odds with itself in the closest proximity to itself. Madness writ large, partly overlapping with what I have been calling *delaboration*, is the engine powering the Hegelian project.

Considering the universal aspirations of the law of the heart, presumably held true by all hearts, the madness that afflicts this law (or, should we say with Hegel, the madness that it is?) strikes the socio-political sphere in a regime known as *liberal*. This sort of 'public order' draws its legitimacy – its «actuality and power», *Wirklichkeit und Macht*, as Hegel puts it with great precision – from the insane act of elevating individuality to the very form of the order: «*die Individualität als die Form derselben*» (p. 282). Liberalism is predicated on an ultra-pure translation of individuality into public life, bypassing the muddle of individual activity that indeterminately spans the two extremes. So pure is its foundational act that it causes translation to disappear: the singular *immediately* becomes the form of the universal. In it, translation as the form of a shaping (hence, *transformative*) activity is supplanted by the form of individuality that makes the regime in question delaborative, mired in endless

deliberations and unworkable, largely divested of political energy-actuality.

We are, perhaps, better apprised of liberal formalism than Hegel was in his nineteenth century. That said, his inferences are profound and far-reaching. One such inference is that the form of liberal society and the Hobbesian war of all against all are two sides of the same coin, or, differently stated, that Kant is a continuation of Hobbes by other means. In the absence of mediations, the universal shatters into individual universalities, each of them wielding an equal claim to validity: «The universal, which is present here, is hence merely universal resistance and the combat of all against all [*Das Allgemeine, das vorhanden ist, ist daher nur ein allgemeiner Widerstand und Bekämpfung aller gegeneinander*]» (p. 282). Neglected with regard to its mediations, energy falls into a mechanistic modality, a physics of the social and political arena (the proverbial billiard table), rife with frictions and collisions at worst and noncontact at best between individuals isolated in their virtual actuality.

A thoroughly negative version of universality emerges from ‘universal resistance’. With these words, Hegel is referring not only to the universality of a standoff among isolated individuals but also to a basic resistance to mediation, which Freud will recast into resistance to analysis. In psychoanalytic jargon, such a resistance gives free rein to the unconscious desire not to work through, to keep acting out and to hold onto a disturbing symptom. For Hegel, resistance to mediation is turning a deaf ear to the demand to come back from one’s virtual, subjective self-enclosure, in accordance with the Freudian *reality principle* and with what Hegel might have ironically dubbed *the actuality nonprinciple*.

As a form of mediation, translation is never pure; in effect, it is impurity itself. The pure form of translation thus resists translation, and so contributes to universal resistance, even if its outcome thrusts the self, translated by itself into itself, open to others. Exteriority intrudes and obtrudes on a liberal subject, often unannounced, and, when it does, its resistances gather, build up, and are diverted into a murderous resistance to the other, who holds an equal claim to universality. Subjects who participate in the pure form of translation, on the contrary, turn themselves into an exteriority available to others. For all their differences, they are the

perversions of *Wirklichkeit* turned against itself, inside out, or outside in.

Their forms, too, are the perversions of form on the brink of becoming a hollow husk, indifferently stuffed with any content whatsoever. It is for this reason that in both cases Hegel uses the Latinate *Form*, not *Gestalt*. In comparative terms, the pure form of translation is more mediated than its liberal counterpart, which is why it appears further down the line in the *Phenomenology's* philosophical narrative. But the claim that it «alters nothing and goes against nothing» puts it on the side of an immediacy lodged within mediation. To remain viable, a pure form has no choice other than to *deformalize* itself, to keep deformatizing itself, returning to the 'nothing' or the 'not' that is the common denominator of nothing-altered, nothing-opposed, and not-having-been-seen. Only thanks to its deformatization will the interrupted continuity of translation and energy-actuality recommence again.