

Expository Remarks on Stirner's 'My Self-Enjoyment'

For the Upcoming Seminar

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The Meaning of *Selbstgenuß*—An Expenditure

I.

On the matter of why I chose this section of *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum*, on “My Self-Enjoyment”, it is not simply a matter of its manageable length as a simple subsection of yet another subsection. My main motivation comes from a remark made by Catherine Malabou on the practice of a politics of metaphysical anarchy—*an-arche* in the mode of a philosophy without a fixity of principles or a transcendental horizon that would delimit its unfolding in advance—“risky but pleasurable, pleasurable because risky”.¹ Stirner is a profound thinker of risk, insofar as his thought aims to undermine the structure of essentialism that served as the *arche* for all of his contemporaries, and the risk taken here offers for him no less than the prospect—or can we dare to say, *actuality* (we cannot, as the misery of his own life seems to suggest)—of his “self-enjoyment” or *Selbstgenuß*, which is not only his *genuß* in the mode of its translation as ‘enjoyment’, but also as indulgence, and consumption. Stirner is hence a thinker for whom self-enjoyment is a mode of what Bataille would call Sovereignty, as that one who has the true power of ecstatic expenditure.

Other members of the *Acephale* project, such as Callois, would contradict me, in that they wanted to make everything sacred, whereas Stirner remains the thinker *par excellence* of the profane.² For the Acephalic sciences, sacredness consisted in sacrifice, loss, and expenditure.³ Stirner’s sacredness realizes itself in a mode of loss that remains sacrificial, but it is the sacrifice of the expenditure itself, from the perspective of those whom sacrifice their own right of expenditure before a higher law, that of the sacred.⁴ The unconscious egoist, captured under fixed ideas of themselves imposed by the social order (and even by their own complicity with them), lacks autonomy and self-ownership in their complicit conformity to their own subjectivation. As such, they lack even the self-consciousness that would allow them to hold anything as their own proper, in order to sacrifice it. It can never be their own so long as the relation of religiosity, of possession *by* the sacred is affirmed in their consciousness.⁵ One must first comprehend what is one’s own, the true and ultimate relationship of self and other, in order to consume it as an expense of one’s own, rather than as a pittance granted from the Lord(s) above. As we have seen in the text, the only thing that we sacrifice is ourselves, in a waste most lacking in self-affirmation or autonomous pleasure. We end up sacrificing ourselves to the fatherland, to the spectral Humanist essence that has replaced our God, and to other ‘stale airs’ of the supreme being (as Hegel so aptly described them).⁶

The ultimate structure of expenditure as we see earlier on in the text, the element of *Selbstgenuß*, is the spatio-temporal dimension of the embodied subject, the *living ‘I’*, its life itself.⁷ Rather than repeating the adversarial drama of the relation of the pure ‘I’ of self-consciousness to

¹ Spike Art Magazine, *Q&A with Catherine Malabou*: <https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/articles/qa-catherine-malabou>

² Roger Callois, “The Winter Wind”, in *The Sacred Conspiracy*, (Atlas, 2017), pp. 202-215, 206.

³ Georges Bataille, “The Notion of Expenditure” in *Visions of Excess*, pp. 116-129, 119.

⁴ Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, (Underworld Amusements, 2017), 333-4. Hereafter UP.

⁵ *Ibid*, 235.

⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford, 1977), Section 586.

⁷ UP, 332.

its living embodiment as in the early sections of Hegel's *Phenomenology*,⁸ Stirner comprehends both lessons, that one is dependent on their embodiment and that one equally has the power to transgress nature as such in the determinate negation of natural existence. In the median range of expenditure from simple death-seeking and skittish attachment to the mere immediacies of staying alive, Stirner learned the importance of the sovereignty over life that requires the *squandering* of It;⁹ the affirmation of the transitory and plastic nature of the subject-form and of its self-other relations in the mode of its embodiment. Rather than, say, holding back from life for the sake of the next one, handing it over to a sacred power such as the state or one's job, the practice of self-enjoyment is defined by Stirner in our reading as "using life up."¹⁰ 'Using' [*Nutzen*] is the key term here, insofar as it suggests conscious, utile decision, and does not itself forget that life is already in a constant process of self-expenditure throughout all of its finite individual lives. The finite naturally expends itself in passing into its other, and in nature finite life and energy passes into waste, life passes into death, nutrition into excretion—whether we are particularly or properly conscious of this or not. Finitude is already transgressing itself, transforming itself, the point is to maintain a degree of self-consciousness in a manner that channels these flows into an autonomous life.

