Thinking beyond the parameters of convention, in a way contrary to it, how can we come to grips with that approach which overcomes differences within the unity of a system, namely, with Hegel's dialectical method? From its inception, Hegel's dialectic has continually been the brunt of attempts to modify, improve, and revamp it. These revisions began with Marx's dialectical materialism and later gathered momentum through the efforts of critical theorists who adjust for the initial "materialist" slant, compensating for the overcompensation.¹ In the wake of these successive adjustments, how can we avoid the historicist mode of interpretation and still rise beyond the monolithic structure of the dialectic? How can we appreciate its simplicity without resorting merely to internal criticism or adopting an artificial, external standpoint that seeks refuge in the narrowness of a worldview?

The attempt to develop these questions will begin by inviting the most notorious disruption of the self-organizing tactics of the dialectic, namely, the play of imagination. In its elemental form, the dialectic instills patterns of organization within the chaos of experience, channeling the creative forces into higher levels of development and ultimately capturing them within a circuit of mediation. In radically siding with otherness, imagination does not introduce another stance of identity, which can in turn be
negated at a subsequent stage of the dialectic. Rather, imagination stands as the most extreme emissary of otherness, occupying a place prior to the inception of dialectic in its effort to mediate opposites within the unity of the Absolute. The self-legitimatizing and self-authenticating character of the dialectic remains inherently problematic. An inventory of this problem becomes possible only by turning toward the outermost periphery of any organizational scheme, and disrupting it through the ecstatic play of imagination. Insofar as ecstasy marks the span of distance in which the opposition of terms can occur, the ensuing reinscription of meaning unfolds from across the widest chasm for dispersing that difference, or textuality.

Ultimately, deconstruction must relish the challenge of allowing this abysmal event to reverberate with an innovativeness alien to the dialectic; the nothingness of this creativity diverges from Absolute Spirit’s calculative path of development, the “cunning of reason” embodied in its historical unfolding. By exploring its latent kinship with language, we can uncover the creases and folds of the dialectic, its discreet manner of occurrence. Among critical theorists, Adorno took the greatest strides toward appreciating the subtleties of language (Sprache), although without tracing the source of its creativity to its intersection with imagination. Only by following the unique conduits of the text, however, can we undo the sedimentation of conventional usage and welcome improvisation at the margins of speech, i.e., the novelty of style. Our discussion will proceed by unveiling: 1) the nondiscursive side of the dialectic, 2) the impact of imagination in monitoring the path of dialectical mediation, and 3) the hiatus and dissonance between the Hegelian nomenclature of the “labor” of thought and the “playful” demeanor of deconstruction which resounds throughout a text.

I. Displaced Anxiety

Language bears the reverberations of tradition and elicits meanings that resonate with those depths. This is an insight concerning the essence of language that Hölderlin helped to spawn during the period of his friendship with Hegel at Tübingen. A sensitivity to the governance within language in its historical setting gives rise to a concern for etymology and, by contrast, to a strategy to combat our reliance on prepacked, sedimented meanings. An eclecticism toward the powers of speech, as it were, takes precedence over the construction of a narrowly confined vocabulary which is tailored to a preset subject matter, a nomenclature imprisoned to convention. And yet Hegel’s thinking will display the irony of adjusting itself to grasp that phenomenon whose