theories and methodologies

Comparative Literature and Hegel's Historical Thinking

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HAUN SAUSSY OPENS HIS INFLUENTIAL DISCUSSION OF PAST AND PRESENT CONCEPTIONS OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE, "EXQUISITE CAdavers Stitched from Fresh Nightmares," by linking them in an apparently historic claim to victory: "Comparative literature has, in a sense, won its battles" (3). The ambiguous nature of that claim, and the real subject of Saussy's ensuing discussion, is indicated, however, by the qualifying phrase "in a sense." In *another* sense, Saussy implies, the achievements of comparative literature remain open to debate. For, despite the widespread adoption by national-literature departments of comparative literature's theoretical methods of inquiry, comparative approaches to literature continue to be considered inessential or secondary to the defining aim of national-literature departments—investigating and describing the reality of historically grounded national traditions and identities. Saussy's "sense" of victory is thus snatched from the jaws of an unapologetic sense of defeat:

> What needs propagating is the comparative reflex, the comparative way of thinking, not the departmental name; and if those are to spread at the cost of identity and institutional reward, so much the worse for identity.
>
> —It so happens that identity is the pivot of our triumph—and our wraithlikeness. (5)

Saussy's argument for "propagating" the "triumph" of a field whose task is comparing rather than historically confirming identities underlies a larger, philosophical as well as disciplinary, argument against defining history and identity in any *non*comparative—systematic or reified—sense. Before comparative literature attained its equivocal prominence among the disciplines, the notion that comparisons of identities define, rather than undermine, the only conceivable relation between identity and history formed the basis for the encompassing philosophical project of the first great systematic comparatist, Hegel. This essay argues that Saussy's advocacy for a "pivot[al]," "comparative way of thinking" finds important precedent in the systematic critique of noncomparative conceptions of historical

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identity that Hegel's entire dialectical philosophy—its "logic" no less than its "aesthetics"—at once requires and describes. In Hegel's view the bases of that systematic comparative critique inhere explicitly (as, in Saussy's "triumph[al]" view of comparative literature, they do implicitly) in the general structure of signification around which all particular—historical and contextual—usage revolves (or, to repeat Saussy's term, "pivots"): the different, while interrelated, semantic registers of the "symbol" and the "sign." Bearing in mind both Saussy's advocacy for the "propagation" of the "comparative reflex" and Hegel's reflectively comparative philosophical project, I examine the formative relations among history, identity, and origin—as well as those between language and logic and between the particular and the "real" or "absolute"—that Hegel originally derives from the different ways we signify them, the overlapping but never identical identities of symbol and sign. Even as these nonidentical identities of symbol and sign incur, in Saussy's terms, "a cost to identity," as well as to the course of history in Hegel's own system, the semantic relations that compose the basis of the philosopher's "logic" of comparison render their necessarily comparative discernment, or reading, essential to the production and recognition of identities over time, whether these be individual and concrete or notional and national.

Origins of Comparison

Of a piece with acts of comparison are positive acts of negation, and Saussy exposes the "cost," not only to positive identity but also to its practical, "institutional reward," that any discipline defined by questions of what constitutes a discipline (or, for that matter, a definition) must pay. Constituting such a discipline—one that questions the boundaries that delimit fields and the identities within them—will present inevitable linguistic and epistemological difficulties, and mediating these can be viewed as the central purpose of Hegel's dialectic. Still, any positive articulation of the identity of a field whose mode is inherently negative is bound to incur slippage in its analytic categories and terms, especially if such an articulation's aim is to convince others of that unbounded field's existence. Once negation is considered to be one of comparative literature's principal activities, the identification of the field brings with it disciplinary questions: epistemological questions as to "what," if anything, the comparative study of literature negates; ethical questions as to "why," to what purpose or end, it does so; and aesthetic questions as to "how," the medium or mode in which negation takes place. For a comparatist, these questions cannot be answered without comparison because the task of comparison has no given grounds other than the facts its undertaking determines: the objects of comparative inquiry are neither given nor predetermined. Methods of comparison change according to the objects being compared, and what constitutes the "objective" emerges in each case not from the description of an object but from the relations among the compared objects. The inability of comparison to provide definitive answers to the questions it poses reveals the necessary reversal of the logical procedure by which comparison traditionally proceeds, one that defines what a thing is by what it does, instead of deriving its activity from already defined identities. By analogy, the argument for the right to practice such a nonpositive logical mode must—rather than find its justification beyond its own existence—reverse the conventions of argumentation to argue that its existence, as logical argument ("wraith-like" though it may be), gives it that right to begin with.

