

## OUTLINE FOR A FILM: HEGEL'S LECTURE

### Storyline:

The door of the lecture hall opens and the camera enters over the shoulder of a student. We see the face of the doorman standing inside briefly in close up as we pass. The camera moves down a side aisle. Hegel is in mid lecture. Other students look up as we pass, but they are very intent on the lecture. The camera separates off from the entering student as he moves into one of the rows, and it pauses at the front of the class. It pans across the class - everyone is in accurate period costume, the wainscotting, wallpaper and decorations (perhaps a bust or two) are all exactly reconstructed as Hegel's Berlin lecture hall of the 1830's. The camera pans around until it is facing the lecturer. He is speaking a Swabian dialect of German (see below). After holding on the lecturer for a moment or two the camera zooms in closer, focusing on his face. The angle of view is slightly below. It then cuts to a position above and behind his left shoulder so that we can see the pages of the manuscript (copied out by hand). This is the only cut in the film. After an interval long enough to strain the viewer slightly the camera begins another movement, describing a curve whose radius becomes progressively longer: it pulls back and swings around him to the right until it is facing the lecturer from the left end of the front row. As it sweeps around this curve it pans over the audience and we see the doorman out of focus at the back of the room, standing in livery with his hands behind his back. The camera then closes in again on the speaker's face, though this time from a level position. After a noticeable interval the camera backs up the side aisle to the back of the hall, and then rests there, with the speaker and the audience in view. After a substantial interval, it turns and views the impassive face of the doorman from the side. It then swings around him and exits frontwards from the hall. End of film as the door swings shut cutting off Hegel's voice, which is not loud enough to carry through.

The following first person description of Hegel's teaching style will provide a guide for the actor. The actor must try to discover the ideas as he reads them, to produce the thought, not just recount it.

Exhausted, morose, he sat there as if collapsed into himself, his head bent down, and while speaking kept turning pages and searching in his long folio notebooks, forward and backward, high and low. His constant clearing of his throat and coughing interrupted any flow of speech. Every sentence stood alone and came out with effort, cut in pieces and jumbled. Every word, every syllable detached itself only reluctantly to receive a strangely thorough emphasis from the metallic-empty voice with its broad Swabian dialect, as if each were the most important. Nevertheless, his whole appearance compelled such a profound respect, such a sense of worthiness, and was so attractive through the naivete of

the most overwhelming seriousness that, in spite of all my discomfort, and though I probably understood little of what was said, I found myself captivated forever...

He faltered even in the beginning, tried to go on, started once more, stopped again, spoke and pondered; the right word seemed to be missing forever, but then it scored most surely; it seemed common and yet inimitably fitting, unusual and yet the only one that was right...Now one had grasped the meaning of the sentence and hoped most ardently to progress. In vain. Instead of moving forward, the thought kept revolving around the same point with similar words. But if one's wearied attention wandered and strayed a few minutes before it suddenly returned with a start to the lecture, it found itself punished by having been torn entirely out of the context. For slowly and deliberately, making use of seemingly insignificant links, some full thought had limited itself to the point of one-sidedness, had split itself into distinctions and involved itself in contradictions whose victorious solution eventually found the strength to compel the reunification of the most recalcitrant elements.

Thus always taking up again carefully what had gone before in order to develop out of it more profoundly in a different form what came later...the most wonderful stream of thought twisted and pressed and struggled, now isolating something, now very comprehensively; occasionally hesitant, then by jerks sweeping along, it flowed irresistibly.

Hegel is reading from his lecture notes on the Philosophy of History. The source should be an early authoritative German edition of his manuscripts.

This film should be seen in the context of the many recent film adaptations of novels by Jane Austen. Austen's novels are about the conflict between emotion and calculation. She clearly favours passion, yet as her heroines pass through their trials - false starts, misapprehensions, dead ends and temporary infatuations - "sense" does prevail. As her characters learn and grow, feeling, or "sensibility," is corrected and channeled. It is the comic dance of the divided self, and its turns are mapped out by the effort to draw distinctions between feeling and "feeling," between "reason" and reasons. The existing descriptions of Hegel's lecture style indicate that he too was engaged in a kind of dance, though one without elegance, lightness or charm. Hegel is

struggling for self liberation; he wants to use the interior movements of the self, the pas-de-deux of the antinomies, to generate the energies that could break through into freedom. This dry, heavy, laborious, all-too-serious and ultimately boring spectacle is a “period” film - the unfolding of a number of periods - and the exact antithesis of the drawing room comedy.

According to Adorno, “Hegel’s publications are more like films of thought than texts. The untutored eye can never capture the details of a film the way it can those of a still image, and so it is with Hegel’s writings.” The oral presentation of Hegel will be even harder to grasp in its details, but will serve to give a better idea of the “feel” and style of Hegel’s thought than any printed book could. In this respect, the passages chosen to be read don’t necessarily have to make sense together. We will see Hegel the same way we would see anyone met in a drawing room - as a whole, as a manner, as a style, as a character, as a type. In this way, film will evaluate philosophy.

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