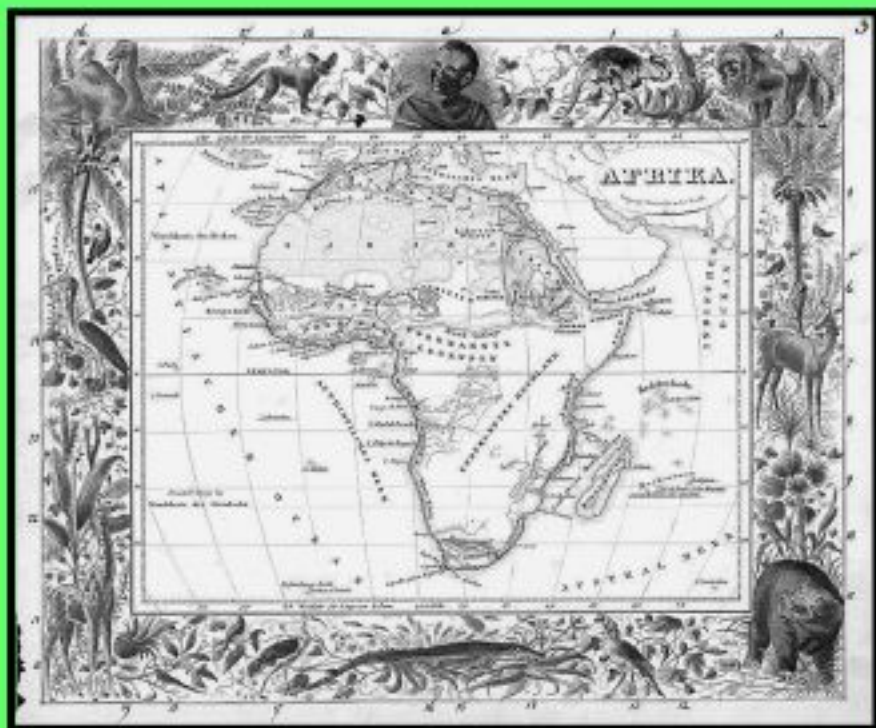


ACTA GERMANICA

GERMAN STUDIES IN AFRICA

Jahrbuch des Germanistenverbandes im südlichen Afrika
Yearbook of the Association for German Studies in Southern Africa

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PETER LANG
EDITION

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Editorial

Der erste Teil des Bandes versammelt drei Beiträge, die unterschiedliche Bezüge zu Afrika herstellen. JOHN NOYES eröffnet den Band mit einer Untersuchung, in der er den Roman *Im Kongo* des Schweizer Autors Urs Widmer als eine alternative Lesart von Hegels *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* vorstellt, denn Hegels Vorstellung der Vernunft in der Geschichte erzeugt bezüglich der Verortung Afrikas im Geschichtsprozess, wie Noyes zeigt, ein unauflösbares Paradoxon. JOHANNAS CANARIS analysiert anschließend das Stück *Peggy Picket sieht das Gesicht Gottes* von Roland Schimmelpfennig als Diagnose des schiefen Verhältnisses zwischen westlicher und afrikanischer Welt. MENSAH TOKPONTO befasst sich mit unterschiedlichen Vorstellungen des Rechts in ausgewählten Grimmsch'en und afrikanischen Märchen und kommt dabei zu dem Schluss, dass die Rechtsprechung und die Frage der Gerechtigkeit in beiden Kulturkreisen Ähnlichkeiten aufweisen, aber unterschiedlich bewertet werden.