While unnatural and certainly unconventional as a mode of procedure, this reversal of logic reflects the operating principles that make the enterprise of argument—specifically, of linguistic logic—possible. A self-

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questioning that examines its own existence provides no ground or reason for that existence other than the "fact" ("deed" or "act" [*factum*]) of its own existence. Just as comparative literature finds its value in comparing, language creates its value in being used. There is no predetermined outside—in language—to language, no "identities" of which it does not speak, and so a comparative method whose object is, generally speaking, language (for Hegel the "names" employed by logic, as well as aesthetic and discursive "symbols" and "signs" [*Hegel's* Philosophy 220, 213]) finds itself aligned with a reification of identities when its existence as "an adverb" ("comparative") "among earthshaking nouns" is challenged by its own, no-less-inevitable, reliance on a "contextualizing mode" (Saussy 21).

The reification assumed (rather than challenged) by national literary studies depends on a conception of history that defines and objectifies identity, of whatever genre or name. The idea that history should serve generally as the ground for assessing objectivity presumes historicity to be the decisive criterion for the evaluation of the nonsubjective (nonconceptual and nonlinguistic), or "real." As Saussy describes it, comparative literature owes its controversial status to the fact that its identity as a discipline is defined by its conceptual methods. Such a mode of identification fundamentally conflicts, he notes, with the historically developed method of objective contextualization that, rooted in a nineteenth-century "science of origins" (8), makes claim to a "real," rather than conceptual, grounding of identity in history. Comparative literature, too, according to Saussy, only avoided becoming one science of origins among others by including Hungarian, an exception to the Indo-European language group, in its purview. While the bases of that inclusion (prescribed, Saussy tells us, by Meltzl de Lomnitz in 1877) remain uncertain and may include mere accident, the historically illogical inclusion of Hungarian "had the effect," Saussy argues, "of impeding comparative literature's dissolution into one or another existing branch of the historical sciences" (9).

For his part, Saussy offers two origins for comparative literature. The first, "particular," origin follows the logic of historical determination in defining the discipline "as a product of the nineteenth-century European nation system" (6, 25). The logic produced by combining the concept of "nations"—nonnatural identities defined externally, by boundaries constructed against other "nations"—with that of an internally self-defining and coherent system brought with it the origin of comparative literature's anxiety about becoming "the literary corollary to historical studies." Nineteenth-century attempts to resolve the irresoluble conceptual problem of conjoining systematic historical with comparative methods proposed instead a kind of two-way street between them. The establishment of empirical history as the real would allow the comparative method to establish history as a systematic totality, thereby offering to history, in turn, a route back to the beginning, or origin, of history itself. As Saussy notes, "Comparison enabled one to discover the distal [sic] events in the past that had produced branchings; it read difference as differentiation, a process unfolding in time" (13). Similarly, the concept of the system itself requires history in order to establish at once the "original" and "final authority of the real" (23).

