

When I designate myself as 'I', I mean 'me'. When you designate yourself 'I', you mean 'you'. Except, in reading this, you not being me, 'I' always means 'you' and 'you' 'I'. But this does not happen: you are aware of my authorial voice and thus displace the signifier 'I' into 'you', despite their roles being diametrically opposed. You are still an 'I', but a passive 'I' to my active 'I', in the act of writing. In the current performance of reading, which you now enact, however, 'I' (that is, the writer) is passive and you (the reader 'I') is active. Picking apart the linguistic semiotics of Self proves challenging. For, despite being an objective word use to designate and differentiate myself from everything and everyone else, it provides the same role to the everything and everyone else against which I am attempting to differentiate. The irony is clear: every single English speaker uses the exact same signifier to signify their unique identity. And yet, it is used in quotidian communication and interaction without a mass confusion of identity. How can this be? For if the signifier 'I' is to represent Self to anyone else, it must be inherently understood as demonstrating the the 'I'. That is, 'I' and not being in order to effectively communicate through shared linguistic practice in this manner, in order to understand the signifier in such a way to allow communication, the other must possess a pre-reflexive Self that is precisely not dependent upon signification.<sup>1</sup> Self-definition is implicit through a subjective understanding of Other. Community is inherent in Self. In communication, one accepts necessities entailed in shared meaning with other language users while also acknowledging their capacity to mean something totally unique to them. Someone versed in 'jive' talk would appreciate that 'hip' does not signify a bone of the body, but a newcomer to the vernacular would be lost in the wrong field of semantic association.<sup>2</sup> Novalis: interacting Selves 'will, without realising it, have painted their own image before the mirror of reflection [and that] the picture is painted in the position that it paints itself'.<sup>3</sup> One thinks of Velasquez, the viewer-as-mirror in the position of the painting; the I dependent upon reflexion in a non-existent mirror.

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<sup>1</sup> The infinite possibility of misunderstanding does not obviate the possibility of agreement.

<sup>2</sup> Cab Calloway, *The New Cab Calloway's Hepsters Dictionary: Language of Jive* (No publisher, 1944).

<sup>3</sup> Novalis, *Band 2 Das philosophisch-theoretische Werke*, edited by Hans-Joachim Mähl (Munich: Hanser, 1978), 15. See: Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 90-5.