Im zweiten Teil des Bandes unternimmt AKILA AHOULI eine entwicklungspolitische Lektüre von Storms bekannter Novelle *Der Schimmlreiter*, indem er als Hauptursache für die Überflutung des Dorfes die Missachtung traditionellen Wissens beim Bau des Deiches identifiziert, der eben diese Flutkatastrophe verhindern sollte. Ihren Beitrag widmet MICHAELA HOLDENRIED der eingehenden Untersuchung des Romans *Die Gelbe Straße* und den Dramen *Der Oger* und *Der Tiger* der bislang immer noch größtenteils unentdeckten Autorin Veza Canetti. Das ‚Glücksverlangen‘ des Menschen nimmt in Brechts Literaturproduktion und in seinen theoretischen Schriften von Anfang an, vor allem seit der Baal-Figur, einen zentralen Platz ein und bleibt auch beim späten Brecht ein entscheidender Aspekt seiner politischen Überlegungen, wie FLORIAN VABEN im Einzelnen nachweist. Welcher literarischen Strategien sich Autoren bedienen, wenn es ihnen darum geht, politische Verbrechen zu enthüllen, befragt HEBATALLAH FATHY am Beispiel ihrer vergleichenden Untersuchung des Romans *Seini Barakat* des ägyptischen Autors Gamal al-Ghitani und Herta Müllers *Herztier*, vor allem dann, wenn durch eine Veröffentlichung in der jeweiligen Gesellschaft politische Tabus durchbrochen werden. KIRA SCHMIDT geht es darum, am Beispiel von Ilija Trojanows *Der Weltensammler* und Thomas Stangls *Der einzige Ort* zu klären, in welchen Zusammenhang unterschiedliche Erzählstrukturen und –perspektiven zu metafiktionalem Erzählen gebracht werden können. Sprachen und Sprachenkontakte im Film werden in linguistischer Forschung seit längerem thematisiert und auch die Fremdsprachendidaktik hat (Spiel-)Filme im Hinblick auf ihr Potenzial für Motivation, Emotion, Fertigkeitentraining und Wahrnehmungsschulung befragt. CAMILLA BADSTÜBNER-KIZEK verknüpft diese Aspekte mit Fragen der Sprachen- und Distributionspolitik für audiovisuelle Medien in Europa und fragt nach den Folgen, die sich daraus sowohl für die visuelle wie akustische Wahrnehmung des ‚Fremden‘ ergeben könnten.

Im dritten Teil dieser Ausgabe beschreibt ALBERT GOUAFFO im Rückgriff auf den Postkolonialismus als Denkrichtung einige Lehr- und Forschungsbereiche, in denen sich ein emanzipiertes Germanistikstudium im afrikanischen Kontext behaupten kann und berichtet in diesem Kontext von der wichtigen Rolle der kamerunischen Zeitschrift *Mont Cameroun*.

Editorial

The first part of this edition comprises three contributions with different perspectives on the African continent. JOHN NOYES proposes an alternative reading of Hegel's idea of reason in history through Swiss writer Urs Widmer's novel *Im Kongo*. Read in this light, the role of the African continent in relation to reason in history poses an irresolvable paradox. In its autobiographical mode of writing, Widmer's novel highlights this paradox in order to subject the grand narratives of history to critical scrutiny. JOHANNA CANARIS' contribution analyses Roland Schimmelpfennig's play *Peggy Picket sieht das Gesicht Gottes* as diagnosis of a displaced relation between Western and African worlds. MENSAH WEKENON TOKPONTO deals with different understandings of moral orders in a comparison between Grimms' and African fairy tales, pointing to similar elements but different valorisations in questions of justice.

The second part of this edition opens with AKILA AHOULI's political reading of Theodor Storm's classical novella, *Der Schimmelreiter*. In his reading, it is the disregard for traditional dyke-construction techniques that accounts for the flooding of the village. MICHAELA HOLDENRIED's article is devoted to a hitherto largely unknown writer - Veza Canetti -, whose novel *Die Gelbe Straße* and plays *Der Oger* and *Der Tiger* she analyses through a deep reading. FLORIAN VABEN pursues the search for the good life that assumes a major political dimension in Brecht's literary and theoretical writings from their inception, particularly in the figure of Baal and subsequent incarnations. HEBATALLAH FATHY investigates literary strategies in the disclosure of political crimes, in her comparative analysis of Egyptian writer Gamal al-Ghitani's *Seini Barakat* and Herta Müller's *Herztier*. This approach gains salience in situations where novelistic writing breaks particular political restrictions. Analysing Ilija Trojanow's *Der Weltensammler* and Thomas Stangl's *Der einzige Ort*, KIRA SCHMIDT elucidates the connection between different structures of narrative and meta-fictional narration. The capacity of film to stage encounters in different languages has long been a subject of linguistic research. Language teaching methodologies, likewise, have come to investigate the possibilities of film for enhancing the spectrum of linguistic registers and competencies. CAMILLA BADSTÜBNER-KIZEK refers these aspects to language policies and the distribution of audiovisual media in Western Europe and explores potential consequences for visual and acoustic perception of 'the other'.

In the third part of this edition, ALBERT GOUAFFO identifies a few arenas for teaching and research in which a postcolonial *Germanistik* could become relevant for African contexts, adducing the Cameroonian journal *Mont Cameroun* as important example.