Despite the extended historical reach that systematic comparison affords, the search for an origin in history entails a circular problem of knowledge. Knowledge requires historicity to be factual, while the guarantee of certainty for both knowledge and history requires an epistemologically accessible point of origin in history. According to Saussy, the goal of identifying such an original point of access to history motivated the development of comparative nineteenth-century methods of inquiry. Yet the logical consequences of Saussy's account extend further still. For an origin

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considered positively to function as a discrete, identifiable point in history, on the one hand, and as the encompassing, extensive ground for historical knowledge, on the other, it must remain inaccessible to both of these conceptions of the historically real individually. Such a double origin simultaneously holds the two conceptions together and holds them at the brink of extinction. Only a tautology can state the problem of searching for a point of origin, for this problem is (the problem of) searching for the origin, of having to seek it in the first place. At the same time, the logically regressive structure of the problem of identifying an origin discloses knowledge and history to be interdependent, concerned less with the (tautological) identification of discrete identities than with each other. Finally, their logically irreducible interdependence points to the larger, interrelated conditions underlying such identities: first, that the identities of "knowledge" and "history" alike are constituted not by logic but by language; and, second, that a single, historical and epistemological, point of origin is and remains by definition inaccessible by way of language.

Saussy's alternative origin of comparative literature is less clearly defined. Similarities of references and linguistic characters identified in geographically and historically distant texts reveal, Saussy writes, a "consciousness of difference and relation" that "allow[s] languages and literatures to be known as (that is, as if they were) things in themselves." The ubiquity of such phenomena in "history" shows that "[t]he logic of comparative literature is as old as literature itself" (6). Drawing from the writings of the past to interpret history, Saussy argues that this idea of the origin is not a particular point in time but an expression of the logic of comparative literature. A reversal takes place, in which history, interpreted for conceptual use rather than referred to as objective source, provides the basis for treating languages and literatures as independent of an outside source.

Considered on this dual view—as events recorded in and recording the past—history, we may say, requires reading. The "origin" of that requirement is not assumed to be positively accessible "in" history. Rather, when considered as an original need that provides the logic for the existence of the field, the historical origin of comparative literature is instead found and constructed in—incomplete—acts of reading that themselves depend on comparisons. The contest over what constitutes the historically "real" does not lie, on this view, in historicity as such but in the question of whether the real can be exhausted by the positivism of empirical evidence or whether knowledge of the real demands something more, a defining yet nondefinitive, which is to say an interpretive, act of reading.

Hegel's philosophical concept of the system emerged concurrently with Saussy's "nineteenth-century nation system." Saussy's sense of a historical origin of comparative literature, as of literature itself, constructed through acts of reading resembles Hegel's sense of the origin of all art—identified not in some absolute real but in the "absolute need" for a formal making of identity, the particularly human absolute (*Hegel's* Aesthetics 1) that Saussy, for his part, calls "the universality of human experience" (13). Hegel states of the "origin" of "art":

> The universal and absolute need from which art (on its formal side) springs has its origin in the fact that man is a *thinking* consciousness, i.e., that man makes out of himself and *for himself* what he is and whatever else is. (*Hegel's* Aesthetics 1: 30–31; trans. modified)

> Das allgemeine und absolute Bedürfnis, aus dem die Kunst (nach ihrer formellen Seite) quellt, findet seinen Ursprung darin, dass der Mensch *denkendes* Bewusstsein ist, d. h., dass er, was er ist und was überhaupt ist, aus sich selbst *für sich* macht. (*Vorlesungen* 13: 50–51)

By locating the "origin" "from which art springs" in man's "universal and absolute

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need" to "make," rather than merely to be, what he conceives (including "what he is"), Hegel draws a correspondence between the fact of art's existence and the "fact"—that is, the *factum*, or making—of human "thinking." This correspondence sets in motion a negative deductive logic by which the "facticity" of art—namely, the fact of its made existence, as manifested in form—proves the "original" fact of human thinking. At the same time, once that correspondence between art and thought is given, the reciprocal and positive logical argument can be made, that human thinking seeks, innately and originally, to express itself in aesthetic form. In short, for Hegel the fact of human thinking is neither known nor posited apart from the fact of art. Recognition of the inextricable relation between thinking and art is thus both a properly conceptual, philosophical reflection and one made possible by given or extant objects of art: aesthetic form provides the "objective" proof of the thinking involved in its making. This is why formal awareness of art is inherently reflective for Hegel, and why his *Aesthetics* contains not one but two histories of art: a conceptual history of the idea of beauty as it appears, disappears, and reappears in aesthetic form and an empirical account and interpretation of the significance of art objects across history. Hegel's historical interpretation of art thus doubles—and originates—as an interpretation of history by means of art. A brief review of the deductions and conceptions from which that history "springs" in Hegel's philosophy can help us understand Saussy's defense of comparative methods in its relation to a larger argument about the comparative nature of history and of art itself.

