

Getting serious about finiteness

Remarks on Žižek's reading of Heidegger

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Abstract. Žižek's work on Heidegger has not been examined in the same way as his work on Hegel, Lacan, Marx and Kant. In order to shed light on his political thought – oscillating between a heroic Leninism and a subversive *Ideologiekritik* – we are reconstructing his critique of Heidegger as it follows from the first chapter of *The Ticklish Subject*. In that we want to show how his critique is essentially Kantian – Which means for Žižek: A critique that doesn't retreat from the full consequences of the subject's finiteness. In a last step we are showing how his doubled political position follows from this and hint at the intuition that his heroic Leninism itself could be conceived as a sort of retreat from those very consequences.

Those who find themselves challenged by Žižek's thinking, which is as provocative as it is sharp, are immediately thrown into a wild ride through transcendental philosophy and political theory, in which - to take up a turn of Lacan's - the cat can no longer find its cubs. Where exactly the connections run from Žižek's Kant and his Hegel to the political interventions is difficult to discern - while one does at the same time have the feeling that

he is repeating a fundamental matrix over and over again in different words. Mustn't the punchline in an argument with Žižek be to find the right, quasi-dialectical answer to his paratactic, associative - and highly productive - maelstrom of thought in a sober, academic, most boring analysis? In order to shed a little light on Žižek's philosophy, we want to link up below with his work on Heidegger, which, as he himself repeatedly remarks (cf. Žižek 1999 [TS]: 13), at least marks the chronological start of his thinking.

Žižek attempts to open up a way out of the usual dilemma vis-à-vis Heidegger by, on the one hand, thoroughly asserting that „Heidegger did not engage in the Nazi political project ,in spite of' his his ontological philosophical approach, but *because of it*" (TS: 14), and on the other hand vehemently argues for "not criminalising" Heidegger, but rather taking him seriously as a "philosophical classic" (cf. Žižek 2015: unpaginated) and not avoiding the uncomfortable questions he poses to our concepts of humanity, democracy and liberal freedom. Žižek's engagement with Heidegger has provoked a number of responses and connections (cf. Woodson: 2020; de Beistegui: 2007; Montero: 2021) and Brockelman even suggests that Žižek's philosophical oeuvre should be understood in terms of his concept of and commitment to *finiteness* - which in turn draws substantially from Žižek's work on Heidegger (cf. Brockelman: 2008).

In what follows, we want to build on this intuition and trace this work on Heidegger in a careful reconstruction from the first chapter of *The Ticklish Subject* - Žižek's linkage to and his inherent critique of Heidegger. In doing so, we want to show how this work is essentially mediated by Kant: Žižek's path leads from Kant to Heidegger *and back again* - his critique of Heidegger is essentially Kantian and so he sees Heidegger's reading of Kant as "crucial" (TS: 22) in order to simultaneously identify Heidegger's "great achievement" (TS: 26) and his "inherent failure" (TS: 11). He turns both Kant and Heidegger against themselves to make clear in both how they recoil from the *full consequences of finiteness*. We will conclude by touching on the crucial question of the political dimension of this deployment of finiteness in order to shed new light on Žižek's heroic Leninism: A light which highlights Žižek's reliance on heroism as a retreat from finiteness.

2. Noumenal Freedom as receding: From Kant to Heidegger

Heidegger's project in *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* is the eponymous attempt to counter the classical - especially neo-Kantian - reading of Kant as an epistemologist with a specifically metaphysical one. But this can just as well be called an "anti-metaphysical" reading, insofar as it recognises in Kant a thoroughly revolutionary position of completely

refounding metaphysics as a science, which in a certain way resonates in Heidegger's later project of a "Verwindung der Metaphysik".ⁱ According to Heidegger, the decisive factor for this exceptional position of the Kantian project is now the specific role that *finitude* plays in it - which leads to the problem of *transcendental imagination*. We will now first briefly sketch this reading of Heidegger, insofar as it interests us here in the context of Žižek's critique, in order to mark in particular the position that the transcendental imagination plays in it. Subsequently, it is important to describe Kant's inconsistency in the very problem of imagination that Žižek (*with* Heidegger) diagnoses.