Carlotta von Maltzan

Stellenbosch, September 2012

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On the Natural History of Africa

Reading Hegel with Urs Widmer

JOHN K. NOYES

University of Toronto

Abstract

In this paper I read the novel Im Kongo by Swiss author Urs Widmer as an alternative telling of Hegel's narrative of Africa in his Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Hegel's views on reason in history leave him unable to deal with African history, to the point where he cannot resolve the contradiction between an Africa that remains outside world history, and an Africa that is destined to become a historical part of the world. In opposition to Hegel's claim that world history emerges out of the erasure of bodily life in individuals, Widmer uses autobiographic discourse to demonstrate the paradoxical place of the body in the macro-discourses of history.

Widmer's Heart of Darkness: Is the Rhine the same river as the Thames?

In 1992, Haffmanns published a new translation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* by well-known Swiss author Urs Widmer. Four years later, Widmer published a novel with the title *Im Kongo*. Widmer was by this time a well-established author, having published more than 30 books, and received a number of prestigious literary awards. For those who expected a re-writing of Conrad, the book is a surprise. Widmer's novel both does and doesn't rewrite Conrad's famous novel. Indeed, it is not until page 123, more than half way through the novel, that the protagonist, Kuno Lüscher, embarks on the *Perle des Afriques*, "das die tausendfünfhundert Kilometer flußaufwärts bis nach Kisangani in nur sieben Tagen zu bewältigen versprach."¹ (Widmer 1996:123) The subsequent description of the journey upriver is, as Widmer proudly states, "a replication of Conrad's ship voyage. Not intended as plagiarism, but as obeisance." Widmer describes his book as "homage to Joseph Conrad".² This homage is carried by a stratification of the narrative into three distinct temporalities: the historical past, a mythical timelessness, and a *Jetztzeit* of narrative enunciation that is constantly slipping into the past. This elusive narrative present is the moment of typing, as Kuno sits in a tree-house in the Congo, recording on his laptop the story the reader is currently engaging. Three pages into the book, we read:

Ich fülle den Bildschirm mit Buchstaben und schaue zu, wie sie im Gedächtnis der Maschine verschwinden. Weg, mein Text. Ich, Sekunden später, könnte nicht mehr sagen, was er war; aber die

Maschine merkt sich sogar Tippfehler. Eine Anzeige weiß, daß ich, obwohl ich doch noch gar nicht begonnen habe, bereits 4971 Zeichen gespeichert habe. 5001 jetzt. (Widmer 1996:11f)

Whereas Conrad's enigma is what qualities of darkness the Thames shares with the Congo, Widmer's enigma is how to think the emergence of historical time from the destruction of what Spivak (1999) calls the "vanishing present" in both its temporal and a-temporal (mythical) dimensions. Kuno sits writing in a forest whose luxuriousness and sheer dimensions dwarf the shrinking forest of his childhood memories ("zu einem Nutzwald voller Forststraßen geschrumpft," Widmer 1996:11); but it is the forest that opens the present to history. The sheer vegetable force of nature, whose luxuriant and unstoppable proliferations promise to hide the struggles for human rights, itself begins to disappear behind the human arrangements it seeks to hide. It becomes, to speak Hegel's language, accessible only by way of the second nature that constitutes the realm of rights. (cf. Hegel 1964:50) By peering into nature run wild – in the forests of childhood memory or in the forests of the Congo, we sharpen our gaze to the marks of history.

The entire first and second parts of the book are devoted to the elaborate web of intrigue that determined how the murderers and those fleeing from them were (and continue to be) treated in Switzerland, a supposedly neutral country. In the process, the family narrative Kuno has lived with all his life (and which we glimpse through childhood memories in Part I) begins to unravel. This unravelling brings him face to face with the historical events that unwittingly enmeshed him in the Second World War and the Swiss resistance. And, as will become apparent, these same events continue to implicate Switzerland and its citizens in the relations of colonialism and post-colonial societies. Once it is released from its natural appearances, history reveals its workings via the increasingly globalized networks that perpetuate the conflicts played out in the open warfare of the Second World War.³ In juxtaposing the events of the novel with the futile attempt to hold onto the now of narration, Widmer enacts the powerful pull of the past on the present moment. And in doing so, he allows the force of the symptom to explode the apparent harmlessness of life in the present, life without history. These symptoms are many, and they are carefully woven into Kuno's childhood memories, naturalized to the point where they are hardly even perceived as enigmas. They are simply the unfinished stories out of which a life is constructed. This symptomatology is part and parcel of the silence surrounding issues of resistance, complicity and sympathy in Switzerland today.