Hegel's Comparative "Ground": Nature, Metaphor, and Formula

As a narrative of the history of thinking through and across identities, Hegel's philosophy must posit a beginning. The beginning poses a problem because to move forward by means of reflecting on the mediation of identities would actually mean to move backward, to search for what preceded and compelled each mediation. Thus, the only "real" beginning point of Hegel's narrative of the idea would have to be located at its end, making the temporal development of his logic a function less of the dialectic—the relations of opposition and difference operative in the world that thinking human subjects make—than of the language human beings use. The beginning, or origin, of language is perhaps even more difficult to identify than that of a philosophical narrative; for this reason Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* begins with a statement of an absence: "Philosophy misses an advantage enjoyed by the other sciences. It cannot, like them, presuppose either the immediate presentation of its objects or its method of cognition, whether for starting or for proceeding, to be already given" ("Die Philosophie entbehrt des Vorteils, der den anderen Wissenschaften zugute kommt, ihre Gegenstände als unmittelbar von der Vorstellung zugegeben sowie die Methode des Erkennens für Anfang und Fortgang als bereits angenommen voraussetzen zu können" [*Hegel's* Logic 3; *Enzyklopädie* 8: 41]). What philosophy lacks are not extant objects but rather its own immediate ability to apprehend those objects, since, as Hegel later articulates, every considered object requires a "ground" ("Grund" [*Hegel's* Logic 175; *Enzyklopädie* 8: 248]). For the other sciences, the ground of inquiry is not consciousness but the "immediate presentation" of objects given by nature. Philosophy, by contrast, must engage in thinking when just such nature-based perception fails the demands of mind.

Hegel demonstrates that failure when he discusses what happens when nature itself is appealed to as the conceptual ground of a perceived natural phenomenon. The example Hegel gives is the redundant reasoning regarding the ground of an electrical

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phenomenon. When the question is what makes this phenomenon possible, the answer, that electricity is the ground of this phenomenon, must revert to tautology (*Hegel's* Logic 176–77). For Hegel the tautological use of the copular *is* forecloses further thinking by establishing an identity without difference, prohibiting the comparisons and negations that compose the mediating, rather than immediate, ground on which philosophical knowledge is based.

In expressing the absence of a ground for philosophy, Hegel brings the plasticity of language to light, the way in which identical words—even such a foundational word as *ground*—can function either as differential metaphor or as formulaic principle.[1] When stated as the basis for an existence—philosophically, its reason—the word functions as a formula. Yet when the formulaic ground is used to mean the foundation for the construction of a dialectical system, it reveals itself instead to be a necessary metaphor, one required by the representational, linguistic medium of the conception of such a system. At the same time, such slippage into metaphor reveals the aesthetic ground on which the Hegelian system rests—a shaky ground for a system seeking to identify the concrete in history. In using *ground* in relation to acts of logical speculation for which no "natural" ground exists, Hegel thus indicates the indissoluble bond in philosophy between aesthetics and logic.