2.1. *Finitude and imagination*

Heidegger follows Kant's foundation of metaphysics - which here means above all: the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* - in four stages: 1. the abstract distinction of finite cognition into the elements of *Anschauung* and *Denken*: Heidegger's reconstruction of transcendental aesthetics and logic (Heidegger 1929 [KM]: 43-58). 2. the necessity of the concrete *unity* of these elements if they are to be able to relate to each other: Heidegger's lead to the necessity of a transcendental deduction (KM: 58-68). The possibility of this unity, in which the necessity of the mediating term of the *imagination* is indicated: Heidegger's reconstruction of the transcendental deduction (KM: 69-88). The formulation of this unity as imagination, which *temporalises* the pure concepts of understanding, i.e. brings them to pure *Anschauung* (as whose primary form *time* was determined in 1.): Heidegger's reconstruction of transcendental schematism (KM: 88-113).

The core of Heidegger's reading, which is of interest to us, is that the initial separation into *sensuous intuition* and *thought* follows from the *finiteness* of human cognition - this refers first of all to the simple fact that finite perception is *dependent on a being* that it does not itself produce. But if sensuous intuition is to be *cognition*, then it must be made accessible to others: It needs a detour via the general, via that which is common to several individual intuitions - it needs thinking. This has the initially paradoxical consequence that a finite, i.e. receptive cognition, is dependent on the "active" performance of the detour via the generalⁱⁱ - precisely this is the *finiteness* of cognition, a divine, infinite cognition would not need this: "Thinking as such is therefore already the mark of finiteness. (KM: 24).

Then, however, the question arises as to the common ground of thought and sensuous intuition that makes this reference of thought to sensuous intuition comprehensible as possible: Heidegger first identifies this in Kant in the function of

synthesis, which, on the one hand, makes this "capable of conceptualisation" on the level of intuition, i.e. collects it to such an extent that it can contain common ground with other intuitions, and which, on the other hand, constitutes the essence of understanding, insofar as it summarises this common ground in concepts: "But in order for pure intuition to be determinable through pure concepts, its manifold must be taken from dispersion, i.e. it must have been passed through and collected. This mutual preparation-for-one-another takes place in that action which Kant generally calls synthesis." (KM: 62).

Kant calls the faculty in which synthesis is generally founded "imagination", the specific faculty in which the conceptual synthesis of understanding is rooted "apperception". This results in a "trinity of pure intuition, pure imagination and pure apperception" (KM: 84), in which imagination constitutes the common "root" of cognition, to which Kant points as the "unknown" (cf. KM: 37).

2.2. Kant's retreat

The extremely schematic reconstruction is only intended to help us put the "trouble with transcendental imagination" (TS: 28) that constitute the core of Žižek's engagement with Heidegger into context. These difficulties arise with regard to the location of the imagination in the conceptual pairs passive-receptive/active-conceptual and phenomenal/noumenal: Žižek's (and also Heidegger's) thesis will be that the imagination is precisely the "faculty" that subverts these distinctions. This is what, according to both, Kant is not quite able to accept.

First of all, this difficulty crystallises in the question of whether the "synthesis" of the imagination is a descendant of that of the understanding or, on the contrary, superior to it:

"is "synthesis generally speaking ... the mere operation of imagination" [Kant 1781 [KrV]: A77; note NG], with Understanding as a secondary capacity intervening after imagination has already done its work, or is it that "pure synthesis, represented generally, gives us the pure conception of the understanding" [KrV: A78; note NG], so that the synthesis of imagination is merely the application of the synthetic power of understanding at a lower, more primitive, pre-cognitive level?" (TS: 43).

As we have already seen, Heidegger's choice clearly falls on the former optionⁱⁱⁱ - As Žižek also attests, Kant *ultimately* "recoiled from this radical step" (TS: 29).

Connected to this is the further difficulty of defining the imagination in terms of the pair passive-receptive/active-conceptual - we already saw Heidegger's version of this difficulty in its outlines in the last section: a finite, receptive *Anschauung* implies a conceptual performance, whereby the common root of both is neither receptive nor conceptual in the strict sense. Žižek formulates this - referring to the imagination as such, not yet the specifically transcendental one - simply thus: "imagination is simultaneously receptive and positing, "passive" (in it, we are affected by sensible images) and "active" (the subject himself gives birth to these images, so that this affliction is self-affection)." (TS: 27).