What Widmer is showing in the first two parts of the novel is how history is written into the everyday lives of those who think it has passed them by. And he is demonstrating two possible approaches to history – a reclamation of deep history (history in the woods) via a symptomatology, and an erasure of the everyday in the service of a grand narrative of historical time. Historical time bleeds into the moment of narrative enunciation, and in doing so, it historicizes nature. At the same time, these two temporalities are destabilized by the introduction of mythic time. Twenty-one pages into the book, the first-person narrative stops abruptly and, without transition, the text shifts to italics. We read:

Die Eingeborenen des Kongo wissen so sehr, daß die Menschen zum Leid geboren sind, daß sie nicht darauf achten. Es nicht erkennen. Sie wissen nicht, was Leid ist. Sie kennen kein Wort dafür. (Widmer 1996:21, italics in original)

The present that give this passage its temporality is a very different present from the one that counts the symbols on Kuno's laptop. Where the narrative present is so tenuous it disappears in its performance, the mythic present of the "Congo" passages threatens to undo historical discourse with the timelessness of its claims to truth. Widmer adopts a discourse that seeks to flee from the complexity of historical thought into the comfort of pure nature – a move that is only possible via the mythic.⁴ Widmer writes:

In den Nächten des Vollmonds opferst du den Mächtigen Früchte; an den ganz heiligen Tagen, von denen nur die maskentragenden Zauberer wissen, den Vater. Ein Kind. Ach nein: du bist es, den die Magier zum Opferplatz schleppen. Während du dich wehrst, dir das Leben zu erleben versuchst, dich ergibst, erkennst du unter den Masken: den Nachbarn, den Freund, den Bruder: fremd. (Widmer 1996:21, italics in original)

In his posthumously published *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* of 1831-2, Hegel proclaimed:

Bei den Negern sind aber die sittlichen Empfindungen vollkommen schwach oder, besser gesagt, gar nicht vorhanden. Die Eltern verkaufen ihre Kinder und umgekehrt ebenso diese jene, je nachdem man einander habhaft werden kann. (Hegel 1986:125)

Die Könige haben Minister und Priester, zum Teil eine vollständig organisierte Hierarchie, die als Beamte dazu da sind, daß sie zaubern, den Naturmächten gebieten, dem Wetter befehlen. ... Wenn es ihnen lange damit nicht glücken will, so befehlen sie, daß unter den Umstehenden, die ihre liebsten Verwandten sind, welche geschlachtet werden, und die andern fressen sie dann auf. (Hegel 1955:221).

Widmer:

Sie sind wie die Tiere ihrer Wälder. (Widmer 1996:21, italics in original)

Hegel:

So finden wir in Afrika im ganzen das, was man den *Stand der Unschuld*, der Einheit des Menschen mit Gott und der Natur genannt hat. Denn dies ist der Stand der Unbewußtheit seiner selbst. Der Geist soll aber nicht auf diesem Punkte, in diesem ersten Zustande stehen bleiben. Dieser erste natürliche Zustand ist der tierische. Paradeisos ist der Tiergarten, wo der Mensch im tierischen Zustande gelebt hat und unschuldig war, was der Mensch nicht sein soll. (Hegel 1955:218f, italics in original)

On the surface, the two texts seem to be making virtually identical statements. Both write with authority about the nature of Africa; both hide the source of this authority.⁵ Both delineate a geographical space in which historical time fails. And yet, as we work our way through Hegel's lectures and Widmer's novel, it becomes apparent how very different the two failures of historical time turn out to be. Widmer seems to be repeating the images and stereotypes on which Hegel bases his move away from objective history (or Adorno's "facticity" 2003:353). But let's read this Africa alongside Hegel's and then ask how Widmer takes the steps that Hegel wouldn't. Let's begin by following Hegel on his imaginary visit to Africa and his sudden departure and return to Europe.

Hegel's Africa: Thursday, December 2, 1830

Imagine Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel standing before his class of students at the University of Berlin on the evening of 2nd December 1830. Hegel is 60 years old, and has less than one more year to live. He addresses the class in his characteristic nasal voice, still sporting his Swabian accent after all these years away from home; he stutters and coughs, pausing often to shuffle his notes or grope for words, and he gesticulates awkwardly as he speaks (it is this strange mode of delivery that has earned him the nickname of "Grand Llama"). After this class is over, students would often compare notes to discover, among other things, how often their professor began each sentence with the German word *also*. Hegel has been talking about history, world history, and has been on the topic of Africa since the beginning of the week. But now he's drawing to a close, about to move on to the Orient.

