Identity Of Movement

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We exist as a movement between seemingly contradictory terms. The subject, or self, embodies both sides of this dialectic simultaneously. Self-identity is formed in our relationship to, and knowledge of, the various structures of this movement (for example, but not limited to, between good/evil, master/slave, teacher/student, concept/action, active/passive). This movement is at once inter- and intra-subjective. It exists within individuals and as a social dynamic in the form of fragmentation and wholeness. To understand this movement is to place oneself between these opposing terms, to see oneself as defined simultaneously by each, and to identify with the direction that one is moving in relationship to them. Achieving this potentially elusive understanding is alike to exploring the Ancient Greek aphorism “know thyself.” Identification as this directional movement not only allows subjects to situate themselves in relation to the present world but also to see themselves, and the world, in a new light. In contrast lies the impossibility of identification as extremes. In understanding this relationship to dialectic contradiction we can establish a faith toward uncovering the truth of identity.

The Master and Slave Dialectic

The Master and Slave dialectic, written by Hegel and re-appropriated by Kojève, is the fundamental structure of this movement. In this text, Hegel elaborates on the moment when Self-Consciousness is born. When two men meet each other they desire to be recognized by the other. Within this recognition is a potential objectification of what previously existed as a subjective certainty within each man. Such a meeting must constitute a fight for recognition; each man must be willing to risk his life in order to be recognized by his peer. However, during
the fight, only one man will be able to go all the way in fully risking his life. The other has a brush with death that he becomes faithful to as he submits to the superiority of his fellow man. In his submission he becomes a slave, with the other as his master, and the dialectic is established.

The slave does work in the master’s name while his master sits idle. Since the fight, the slave has internalized his fear of death, but he knows that the master will not kill him; the slave is useful. The master is at an impasse, neither working to transform the world in his own image nor developing a capacity towards anything. The slave, however, begins to develop a capacity for work. As he plows the field he becomes more capable, as he crafts axes he is able to envision new models of axe, etc. This work is a transformation of the world by the hands of the slave, but in the name of the master. Ultimately, neither of these men achieve the recognition that they wanted from the start. The master is recognized by the slave, but this is hollow because the master doesn’t recognize the slave as someone whose recognition is worthy. The slave, however, realizes his true desire: he wants not only what the master wants, but he also wants it how the master has it. Though both individuals are unsatisfied due to their empty fulfillment of desire, only the slave can “dialectically overcome” his situation.

Kojève writes: “the satisfied man will necessarily be a Slave... who has passed through slavery.” The master is the catalyst for this overcoming because he provides a boundary experience for the slave. However, in order to overcome the limit set by the master’s existence, the slave must overcome the fear of death that he internalized from the initial fight. As he overcomes this fear he also reclaims his work from the master and begins to work for himself instead. In a sense, then, the slave’s overcoming is also a shedding of identity. Kojève explains this as a transformation, not from slave to master, but from slave to change, where slavish consciousness melted internally: “it shuddered deeply and everything fixed-or-stable trembled in it.” Though the master and slave identities were limited in terms of themselves, they both created the possibility for the liberated slave identity. This is the identity of the individual who is “ready for change; in his very being he is change, transcendence, transformation and 'education'.

Movement

This third identity is the liberated slave. He is the slave who has overcome his internalized fear of death and is no longer a slave. He exists instead as the movement between the master and slave identities. These two seemingly contradictory terms constitute this movement. Hegel writes:

Since both are equally right, they are both equally wrong, and the mistake consists in taking such abstract forms as ‘the same’ and ‘not the same’, ‘identity’ and ‘non-identity’, to be something true, fixed, and actual, and in resting on them. Neither the one nor the other has truth, the truth is just their movement.

2 Ibid, 20.
3 Ibid, 21.
4 Ibid, 22. [emphasis added]
Here, Hegel posits the impossibility of identity in its abstract form. Since both master and slave identities exist as polar, contradictory abstractions, it is impossible for an individual to exist as these identities. Instead, the master and slave identities represent two extremes of existence that an individual may identify herself between. Kojève states this as a “simple-or-undivided essential-reality of Self-Consciousness” where an “absolute liquefaction of every stable-support” takes place. However, is this fluidity, implied by both Hegel and Kojève, impossible to reconcile into a third identity?

Malcolm Bull, author of Seeing Things Hidden, examines this possibility of a third term through Derrida:

Derrida considers Hegelian contradiction to consist of... ‘a resolution of contradiction into a third term’, whereas the undecidable never constitutes a third term, but is rather ‘the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing etc.).' Here, Derrida considers this reconciliation to be impossible while simultaneously suggesting a form in which this resolution is affirmed. This “medium... movement and... play that links” these contradictory terms together is the very third term that Derrida attempts to deny. If this is the case than it may be possible to identify with and as this movement.