Finally, Hegel's use of *ground* reflects and reinforces the inherently temporal and temporary nature of language, the way in which even its formulaic meaning must follow from the fact of its having been posited: "The ground is a ground only to the extent that it affords ground: but the result which has thus issued from the ground is only itself. In this lies its formalism" ("Der Grund ist nur Grund, insofern er begründet; das aus dem Grunde Hervorgegangene aber ist er selbst, und hierin liegt der Formalismus des Grundes" [*Hegel's* Logic 176; *Enzyklopädie* 8: 248]). Like the impossibility of grounding such an object in the givenness of its "immediate presentation," the necessity of grounding the object of philosophy in a verbal term that slips between formula and metaphor is due to the fact that it is not by way of naturally given objects but—both finally and to begin with—in language that we think. "It is in names that we *think*" ("Es ist in Namen, daß wir *denken*" [*Hegel's* Philosophy 220; *Enzyklopädie* 10: 278]), Hegel declares—well in advance of the grounding, analytic philosophical principle that language, and language alone, offers a commensurate object of logical thought. Yet, as the medium of thinking, "names" also prevent thinking from attaining knowledge of the concrete immediately: the names in which we think ensure that thinking occurs in time instead.

Hegel's *Aesthetics*: Comparing Sign and Symbol

The double, formulaic and metaphoric, semantics of *ground* originate in a movement inherent to language, which Hegel analyzes as the relation between the symbol and the sign, and it is in relating the symbol and the sign that Hegel's history of aesthetics progresses. Thus, Hegel's history of the arts begins not with a historical epoch but with a mode of signification, the "Symbolic," on which the "Classical" and "Romantic" stages of art follow. To give the initiation of history the name of a medium rather than a historical period signifies that something beyond the historical nature of the aesthetic is at stake in Hegel's dialectical narrative of art. Hegel's history of the aesthetic begins with an analysis of that excess.

The task of writing a history of the medium rather than of specific objects of art presents the same difficulty that, in Saussy's analysis, resides in writing a "history of literariness" in contrast to "histories of literature" (17). History, significance in time, is

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inextricably bound up with the arbitrary medium of the sign. The symbol—itself a kind of sign—mediates between history and the sign. A sign system that enables signification both establishes relations between symbols and uses these symbols in time. Symbolic relations of meaning are thus not only semiotic (or, in Hegel's case, truly semiological) but also temporal, and the resultant signification is history.

For Hegel the most representative genre of the original "symbolic stage" is architecture: in *Aesthetics*, the historical forms of art find their "proper" ("eigentliche") beginning in the mind's encounter with the Egyptian pyramids (1: 347 ff.; *Vorlesungen* 13: 448 ff.). In that they enclose embalmed bodies in the hard materiality of their own exteriors, pyramids are permanently excessive: their physically grounded, opaque bodies can neither move nor be seen through. Intransmutable in form and in content, they refuse metaphoric sublation. Hegel's description of the differential, but not yet dialectical, identity of the pyramid in *Aesthetics* recalls the definition of *symbol* given in *Encyclopaedia*. There, the symbol is defined by its "identical" relation to its content, the grounding of sensuous material in a meaning unlike that of the sign. In *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel describes the difference between sign and symbol as follows:

> The sign is some immediate intuition representing a totally different import from what naturally belongs to it; it is the pyramid into which a foreign soul has been conveyed, and where it is conserved. The *sign* is different from the *symbol*: for in the symbol the original characters (in essence and conception) of the visible object are more or less identical with the import which it bears as symbol; whereas in the sign, strictly so-called, the natural attributes of the intuition, and the connotation of which it is a sign, have nothing to do with each other. As *designating*, intelligence therefore gives proof of freer reign and mastery in the use of intuition than it does as symbolizing. (*Hegel's* Philosophy 213)
>
> Das *Zeichen* ist irgendeine unmittelbare Anschauung, die einen ganz anderen Inhalt vorstellt, als den sie für sich hat;—die *Pyramide*, in welche eine fremde Seele versetzt und aufbewahrt ist. Das *Zeichen* ist vom *Symbol* verschieden, einer Anschauung, deren *eigene* Bestimmtheit ihrem Wesen und Begriffe nach mehr oder weniger der Inhalt ist, den sie als Symbol ausdrückt; beim Zeichen als solchem hingegen geht der eigene Inhalt der Anschauung und der, dessen Zeichen sie ist, einander nichts an. Als *bezeichnend* beweist daher die Intelligenz eine freiere Willkür und Herrschaft im Gebrauch der Anschauung denn als symbolisierend. (*Enzyklopädie* 10: 270)