Hegel's lectures are the talk of the town (much to the chagrin of his old friend Schelling), and curious individuals flock to hear him. He has 120 students in this class.⁶ His student Heimann is taking notes. He's an avid notetaker, managing entire sentences in his own quirky shorthand. He's been writing as Hegel speaks about the nature of the "Negro" and his relationship to nature. Heimann writes "Das nw Afr hat für sich ssnd Rolle in der Weltgeschichte zu übernehmen gh; es grff nur zweilen ein", by which he presumably meant "Northwest Africa has in itself not had any independent role to play in world history; it only intervened periodically."⁷

When Eduard Gans reviewed the various jottings of Hegel's students (including Willem Cornelis Ackersdijck, K. G. von Griesheim, Heinrich Gustav Hotho, Karl Weder, and Hegel's son Karl, later professor of history in Rostock) and superimposed them on the professor's own notes on how and why he was about to leave Africa forever, he wrote (and I have to quote him at length):

Wenn man fürchterliche Erscheinungen in der menschlichen Natur will kennen lernen, in Afrika kann man sie finden. Dasselbe melden die ältesten Nachrichten über diesen Weltteil; er hat eigentlich keine Geschichte. Darum verlassen wir hiermit Afrika, um späterhin seiner keine Erwähnung mehr zu tun. Denn es ist kein geschichtlicher Weltteil; er hat keine Bewegung und Entwicklung aufzuweisen, und was etwa in ihm, d.h. in seinem Norden geschehen ist, gehört der asiatischen und europäischen Welt zu. Karthago war dort ein wichtiges und vorübergehendes Moment; aber als phönizische Kolonie fällt es Asien zu. Ägypten wird im Übergange des Menschengesistes von Osten nach Westen betrachtet werden, aber es ist nicht dem afrikanischen Geiste zugehörig. Was wir eigentlich unter Afrika verstehen, das ist das Geschichtslose und Unaufgeschlossene, das noch ganz im natürlichen Geiste befangen ist, und das hier bloß an der Schwelle der Weltgeschichte vorgeführt werden mußte. (Hegel 1986:99)⁸

Almost 200 years later, we still read these words as a provocation.⁹ It is fair to say that the general sense of outrage over Hegel's Africa has resulted in a widespread refusal to examine what motivates these uncomfortable pages in his lecture notes.¹⁰ The outrage is, I believe justified, but it requires a different response than we have hitherto seen, which has been either silence, exposure of the factual inconsistencies and weaknesses, or analysis of the racism inherent in Hegel's depiction of Africa.¹¹ If we are to understand Widmer's accomplishment in his portrayal of Africa, we need to take the discussion on Hegel's Africa beyond its current impasse. It is not that we need to work at find-

ing a justification for the speaking of these words, in the sense that a court of law might review the circumstances and consider mitigating factors to determine culpability. I'd like to read Hegel's Africa not only as a provocation, but a challenge, a question. Hegel's Africa remains relevant and interesting today because the collective actions of the world's powerful nations continue to reveal a deep seated conviction that enslavement to nature is the lot of the unhappy African populations. And with it comes a continued refusal to accept the fact that *we* on the other side of the world, in Europe, in North America, *are this nature* to which Africa remains enslaved.

If, as Hegel insists, the history of the world is "der Fortschritt im Bewußtsein der Freiheit" (Hegel 1955:63), then it is our responsibility not only to return the acts that constitute freedom to nature, but also to imagine nature as imbued with the qualities that our particular understanding of freedom requires. Hegel himself was not doing anything different. But, as Jean Luc Nancy writes, "the time of Hegel himself, along with his philosophy, have, been left far behind us." (Nancy 2002:5) And, as Nancy goes on to observe: "What Hegel first gives to think is this: sense never being given nor readily available, it is a matter of making oneself available for it, and this availability is called freedom." (Nancy 2002:7) If we are to exercise our freedom in this manner – that is if we are to become the subjects who we have to be in order to read the world in the manner we choose, then the narrative work of spelling out the world of sense for which we make ourselves available is quite literally *vital*.