II.

First point: Self-expenditure, *Selbstgenuß* occurs in a life, and as such it occurs in time.

Second Point: *Selbstgenuß* contains within itself the motion of loss and gain.

Third point: Under a contemporary understanding of the Hegelian theory of time, as that reality of time existing for that subject which stands in the light of Absolute Knowledge, temporality itself exhibits these same motions, as divided between two aspects.

Explanation: I just want to give a brief overview in terms of some of my earlier work on Hegel here based on the work of Malabou in regards to its relevance here. The form of temporality is equally the form of the subject by way of the structuring of its ontogenesis and process of formation itself, its coming to be. The way I typically paraphrase Malabou's description of the two aspects of Hegelian temporality from her *The Future of Hegel*,¹¹ is through two temporal series: the *Chronotic series* or 'C-Time', and the *Kenotic series* or simply 'K-Time'. The former, named after the linearity of Chronos (admittedly conflated, as is often the case, with the figure of Cronus/Saturn) is the abstractly negative mode of time as 'now' which is always flowing into its negation, into the past, no longer being a 'now' in terms of the determinacy of its form and content, but only as a moment of negation of the 'now' that is presence. It is the bare form of presence that as such is the receptacle of form as such. It devours what is given in the moment, and affirms itself in the unity of these moments that it has negated, and which it is *always* negating.

In polar opposition here we have K-Time, the time of *kenosis* or self-giving, the generation of form that projects itself temporally outwards, towards the future. Its object is the outside, the

⁸ See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford, 1977), Sections on Desire up until Lordship and Bondage in the *Self-Consciousness* chapter.

⁹ UP, 333.

¹⁰ Ibid, 332.

¹¹ See, Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, (Routledge, 2005), 133.

external, the sphere of natural time in which the C-series occurs, yet its formations are equally the subject of the negative flow of the C-series. This is simultaneously the case for the C-series, it is the subject of form-reception in its negative unity against the formal determinations that the flows of time eventually consume, and it holds the formal determinacies of the now as the object of its negation.

The unity of these series in the Hegelian temporality of Absolute Knowledge—and let us not forget that at the point just preceding the leap into Absolute Knowledge, Spirit had adopted a view of itself as a kind of kenosis-based Christ figure who has to face the ultimate otherness of raw, negational time itself, in order to supersede the abstract opposition between the two and unify with it¹²—is a temporality, a subject-form, that gives form at the same time that it receives and consumes it, a power of self-differentiation with its own negational mode of breaking itself off from an infinite repetition of a simple constancy of one externalization of form. Temporality, and the subject itself, becomes *plastic*,¹³ and it is in this mode of plasticity that *Selbstgenuß* operates. It affirms malleability, fluidity, the inner capacity to negate fixity, to self-differentiate, to self-externalize, and as such provides the ground for Stirner's affirmation of a key Hegelian lesson, *that one cannot resolve alienation through means that are themselves alien*.¹⁴ If one feels alienated from oneself, feels a lack of autonomy, of control over one's own life, that the truth of one's self is always transcendent and forever beyond you and your life, alien means will not help. To seek to conform perfectly to a given essence or code is a means of self-flagellation, it is the Hegelian *Unhappy Consciousness* that cannot see the necessity and ontological reality of contradiction and negation.¹⁵

For Stirner, it is futile to seek to differentiate oneself from alienation by means of surrender to an alien power, because self-differentiation is always and already within the individual's own breast as the subject, the 'I' that is not simply discursive, but embodied.¹⁶ The living subject holds within itself as much formative power as at the same time it is equally a space or surface for the reception and consumption of form. It is a singular creativity and negativity in constant play across the span of a life, a deposit of the Absolute fallen into time, a time spread out across an estate that can know itself as '*mine*'—the Unique's Property, with *their little Creative Nothing*.¹⁷