The last difficulty now concerns the phenomenal/noumenal pair. If we take the path - explicitly taken by Kant at least in the A-edition - of understanding the transcendental imagination as the root of synthesis in general, then it is also the root of the "transcendental spontaneity/freedom" as which the transcendental apperception and thus the understanding is conceptualized (cf. e.g. KrV: B132). Now, according to Žižek, Kant finds himself in a dead end as far as the location of this transcendental freedom is concerned: on the one hand, he conceives it - in the resolution of the dynamic antinomies (cf. KrV: A532/B560-A565/B593) - as noumenal. Insofar as we are phenomenal beings, we are enclosed in the net of causality - As noumenal beings, on the other hand, we are free, moral subjects (therefore both theses of the dynamic antinomies can be true). On the other hand, however, a crucial passage in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* makes it clear that transcendental freedom would dissolve as directly noumenal. If we had direct access to the noumenal sphere, the following would happen according to Kant: "The behaviour of men [...] would thus be transformed into a mere mechanism, where, as in the puppet play, everything would *gesticulate* well, but there would be *no life* to be found in the figures." (KpV: AA147)

Žižek concludes: "Transcendental freedom and/or spontaneity itself is thus in a sense phenomenal: it occurs only in so far as the noumenal sphere is not accessible to the subject." (TS: 25). In this sense, *finitude* is radically irreducible: even the noumenal side of subjectivity, the autonomy of the moral law - as which Kant spells out the *noumenal* in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* - is bound to finitude, in which the noumenal remains inaccessible.

This is why Žižek sides with Heidegger on the question of the Davos disputation between Heidegger and Cassirer. Cassirer simply contrasts temporality (finitude) and eternity when he praises the achievements of man as a "symbolic animal" to create the eternal universe of meanings and values and contrasts them with the universe of facts.

"Against this distinction, Heidegger demonstrates how the "immortality" and "eternity" of the symbolic system of Values and Meanings, irreducible to the level of empirically given positive facts, can emerge only as part of the existence of a finite and mortal being" (TS: 27).

Kant, in turn, falls behind this crucial insight when he *nevertheless* sometimes understands transcendental freedom as noumenal.^{iv} This is where Žižek sees Heidegger's merit, which he follows:

"Heidegger's great achievement was that he clearly perceived this Kantian deadlock, linking it to Kant's unwillingness to draw all the consequences from the finitude of the transcendental subject: Kant's 'regression' into traditional metaphysics occurs the moment he interprets the spontaneity of transcendental apperception as the proof that the subject has a noumenal side which is not subject to the causal constraints binding all phenomena." (TS: 26)

Kant, contrary to his own insight, asserts a direct, traditionally metaphysical access to the noumenal when he thinks of freedom as noumenal. This is strictly correlative to his refusal to think the categories of understanding against the background of the transcendental imagination (and not vice versa).

3. The Pre-Synthetic Imagination: From Heidegger to Kant

Up to this point, then, Žižek remains on the paths of (early) Heidegger. Let us now try to understand Žižek's central thesis that Heidegger himself does not draw all the consequences from finitude. At what point does Heidegger remain inconsistent, what is his "inherent failure"? Žižek's thesis will be that Heidegger's failure is his "ontologization" (TS: 54)^v of the "regress dimension" (KM: 20) of Kant's grounding of metaphysics, that is, to think of it as a sphere of an original unity that is complete in itself. To this end, Žižek brings the concept of a "pre-synthetic imagination" (TS: 31) into play and, in the final decisive step, draws on Kant's solution of the mathematical antinomies. So let us first clarify the concept of "pre-synthetic imagination" in order to then understand the connection with the mathematical antinomies.

3.1. The Night of the World

Žižek radicalises Heidegger's thesis that Kant recoils from imagination to the effect that Kant recoils from the *negative* dimension of imagination (cf. TS: 31-32). Perhaps Žižek's critique of Heidegger at this point could be expressed thus: If the power of imagination were a primarily unifying, *synthetic* force - would not Kant then even be in the right when he conceives it as a derivative of the categories of understanding and their synthesis? In contrast, Žižek insists on the, as it were, *analytical* power of the imagination: imagination cannot (only) combine elements of perception into an organic whole, but on the contrary, it is able to "treat as effectively existing something that is merely a component of a living Whole" (TS: 32). Žižek illustrates this dimension of the imagination with the reference to Hegel that is probably most persistently repeated within his discourse: the two passages on the "night of the world", once in the manuscripts on the *Jenaer Realphilosophie* and once in the well-known passage from the Preface to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. In this - as in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch (cf. TS: 35) - Žižek sees the most apt illustration of the dimension of a *pre-synthetic imagination* that is able to tear apart the parts of a whole that belong together in the "pre-symbolic, 'natural' real" (TS: 33), to imagine a "colour without shape, a shape without body" (TS: 30) and the like.