Can this spelling out bridge the gap between the freedom of the reader and the erasure of a people in the name of philosophy? How do we bring the right kind of freedom to read the act of erasure Hegel so blithely pronounces? And if we are successful in doing so, what will it tell us about freedom and thought? And those of us who do not live in Africa, how do we become brave enough to bring this freedom back home again, where it might have grown into something new, something capable of defying all the encroachments on civil liberties in the name of freedom that have come to define the post-9/11 West?

To ask these questions is to step into the arena of philosophy, for it is in this arena, Hegel tells us in his introductory lectures, that we can imagine reason in history. Reason makes the philosophy of world history possible. For, as Hegel states, "die philosophische Betrachtung hat keine *andere Absicht, als das Zufällige zu entfernen*" (Hegel 1955:29; emphasis in original). And if there is freedom in philosophy, one of its manifestations is in how we decide on the accidental, and how we go about removing it. This act begins with judgments that are historical in nature. These judgments, however, are marred by the problem of sympathy, which is ultimately unable to bridge the gap opened in historical time. In the margins of his initial draft introduction, Hegel writes:

z.B. wenn wir, es sei welches [bestimmte Zeitalter] es wolle, noch so in das griechische Leben [eindringen], das uns von so vielen und wichtigsten Seiten zusagt, [so können wir doch] ebenso im Wichtigsten nicht sympathisieren, nicht mit ihnen, den Griechen, empfinden. (Hegel 1955:13)

A little later he notes:

Wie [wir] nicht die Mitempfindung eines Hundes haben, [wenn wir auch] einen besondern Hund wohl vorstellen, kennen, seine Manier, Anhänglichkeit, besondere Weisen erraten. - (Hegel 1955:13f)

In Hoffmeister's text, Hegel repeats these observations when cautioning against trying to find one's way into the mind of the African.

Der Neger stellt den natürlichen Menschen in seiner ganzen Wildheit und Unbändigkeit dar: wenn wir ihn fassen wollen, müssen wir alle europäischen Vorstellungen fahren lassen. [...] es ist nichts an das Menschliche Anklingende in diesem Charakter zu finden. Eben darum können wir uns auch nicht recht in seine Natur hineinempfinden, sowenig wie in die eines Hundes oder eines Griechen, der vor dem Zeusbild kniete. (Hegel 1955:218)

This vain attempt to cross an uncrossable boundary is, Hegel laments, best left to the novels of Sir Walter Scott (1955:15). Paradoxically (Hegel observes this in a marginal note to his original draft), reflective history is given its impetus by the temporal limitations of original history; these drive the inquiring mind of the writer to push the framework of time ever further away from the narrow slice that makes his own life, expanding it into a frame that becomes historical as it erases the present (Hegel 1955:10). Clearly, Hegel is asking the historiographer to perform the same work of banishing the present that Kuno does in writing his memoir.

Hegel: Leaving Africa (Stuck in the Mud)

If we survey the reception of Hegel's Africa in recent theory, there is general agreement on what Spivak calls "the deeply offensive passages about Africa and history in *The Philosophy of History*." (Spivak 1999:43) In her ground-breaking article on Hegel's reading of Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz' liberal journal *Minerva*, Susan Buck-Morss speaks of how, when it comes to the question of abolitionism, Hegel's lectures on world history represented a "retreat from the radical politics" expounded in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Buck-Morss 2000:857). Over the course of the 1820's, Hegel was progressively mapping the emancipation from slavery onto a formidable array of fantasies of cruelty and barbarism he was unfolding from the pages of various scholarly works on the Dark Continent. I think Buck-Morss is right when she says that "in an effort to become more erudite in African studies during the 1820s, Hegel was in fact becoming dumber" (2000:863). Indeed, in his philosophy of religion he cautioned, specifically in connection with missionary reports on Africa that the sources are not necessarily to be trusted (1986a:281). This progressive voluntary misinformation about the African Spirit (there were indeed alternative sources, or alternative readings of the sources he used) led to "the brutal thoroughness with which he dismissed all of sub-Saharan Africa, this 'land of children,' of 'barbarity and wildness,' from any significance for world history, due to what he deemed were deficiencies of the African 'spirit'" (Buck-Morss 2000:859).