Without a proper consciousness of ourselves, such that we no longer seek alien means to rectify alienation (but we begin, here and now, with ourselves, and with each other, in active and continuous insurrection), Stirner sees only poverty around us.¹⁸ It is a dialectical poverty, unified with its opposite, in that we are both too full of ourselves and yet lack anything to speak of as fit to our proper 'ownness' or autonomy. In short, man is full of himself when he acts in service of his essential humanity, godliness, his good German-ness, and yet this fullness is the complete emptying of himself and his autonomy in pursuit of these abstractions and their eternal rewards for essential conformity—he is full of a spectre, he is an occupied territory by an alien subjectivation. Materially, also, poverty is seen in the absence of revolt, in the respect for 'private

¹² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford, 1977), Section 787.

¹³ Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, (Routledge, 2005), 133.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford, 1977), Section 803.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Section 207.

¹⁶ UP, 367.

¹⁷ For an ongoing account of the relationship between Hegel's logic and that of the Creative Nothing and the Absolute in ontogenesis, see <https://happyhourathippels.wordpress.com/2021/05/05/draft-thesis-summary-to-have-set-ones-affair-on-nothing-creative-nothingness-from-hegel-to-stirner/>

¹⁸ UP, 333-4.

property' that daren't steal when hungry,¹⁹ that respects the sacredness of the private so as not to profane it for the use of myself and my own (and it is pertinent to remember the almost universal extent of what Stirner considers their *own* in terms of the constitutive element of their autonomy, as tied to their property, or otherness in general).²⁰

The Stirnerian insurgency is a *material* insurgency, but even the spirit itself has become the material of one's self-shaping here, Absolute Spirit and its plasticity, the structures of subjectivation, become matter for a new and insurrectionary mode of self-practice. Subjectivity becomes an object of seizure, of simultaneous reform and revolt to produce new modes of practicing and objectifying oneself, such that insurrection is itself embodied, as profanation. It is a risk because in doing so, one uses up life in a new way, it is pleasurable because it is a consumption of oneself in a way that affirms one's own plastic, playful self-determination, it supersedes the misery of the infinite longing for self²¹—and this equally counts for the infinite longing for the 'revolutionary subject' to appear and bring us into the unified emancipatory collective—and dares to enjoy.

Within and Against Hegel: Self-Positing, Possibility, and Force

Given that my interest in Stirner and in bringing Stirner to you in this discussion, is around his relationship to Hegel and Hegelian logics, this section seems at first to be rather damaging to a thesis that presents Stirner as Hegelian. Hegelianism is presented as a system of spectres, of pursuit of an Absolute detached from all particularity, which doesn't intervene in it, and which one must treat as sacred; a sacred thought not to be toyed with, and to whom one's own thinking must conform in the manner of respect. And yet Stirner in earlier (his review of Bauer's *Trumpet of the Last Judgement*) and later works (*The Philosophical Reactionaries*) endorsed the destructive powers of this system and its dialectic. As such, I argue that we should consider Stirner as one whom provides a provocative intervention in the Hegelianism of his time and with regards to the system as it stood at its limits, and beyond its mere closure as a system of semi-feudal university education (the fullest expression of the system is as an *Encyclopaedia*, a *textbook*).

Stirner, in my view, affirms the ontogenetic motor of individuality that Hegel describes, in affirming the Creative Nothing at the heart of all determinacy, including that of determinate individuality. The Hegelian Absolute, which is contradiction—the development of things constitutively through negation—arrives on the scene as in its unfolding as something *ex nihilo* in Hegel's system, it arrives as the failure of pure Being to begin the logic in revealing itself as a pure Nothing,²² and yet in this failure, this revealing, the first negation arrives as the negation of this attempt to begin Being and thinking from their respective absence, and as such this first negation arrives, from a source which is the source of all negation (and hence dialectic) and which sits at the heart of Being itself—*Nichts*, the nothing.²³ All determinacy in Hegel is a depositing of the Nothing into Being, the insurgency of nothing within being, and the vehicle of this insurgency is the infection of Being with its originary nothing that creates becoming, and that which creates

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ See the Section on Stirnerian Ethics in the thesis summary noted above.