Identity

One of the many contradictory relationships between terms exists between concept and action, between thought and life. In respect to this, identity may be an impossibility in the sense that it is an attempt to fixate that which is always fluid. Just as Kojève’s slave had everything fixed-or-stable tremble within him, so too each attempt at identity may be an attempt to fixate some sense of self within an individual who is always in movement. This is like trying to catch water with a hand: as you tighten your hold, the water flows through the gaps in your fingers. However, it may possible to identify with, or even as, this movement, as the transformation, change, and transcendence that Kojève posits as the form of the liberated slave? Or does the very concept of identification disallow this?

The Master and Slave dialectic is embodied and internalized within every individual. Like Derrida writes, there are varying forms of contradicting terms that constitute movement, whether in a form of good and evil, inside and outside, order and disorder, or insane and sane, etc. Under Hegel's idea of movement, each individual exists between these contradictory terms. This movement also implies direction and a potential to self-identify as a movement in a direction. This also implies that any identification as such is also an identification as both master and slave, existing in varying degrees within the self. If this is the case the identification as a directional movement be useful for knowledge of self?

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6 Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, 21-2.
8 Ibid,39.
The Fragment and Dynamite

Nietzsche is the very embodiment of this knowledge of self. He was able to identify himself apart from the common mentalities of his time in order to better understand himself in relation to them. His hypercritical approach led to a re-examination and re-valuation of language, history, and culture. Nietzsche self-identified as dynamite, an explosive force that tears a hole in the fabric of a previously agreed upon order. Galileo was similarly dedicated: he aimed to be faithful to truth above any comfortable order. This form of change has many faces. These historical individuals portray a movement of rupture. They are the voice of disorder, the voice of doubt that order itself makes possible. In this sense they are also the voice of the liberated slave, but it is only because of their voice that they have achieved liberation. The voiceless, the workless and the passive fragment only result in madness.

Kojéve writes: “Without work that transforms the real objective World, man cannot really transform himself.”9 This man is the slave without a voice, the man who has not reclaimed his work nor overcome his fear of death. He is the fragment of society who is stagnant and afraid, ceaselessly working in obedience to the order of the master’s world. He has changed, but only internally, and “this ‘internal’ change puts him at variance with the world” that he has failed to change.10 This variance eats at the slave and transforms him into a “madman or a criminal.”11 It is the voice of dynamite, the reclaimed work of this fragmented individual, which creates a rupture in the master’s order and redefines the common conception of truth – but only as long as this voice is recognized as such. Copernicus, before Galileo, investigated and discovered heliocentrism, but hesitated to publish his work on the matter for fear of religious backlash.

It is through this conception of fragmentary images of humanity that we can better see the whole. Within this idea, humanity exists both as the whole that continuously splits into fragments as well as the many fragmented individuals who are working towards the whole. Nietzsche elaborates on this mutually constitutive movement as a form of growth:

The majority of people are a fragmentary, exclusive image of what humanity is; you have to add them up to get humanity. In this sense, whole eras and whole peoples have something fragmentary about them; and it may be necessary for humanity’s growth for it to develop only in parts.12

This process has a simultaneously destructive and creative quality about it. Similar to how the existence of a master (and the imposition of terror onto the slave) makes the slave’s transformation possible, so too does the slave’s obedience to the master reinforce the master’s world. The whole of society, the accepted order, makes a fragmented individual possible, and, reciprocally, the existence of a fragmented individual implies the possibility of the creation of a (new) whole.

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9 Kojéve, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, 28.
10 Ibid, 28.
11 Ibid, 28.
The Movement Between Desire and No Desire

Bataille inquires into the relationship between the fragment and the whole in respect to the individual and entirety. He argues that individual man exists as a fragment, constituted by his desire and work. This fragment lies opposite to the whole man, who exists as entirety through his suspension of desire. He experiences this removal from desire in his experience of the abyss:

...the main impulse that leads to human entirety is tantamount to madness. I let go of good. I let go of reason (meaning). And under my feet, I open an abyss which my activity and my binding judgments once kept from me. At least the awareness of totality is first of all within me as a despair and a crisis.13

This is a certain form of non-desire that is established in the individual who does not work. If an individual is to exist as a whole, or entirety, it is possible only through this withdrawal from desire for something. He writes: “Only in empty longing, only in an unlucky desire to be consumed simply by the desire to burn with desire, is entirety wholly what it is... Entirety lacks further tasks to fulfill.”14 So, though it is possible for an individual to exist as an entirety within themselves, Bataille argues that this form of existence is trivial: “Since isn’t seriousness essentially why blood flows? How could a free life, a life unconstrained by combat, a life disengaged from the necessities of action and no longer fragmented—how could such a life not appear frivolous?”15 This is Kojève’s voiceless slave who is estranged from her work. “Only work,” Kojève writes, “by finally putting the objective World into harmony with the subjective idea that goes beyond it, annuls... madness, crime...”16

This process of becoming whole, though frivolous, is also a potential for relief from the demands of work. Bataille writes: “[e]ach of us learns with bitterness that to struggle for freedom is first of all to alienate ourselves.”17 This struggle, this attempt to reconcile one’s subjective certainty in the objective world, is the very process of fragmentation. When we have a desire for something, when we have a cause, our freedom is limited. He writes, not only that “… causes pluck off the wings we fly with,” but also, “[i]nfinite tasks are imposed upon us.”18 It is in empty desire, the individual with no desire, who longs for “laughter... pleasure, holiness, or death.”19 So it seems that while Bataille is critical of his perspective from above the abyss it is also a necessary experience for him, one that rectifies the alienated suffering that his desire itself implies. This movement within the individual is between fragmentation and entirety. It is a movement between desire and no desire. Entirety comes to the individual as a relinquishment of cause and an opposition to the reclamation of work.