Žižek's thesis is that this pre-synthetic imagination is primary in relation to the synthetic imagination - that only through it can we understand how the realm of phenomena opens up. The reason in a nutshell is: because we are *finite*, the pre-synthetic imagination is prior to the synthetic one. Being finite means precisely not having access to a complete synthesis:

"because of the subject's irreducible finitude, the very endeavour of 'synthesis' is always minimally 'violent' and disruptive. That is to say, the unity the subject endeavours to impose on the sensuous multitude via its synthetic activity is always erratic, eccentric, unbalanced, 'unsound', something that is externally and violently imposed on to the multitude, never a simple impassive act of discerning the inherent subterranean connections between the *membra disjecta*. In this precise sense, every synthetic unity is based on an act of 'repression', and therefore generates some indivisible remainder." (TS: 32-33)

The pre-synthetic imagination is primary - that is, every "synthesis" still bears the mark of this negative force in the form of a "indivisible remainder", an element within the synthetic whole that does not add up. And this is precisely the mark of finitude. In this respect, the pre-synthetic imagination is the force that is "violently installing the domain of *membra disjecta*, of *phenomena* in the most radical sense of the term." (TS: 31). The transition from the pre-symbolic real to the objective reality constituted by the categories of

understanding does not take place directly, but through the mediating moment of this "violent installing" - this is Žižek's (Hegelian) reading of the role played by the imagination as the "common root" of *Anschauung* and *Verstand* in the crucial passages of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*.^{vi}

This leads to a further radicalisation of Heidegger: it is not only the case that there are no neutral "zero-ground elements" in the subject's relation to the world - to this extent, Heidegger certainly goes along with the decisive step in Kant's deconstruction of the basic coordinates of the classical empiricism/rationalism problem - but the very idea of such a neutral starting point proves to be the *product of the imagination*, and in its pre-synthetic form. If we conceive of the imagination only as synthetic, we presuppose a kind of primordial substance that must be synthesised, a "level that must be retroactively presupposed, but can never actually be *encountered*" (TS: 33). - Žižek's stake now is that of the closed circle: "we never exit the circle of imagination, since the very zero-level mythic presupposition of synthetic imagination, as the 'stuff' on with which it works, is imagination itself at its purest and most violent, imagination in its negative, disruptive aspect" (ibid.). The idea of a primordial layer of unconnected elements that "our spirit" must synthesise is precisely the "night of the world", our imagination in its pre-synthetic form.

3.2. The Antinomies, the Acosmism, the Pre-Ontological

So far, one could perhaps say, we remain within a radicalisation of Heidegger without knowing the exact point of his "inherent failure". For this, we must now understand Žižek's thesis that the status of this sphere of pre-synthetic imagination is *pre-ontological* - that is, *not-whole*^{vii}. This thesis, as we have already indicated, builds on Kant's resolution of the mathematical antinomies.^{viii}

So what are the mathematical antinomies? Roughly speaking, they are the contradictions that arise when we think of the world as a self-contained totality. They are the first and second antinomies from the transcendental dialectic: The world has a beginning in time and a limit in space//The world has no beginning in time and no limit in space - Everything in the world can be reduced to simplest parts/Nothing in the world can be reduced to simplest parts (cf. KrV: A426/B454-A443/B471). Kant's resolution, as we know, is that *both theses* are false. They are so "because the world does not exist at all in itself (independently of the regressive series of my conceptions) [and] so it exists neither as an *in itself infinite*, nor as an *in itself finite whole*. " (KrV: A505/B533).