²¹ UP, 338.

²² Hegel, *Science of Logic*, (Cambridge, 2010), 59.

²³ Angelica Nuzzo, "Dialectic, Understanding, and Reason: How Does Hegel's Logic Begin?", in *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic*, (Continuum, 2010), pp. 12-30, 23.

a becoming something in the mode of the first true negation that could produce determinacy.²⁴ Retrospectively we see the creativity of this nothing, how it posits itself in being and hence into the register of existence, determinacy. Stirner, having been taught his Hegelian logic by Karl Werder as well as Hegel, recognizes the nothing that precedes thinking and creates all thoughts as well as posits all actual determinations. “Before my thinking—I am”,²⁵ and what is the ‘I’ for Stirner other than a Creative Nothing? It is *his* Creative Nothing, or the motor of the individuality in which he finds himself and which, if we find ourselves inclined to do, we can find within ourselves, as the night of the world visible from the immediacy of the human eye.²⁶

The position of the individual is for Stirner one of force,²⁷ in the way that existence itself requires positing, to be positioned, set down, by an act of force, and hence there is no need to achieve a self-position in order to be a self, the self is already the self-positing of the Creative Nothing. As Stirner makes clear, the use of force, is not something to be achieved in the bad infinity of an indefinite striving that can only be achieved e.g. by sanction of worthiness from God or state, “but rather is his actual and existing *act* at all times. Force is only a simpler word for manifestation of force.”²⁸ Existence is force propelled by the Creative Nothing that is oversaturated with formative potential, that is, the self-positing of that which can give and receive form simultaneously into the position of a finite existent. The force is the propulsion of life into life at the same time that it uses life up within the confines of finitude, in which it expends itself beyond the singular indexical point of the individual spatiotemporal site of individuality. This is its destructive element of plasticity, the reconfiguration of the malleable individual which is its ultimate death.²⁹

However, the account of force in Stirner as given above is lacking if mention is not made of Stirner’s account of force in relation to possibility, and particularly his criticism of the colloquial manner in which possibility is invoked. Stirner, much like Hegel in the *Logic*, rejects that model of abstract possibility in which what is merely thinkable as a posited, purely simple identity without contradiction is claimed as something substantial in and of itself;³⁰ and an identity which one could be obligated to pursue in its actualization. This reification of the abstract possibility which creates the spectre of a false hope. Stirner criticizes those whom certain Marxist partisans would crudely call ‘idealist’ today, those whom do not start from the immanent reality of their present conditions, and instead posit mere possibilities and then moralize that they *ought* to be actual, they who posit an abstract notion of a place beyond all contradiction, of true selfhood beyond the wretched self of the Unhappy Consciousness, and make it a calling for themselves.³¹

For Stirner, autonomy does not begin with a world to come, to be actualized, but it begins *here*, with you, and how you relate to otherness as such, how one orients oneself to it, and how one conducts what is immanently and presently necessary—the *insurrection*. In this, Stirner takes after Hegel’s dislike of the political *ought*³² as well as the logical one when it comes to abstract possibility as such—where to say that such a contentless, abstract identity *ought to be* is to affirm

²⁴ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, (Cambridge, 2010), 59-60.

²⁵ UP, 363.

²⁶ See Hegel’s *Jena Lectures*, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/jl/ch01a.htm>.

²⁷ UP, 339.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, (Polity, 2012), 37-38.

³⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, (Cambridge, 2010), 479.

³¹ UP, 342.