"Freer" signification is possible only in the nonsymbolic, or arbitrarily constructed, meaning of the sign. Yet, Hegel argues historically in *Encyclopaedia*, signs exist by virtue of the given spatial determination of the symbols whose content (here, not an excessive, embalmed body but a "foreign," "conserved" "soul") they sublate: "The intuition—in its natural phase a something given and given in space—acquires, when used as a sign, the peculiar characteristic of existing only as superseded and sublimated" ("Die Anschauung, als unmittelbar zunächst ein Gegebenes und Räumliches, erhält, insofern sie zu einem Zeichen gebraucht wird, die wesentliche Bestimmung, nur als aufgehobene zu sein" [*Hegel's* Philosophy 213; trans. modified; *Enzyklopädie* 10: 271]). Furthermore, in its sublation and "use" as sign, the spatially grounded symbol is given an "existence in time" ("Dasein in der Zeit"), whose intelligibility itself occurs with the "vanishing of that temporal existence" ("Verschwinden des Daseins" [Hegel's *Philosophy* 213; *Enzyklopädie* 10: 271]). Intelligibility rests on turning the spatial symbol into a temporal sign, whose vanishing existence must be extended by use in time. The sign, sublation of the spatial content of the symbol, is temporal through and through, and history is composed by the freedom of the intelligence to use symbols as signs.

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This description of the temporal intellectual work linking symbols to subsequent signs appears to contradict Hegel's *Aesthetics*, in which the pyramid, described in *Encyclopaedia* as a sign, is instead credited with being the first, "properly symbolic," work of art (1: 347 ff.). Yet this apparent reversal of the two terms' order and roles, as effective origin (symbol) and original effect (sign), is itself as illusory as their individual identities. For the symbol with which art and *Aesthetics* begin is itself, "in the first place," Hegel writes, "a sign":

> Now the symbol is in the first place a *sign*. In mere designations, however, the connection that the meaning and its expression have with one another is only an entirely arbitrary linkage. This expression, this sensory thing or image, so little represents itself that it rather brings to mind a foreign content with which it need stand in no proper commonality.
>
> (qtd. in Brodsky 57)

> Das Symbol ist nun zunächst ein *Zeichen*. Bei der bloßen Bezeichnung aber ist der Zusammenhang, den die Bedeutung und deren Ausdruck miteinander haben, nur eine ganz willkürliche Verknüpfung. Dieser Ausdruck, dies sinnliche Ding oder Bild stellt dann so wenig sich selber vor, daß es vielmehr einen ihm fremden Inhalt, mit dem es in gar keiner eigentümlichen Gemeinschaft zu stehen braucht, vor die Vorstellung bringt.
>
> (*Vorlesungen* 13: 394)

In her analysis of the differential definitions of sign and symbol in *Aesthetics*, and of the historical semiotics of Hegel's aesthetic theory generally, Claudia Brodsky ascribes Hegel's apparent inversion of the two semantic modes to the philosopher's "profoundly and distinctly literary" understanding of their interrelation (Brodsky 56): that, while categorically different in their contextual bases and motivations, sign and symbol remain structurally and formally (which is to say, philosophically) identical (57).[2] By aligning symbol and sign with the "two opposing semantic poles, of inherent and merely conventional meaning" (58), even as he declares their shared formal identity, "in the first place," as signs, Hegel defines both the "inherent[ly]" meaningful symbol and the "merely conventional" sign as strictly nonidentifiable (62). For the same reason, if the symbol, origin of temporal meaning, is "to continue to be meaningful in history" (38), its "own," or "proper," meaning is to "remain" ("bleiben") "essentially *ambiguous*" ("wesentlich *zweideutig*"), "incommensurate" ("nicht . . . angemessen") not only with any known content but also with any purportedly conclusive knowledge of whether it is an aesthetically meaningful symbol or a "merely conventional" sign (qtd. in Brodsky 58–60; *Vorlesungen* 13: 396–97).