Moving from the Fragment to the Whole

13 Ibid, xxvii.
14 Ibid, xxiv-xxv.
15 Ibid, xxvi.
16 Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, 28.
17 Bataille, On Nietzsche, xxiv.
18 Ibid, xxix, xxv.
19 Ibid, xxv.
The fragmented and alienated individual, as formed by her desire and work, begins to create a new order. She experiences ultimate fear and terror in the form of and the common thought of time. She seeks to transform the world in her image through her work. In this sense she attempts to move back to the whole, to reconcile herself back into society from her alienated state. In order for her to achieve this objective transformation of the world her voice must be recognized by others, for, if it is not, her voice will be a mere “shout lost in the silence.” This act of transformation is her attempt to divide one world into two, to challenge the current doctrine of established order, and to create something new, a rupture amidst comfort.

This work separates her, alienates her from the world, but, as she transforms the world she becomes whole again. Bataille writes:

A totality like this, necessarily aborted by our work, is nonetheless offered by that very work. Not as a goal, since the goal is to change the world and give it human dimensions. But as the inevitable result. As change comes about, humanity-attached-to-the-task-of-changing-the-world, which is only a single and fragmentary aspect of humanity, will itself be changed to humanity-as-entirety.

If this is the case, then as the slave reclaims her work and offers it to the world she is attempting to reconcile herself with the whole. However, it is only as her work is recognized, and made objective by this recognition, that she is successful in this transformation. For Bataille this is when the fragmented individual, because of her striving, inevitably delivers the divided world back into a unity. The fragment and the whole both exist as extremes that we move between, as individuals and as a society. If Nietzsche represents the movement from one to two, the dynamite that shatters the world, than, in her work, the fragmented individual represents the movement from two back into one.

Identity of Movement

We do not exist as extremes. The master and slave dialectic is a river. There must be two shores for water to flow. Without either of these shores, movement will be either stagnant or directionless. This form is mutually constructive – each extreme implies the other. “Since both are equally right, they are both equally wrong.” Self-identification fails if it attempts to claim itself as only one of these extremes. Instead, one can only identify oneself as the river, as the movement between these shores. The ‘I’ (or self or subject) exists as both Good and Evil, as a master and a slave, as arrogant and humble, but to varying degrees. Can we situate ourselves as this movement? Can we know ourselves as the beings of “change, transcendence, transformation and ‘education’” to which Kojève refers, and if so, what would that knowledge imply? If we accept that we exist as this dialectical movement then we must also accept the many forms that this suggests. There are many mutually constitutive extremes. There are students and teachers, left- and right-wing political subjects, and those individuals who are afraid or courageous.

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20 Ibid, xxix.
21 Ibid, xxv.
23 Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, 22.
This wide variety suggests that there may be many forms of identification and many selves to which any individual can identify. As Michel Foucault states in the interview *Ethics of the Concern for Self*:

> [the subject] is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself. You do not have the same type of relationship to yourself when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes to vote or speaks at a meeting and when you are seeking to fulfill your desires in a sexual relationship.\(^{24}\)

This form is fluid and must be recognized as such. Any attempt to fixate oneself as identity ultimately fails because within each individual are different degrees of contradiction. By labeling myself solely as a humble person I fail to recognize my capacity for arrogance. To realize this means to recognize that one exists as neither, *and* both, humility and arrogance. By labeling myself as a man I fail to take into account the feminine parts of myself, and so on. If we view these extremes as opposing points on a line then we could view our ‘self’ as a point on this line, either in relationship to this opposition, or as this very opposition. Foucault writes: “Undoubtedly there are relationships and interferences between these different forms of the subject; but we are not dealing with the same type of subject. In each case, one plays, one establishes a different type of relationship to oneself.”\(^{25}\)

This dialectic relationship is the play or dance of the self. To understand oneself, to “know thyself,” is to investigate one’s place amidst these many dialectic movements. This intricate knowledge of self-identity then directly relates to the position of the self in relationship to society. As Foucault writes: “…it is the power over oneself that thus regulates one’s power over others.”\(^{26}\) The river flows between opposing shores, those boundaries that constitute one’s relationship to herself and the civilization that she is simultaneously a part of and apart from.

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\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Ibid, 438.