Hegel never visited Africa, nor did he leave. Only in his own imagination. But this imaginary departure is crucial to his historiography. The question of leaving Africa cannot be simply disregarded or dismissed. For it is in the act of leaving that he can consign the "facticity" of Africa to the waste-basket of world history. And this trashing

of facticity has very little to do with the specific features of Africa. It is in fact a central problem of Hegel's historiography, and he knew it. What he says about Africa before leaving it behind could just as well have been said about any of the other "world-historical regions" he visits. This is why we have to ask not what Hegel thinks or feels about Africa and the Negro (so-called), but what he imagines he must leave behind in order to narrate world history. We cannot understand his philosophy of world history without approaching it from the point of view of narrative *techne*, the making of a story.

Hegel's set of lectures is not about history, but the writing of history. In his original draft introduction to the lectures, which he began in October 1822 and revised in October 1828, he is quite clear on this point, using a number of words to describe the historian and his activity: "Geschichtsschreiber", "Autor", "Schriftsteller", "erzählen" – the same words that would denote a writer of fiction. He used these words interchangeably to refer to both historical and fictional writing, the sense being apparent in each case from context alone. The legitimacy of historical writing in Hegel is from the outset anchored not in the structure of a discourse but in a narrative position that can cross discourses and erase other positions that might creep in and corrupt his own story.

Let's take a look at how this happens. Hegel leaves Africa in precisely the same way he asks the unformed spirit in his gentlemen students to leave whatever they might have been doing and abandon themselves to reason when they come to his lectures:

Diejenigen unter Ihnen, meine Herren, welche mit der Philosophie noch nicht bekannt sind, könnte ich nun etwa darum ansprechen, mit dem Glauben an die Vernunft, mit dem Durste nach ihrer Erkenntnis an diesem Vortrage der Weltgeschichte hinzutreten. (Hegel 1986:30)

The professor leads his knowledge-thirsty students not to the world itself, but away from it, into a lecture theatre, to his own re-telling of a composite scholarly representation of the world. And in doing so, quite in keeping with his understanding of the work of negativity, he finds that the slaking of his own thirst is possible only in the dual act of dissolving the narrative voices of his scholar informants into his own, while at the same time turning his back on the African voices the scholarly writers themselves might have heard, had they listened more carefully. Hegel outlines this when he addresses his audience in the same lecture I cited above:

Was ich vorläufig gesagt und noch sagen werde, ist nicht bloß - auch in Rücksicht unserer Wissenschaft nicht - als Voraussetzung, sondern als *Übersicht* des Ganzen zu nehmen, als das *Resultat* der von uns anzustellenden Betrachtung, - ein Resultat, das mir bekannt ist, weil mir bereits das Ganze bekannt ist. (Hegel 1955:30. Emphasis in original)

This force of narrative authority is what enables the tight intertwining of philosophical discourse and historical observation, forcing us to realize that the cause (*Ursache*) and trigger (*Anlaß*) of historical events are always themselves part of the same force. Adorno describes it like this:

Nicht zuletzt darum nähert, wie bereits in Hegel und Marx, die Geschichtsphilosophie ebenso der Geschichtsschreibung sich an, wie diese, als Einsicht in das von der Faktizität verschleierte, aber diese bedingenden Wesen, bloß noch als Philosophie möglich ist. (Adorno 2003a:297)

But there is a problem here. In introducing narrative temporality as the basis of authority, Hegel is working against every claim he will go on to make about how time works in history. For if the truth of history can only be spoken by those who already know how the story will end, how will the speaker ever convince us that his exercise of freedom has indeed opened his reason to the sense of history, rather than simply discarded the random facts of history in order to tell a good story? As a narrator he shares all the paradoxes of narration. If Hegel knows at the outset how the story of history will end, he only knows it because he has decided to leave out and to leave off Africa. But in leaving out and off Africa, he is leaving more than just a geographical region. Hegel makes it clear that the abandoned a-historicity of African geography is of the same nature as the emotions of a dog, the lives of the Greeks, the pre-philosophical “faith in reason” or the “thirst for [reason’s] knowledge” that inhabits the inner world of his gentlemen hearers.

But the fascinating thing about Hegel’s philosophy (and it’s why we can never be finished talking about Hegel) is the way it resists, in narration, the very foundations of its own narrative authority. This is nowhere clearer than when Hegel explains why exactly he had to leave Africa. Just before moving on to discuss the Orient, he declares that properly understood, Africa “noch ganz im natürlichen Geiste befangen ist und [...] hier bloß an der Schwelle der Weltgeschichte vorgeführt werden mußte.” (Hegel 1986:129) It is the narrative strategy of abandonment in this formulation that will allow us to bring Africa back to world history. We can do this simply by remembering that the work of historiography (and of the spirit on the path to perfection) consists in converting spatiality to temporality. In doing so, we will realize that the work of negativity in Hegel’s philosophy will (or should) not allow him to simply pack his bags and leave. Something will have to remain behind, unresolved. It is the formulation of this something that I am moving toward, and that, with the help of Urs Widmer, I will try to outline in the final section of this paper.