³² See Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, (Cambridge, 1991), 22.

its impossibility as something that ought to be realized as actual, but without the primary element of actuality itself as manifestation (of the inner being into the outer),³³ or externalization into its other, its negation, which such a pure self-identical possibility could not allow by its very principle as an abstract, pure possibility.³⁴

When Stirner says that “Possibility and actuality always coincide”,³⁵ he talks of *real* possibility and *real* actuality in the sense of his Hegelian education, and in the manner of force being equivalent to its manifestation. Real possibility is the determinacy of circumstances which necessitate determinate manifestations,³⁶ the circumstances of the production of actuality through the *act* of becoming-manifold, of manifesting force.³⁷ The circumstances, including the capacity, the conditions, and the determinacy of the property and power of the Unique one, find their immanent reflection in the actuality of the force of the insurrectionary, the autonomy that dares to self-rule in spite of any existing mode of dominating actuality that may stake a claim upon its surface.

Remark on Education and Discipline

Education was always important for Stirner, from his initial dissertation on School Rules to his *False Principle of Our Education* and *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum*. In the section I have selected, Stirner praises the education that has brought him about, the critical, religious, and implicitly *Hegelian* education that as taught him restraint from being possessed by desire, dogmatism, giving him the dialectical tools with which he has turned their own discipline(s) against them.³⁸ Yet, that Hegel himself could do this by way of methodology, indicates that Stirner is simply making explicit the radicality of Hegelianism that he learned to embrace from Bauer’s work on Hegel’s radical ‘atheism’, as well as hearing from the old man himself.³⁹ The education that Stirner seems to want is an education that does not eliminate discipline (for evading capture is a discipline of its own) but an education that is post-disciplinary, an education that does not keep its object at a reverent distance, as something that cannot be toyed with or creatively redeployed.⁴⁰ It is an education of mutual consumption of the object of learning, rather than a mere explanation of it as something evermore retained as a fixed referent of knowledge for a knower, it is to develop as a coextension of the ongoing process of education that is self-enjoyment, the autonomous expenditure of life (and hence we re-encounter the question from Bataille, Callois et al of the possibility of an Acephalic science).

The problem in the contemporary understanding of Stirner (and I am not talking about the literature, which is scarce enough, but in the discursive spaces where he is *actually* discussed) is that this disciplinary aspect is missed, and instead we see something addicted to immediacy and saying what it merely pleases—this ignores not only Stirner’s history as a teacher and as a writer

³³ Ibid, *Science of Logic*, (Cambridge, 2010), 477

³⁴ Ibid, 479.

³⁵ UP, 341

³⁶ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, (Cambridge, 2010), 482

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ UP, 344-5.

³⁹ See Bauer’s *Trumpet of the Last Judgement Against Hegel: Atheist and Antichrist*. I apologize in advance to those of you whom will most likely have some difficulty finding this text in English.

⁴⁰ UP, 357. This is much clearer in light of Stirner’s *False Principle* essay.

on education, but equally misses the speculative content of what pleases him, as *Selbstgenuß*. Education as self-consumption, as that which in the words of the *False Principle* affirms student as creator and not merely as creature,⁴¹ is the education that manifests as the force of self-shaping that is the shaping of that self-consciousness that comprehends its ability to self-shape and self-differentiate, to channel the flows of life-using into a mode of self-determined, self-practicing individuality. That this education allows for Stirner to be consumed by others is tied to Stirner's ultimate social goal, that of *mutuality*.⁴²

Mutuality for Stirner can be explained by the speculative judgement that ownness is the unity of The Unique *and* Its Property. Given that property for Stirner simply means to be an object of the subject from the indexical point of view,⁴³ its ownness is tied to the objective as much as the subjective dimension. How he conducts himself in relation to objectivity, to otherness as such, is dialectically built into his own autonomy, and in this sense his autonomy is built into his self-other relation. Add to this Stirner's claim that the feelings of others are his property through the mode of absolute sympathy,⁴⁴ and loving all individuals is a mode of self-enjoyment,⁴⁵ then the fact that Stirner is attempting to exemplify his new mode of 'Unique' self-consciousness suggests that for Stirnerian consciousness the autonomy of the other is built into his own—hence mutuality, **not domination**.

⁴¹ See Stirner, *The False Principle of Our Education*. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/max-stirner-the-false-principle-of-our-education>

⁴² UP, 324.

⁴³ Ibid, 155.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 303.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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This talk was given on two subsequent days as part of The Stirring, a seminar by the Acid Horizon collective given by the author.

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