In the exposition of the relation between sign and symbol in *Aesthetics*, the sublation of the two into a third dialectical moment, the general procedure for Hegel's dialectic, is absent. This is why a "comparative," or literary, reading of the meaningful articulations of history—of symbols as differentiated from signs, and of symbols identified as signs—is required of us by Hegel. For if history, too, is to "remain" meaningful, the dual, differential and temporal, origin of meaning in it, rather than the already historicized identification of its meaning with any one mode of meaning, must be interpretively maintained.

Identity of a Field

In sum and in view of the inherently comparative bases for any intellectually significant history according to Hegel, we may now say that Saussy's argument for the enduring importance of the field of comparative literature is an argument against fully symbolic, and thus meaningless, histories. His polemical point, that national-literature departments first "came into existence because of a claim that the language and literature of a subset of people living" in a country "formed a meaningful unit with a narratable history," and

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that the "pioneers" of such departments reified" the object they were "trying to understand," aims at underscoring the polemical, noncomparative and nondifferentiating manner in which such a history is signified (21). The tendency to erase the "enduring ambiguity" of symbols that are, "in the first place," merely conventional "signs" for the sake of representing historically a self-identical "subset of people" clustered in space will indeed politicize social relations and all personal claims to national identity.

The academic politics Saussy addresses, involving the proper definition of and distinction between the disciplines, turn out to be standard-bearers of an enduring conflict over the identity of the subject of history. Saussy deftly calls these the "politics of the adverb" (23). In the terms offered by Hegel's comparative—or, as we might now say, interdisciplinary—analysis of the differently signifying, aesthetic and logical, bases of history, we may call the politics opposing responses to the enduring difference between the sign and the symbol, as between the analytic concepts of identity and difference: attempts either to understand how the two are integrally related to each other in time or to conflate them in the name of an identity, and a history, one already understands.

Yet even Hegel revealed a certain anxiety about the inevitable objections his turn to the aesthetic would raise, recognizing that his attribution of "serious aims" to a realm of experience that bears, at worst, the "appearance" of "frivolity" or outright "deception" or, at best and only slightly better, that of "passing amusement" would call into question the seriousness of his systematic, comparative theory (*Hegel's* Aesthetics 1: 4–7). *Lectures on Aesthetics* (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*), which follows this expressed anxiety, demonstrates that Hegel had already—in the act of identifying those objections—comprehended that any theory of the aesthetic worthy of its name must write its own identity, both conceptually and historically, confronting its own representation by confronting its own perplexing origin, as it does that of art itself. No less engaged with doubts about disciplinary identities than with the politics and histories these identifications produce, comparatists involved in the task of reading and writing identify their field by their work, continually working in, for, and against language, constantly rereading and interrogating history.

Notes

1. Kleist, by contrast, claimed that "[o]ne could divide humanity into two classes: 1) those who master a metaphor, and 2) those who hold by a formula. Those with a bent for both are far too few, they do not comprise a class" (13).

2. Elsewhere Brodsky interprets the structural parallel in Hegel between the origin of art, in the "properly symbolic" pyramid, and the introduction of "freedom" into philosophy, by Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment in particular, as dialectically derived "points of departure" ("Ausgangspunkt[e]") for Hegel's own historical narrative of mind (Brodsky Lacour 327). Like the Egyptian pyramid, Brodsky argues, so "the Kantian philosophy" ("die Kantische Philosophie" [Hegel, *Vorlesungen* 13: 83 ff.]) provides an origin for the temporal interpretation of the signs of art in Hegel: "only from a temporal distance does sign appear not as 'meaningless sign' but as 'meaning-bearing symbol'—only as a vehicle of comparison does the 'indecipherable' appear to speak 'the clear language' which present signs 'lack'" (364).

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