The story of world history is the story of the temporality of spirit distilling itself into its proper form out of the spatiality that clings to geography. I am careful in speaking of history as the story of spirit, for the conversion of spirit’s spatiality into temporality is the work of narrative. In Hegel’s world, historiography, the narration of history, is a technology for producing the human by converting geographical space to linear time. If we follow this story, then Hegel is clearly making room for a development of the African Spirit along precisely these lines. Hence his use of the words “noch” and “an der Schwelle”. It is precisely this use of the regressive spatial metaphor of the threshold to portray the moment before Africa enters history, together with the temporal preposition “noch” that gives the lie to his own claim of African a-historicity.

If we are serious about Hegel’s claims for what happens to spirit when it partakes of the narratological conversion of space into time, and if we take care in appreciating how this conversion affects what can be said not about History, but about World-History, then we will understand the departure from Africa as Hegel’s own narrative struggle with negativity. Another way of saying this is to observe, with Nancy, that

the *subject* is what it *does*, it is its act, and its doing is the experience of the consciousness of the negativity of substance, as the concrete experience and consciousness of the modern history of the world – that is, also, of the passage of the world through its own negativity. (Nancy 2002:5)

What Hegel *does* is to speak his gentlemen hearers into being as those who can, together with him, speak Africa out of the world. The offence here is not only Hegel's racism, his misuse of sources, his blatant disregard for the socio-political sophistication and cultural wealth of African societies, and so on. These are all offensive enough on different grounds. But the philosophical offence is how Hegel decided to neutralize the force of negativity – a force that he himself has so brilliantly shown refuses neutralization.¹²

And Hegel's refusal to follow through with the implications of his own concept is the great and lasting challenge and fascination of his philosophy of Spirit (by which I also mean the Spirit that drives World History). The philosopher, in using negativity to give history content, and in overcoming negativity to produce a linear narrative of history, must become disembodied. And the part of life which resists this disembodiment is viewed not, as we might expect, with contempt, but with an odd mixture of fascination and awe, self-satisfied, condescendingly. It's almost the same thing as an exoticization of those aspects of the physical world that capture the philosopher's desire and work against the departure he knows he must, sooner or later, perform. This is how he treats Africa.

When Hegel speaks of Africa, it sounds a lot like the Africa of Kafka's ape *Red Peter* (1996) – a distant memory, separated from his present life by a trauma so profound he cannot be certain of the truth value of anything he remembers about it; or if (as in Hegel's case) maybe he had only gleaned an image of this lost place from a set of stories, a collection of books, about whose reliability not much can be said. Lost narratives or lost memories – the trauma is the same. And just like *Red Peter*, Hegel seems to assume that his audience, the world of the learned gentlemen, have, in coming to his lectures, left behind them another kind of Africa – the Africa of uneven development within Europe (a topic which had been on the minds of most German intellectuals since Herder). Just like the sheer natural physicality Hegel fantasized in Africa threatened to disrupt his narrative of world history, so did the everyday lives of his students threaten at all times to disrupt the act of narration, or at least to undermine the narrative authority on which the truth of history was supposedly based.

Black Skin: the return of Embodiment

Hegel wanted the spirit to rise above this messy mix of fact and causality, where it could tell a story as if it had an ending. But how could he protect himself from the question asked, as legend would have it, by an apprentice who had been talked into coming to one of Hegel's early lectures by one of his most dedicated students, Suthmeier, as a way of filling the masses of empty seats in Hegel's classes: "Geht es hier eigentlich um Enten oder um Gänse?" How would he ever find the shoe which – again, as legend would have it – he lost in the mud on the way to class in Heidelberg, without even noticing it? (Schweizer 2006:129f) What did this do to his assertion, at the beginning of his lectures, that

wenn man nämlich nicht den Gedanken, die Erkenntnis der Vernunft, schon mit zur Weltgeschichte bringt, so sollte man wenigstens den festen, unüberwindlichen Glauben haben, daß Vernunft in derselben ist, und auch den, daß die Welt der Intelligenz und des selbstbewußten Wollens nicht