This is Kant's "acosmism" - In Žižek's words, "there *is* no 'cosmos'; the very notion of cosmos as the ontologically fully constituted positive totality is inconsistent". (TS: 60). And Žižek's perhaps most central, anti-metaphysical impulse is to no longer fall behind this insight. On the one hand, this means holding on to the *primacy of* mathematical antinomies over dynamic antinomies: The dynamic antinomies arise from the secondary attempt to save the unity of the realm of phenomena (the "world") by transposing the inherent contradiction *within* this realm into the external contradiction *between* the mutually external realms of the phenomenal and the noumenal, through the introduction of an extra-worldly entity such as the noumenal soul or God, which functions as an external guarantee of the world (cf. TS: 38). And on the other hand, this means not to "ontologize" the realm of the self-contradictory, "monstrous real" (ibid.) again "under the table" - this is what the epistemological reading of this contradiction^{ix} does in a paradigmatic way: the world is complete in itself, but we as finite subjects simply cannot grasp it. In Žižek's words, "the mistake of the identification of (self-)consciousness with misrecognition, with an epistemological obstacle, is that it stealthily (re)introduces the standard, premodern 'cosmological' notion of reality as a positive order of being [...] Consequently, the only way account effectively for the status of (self-)consciousness is to assert the *ontological incompleteness of 'reality' itself.*" (TS: 60). The realm of the "monstrous real" that underlies the ontological constitution of reality - and insofar is *precisely the realm of the presynthetic imagination* that underlies the synthetic imagination and the categories of understanding built upon it - is strictly *pre-ontological*.

3.3. Heidegger's retreat

We can now pinpoint precisely the point of Heidegger's "inherent failure" according to Žižek: Heidegger himself "ontologizes" this realm^x, when he conceives of the fundamental position of the subject as "being-in-the-world", and thus falls back into a metaphysical, pre-modern cosmology - He likewise recoils from the abyss of the transcendental imagination, which is outwardly announced by the fact that he abandons Kant as a central reference point and - even more so - thinks he has to purify his thinking of the remnants of "transcendental subjectivism".

Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" designates precisely - and in this way it has been taken up in the many "anti-Cartesian" currents, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world^{xi} - the realm of an irreducible being-integrated into the whole of the significant life-world, in which *Dasein* finds itself as an always already engaged agent, as always already "in concern

(*Sorge*)". As a consequence, the suspension of this whole in anxiety only means a secondary and momentary suspension, it is - in Heidegger's words - "derived" from the original whole of being-in-the-world; or - in the vocabulary developed here: The synthetic imagination precedes the pre-synthetic one. In contrast, Žižek shows how the momentary detachment from my lifeworld context can only take place "because from the very beginning something in the subject resists complete enclosure in its lifeworld context" (TS: 63)^{xii} - this is shown in the fundamental sphere of the pre-synthetic imagination.^{xiii}

4. Lenin and Subversion - Political Consequences

So we saw how Žižek attests to *both* Heidegger *and* Kant that "recoiling from imagination" that the former attests to the latter. He does this in a *Kantian* way by insisting on *finitude* and on the recognition of the *ontological incompleteness of the real itself* - by insisting, in other words, on a *pre-ontological* level whose domain is the pre-synthetic imagination; by placing Kant's resolution of the mathematical antinomies at the centre. In doing so, the ontological incompleteness of the real forms the exact counterpart to the excessive gesture of the pre-synthetic imagination, which is the basis for the transcendental constitution of stable reality through the categories of understanding (synthetic imagination).

This has an immediate political consequence, insofar as this "supplement" of the *not-whole* real to a *whole* reality is necessary, a priori: "In this precise sense, every ontology is 'political': based on a disavowed contingent 'subjective' act of decision." (TS: 158). This realm of supplementation is what Žižek refers to with the Marxian term "ideology" - he thus politicizes the transcendental constitution of reality by claiming that the sphere of transcendental imagination - pre-synthetic and synthetic - necessarily makes use of certain phantasms that are socially constituted (cf. Sharpe 2008: 17).

This leads us to the political consequence he draws from his Heidegger/Kant critique. The "ontologization" of the noumenal freedom of the subject in Kant and of *Sorge*, the lifeworld context in Heidegger, *both* lead to the opposition of two distinct orders - the noumenal/phenomenal and the ontological/ontic. Politically, this leads to the impossible task of realizing the former order: in Kant, the regulative idea of the unconditioned, a "*démocratie à venir*, slowly approached, but always kept at a distance" (TS: 238) and in Heidegger, the realization of the "ontological essence", which is revealed in the temporary suspension of being-in-the-world, in an ontic-political system. This critique of the ideal asserting itself as impossible also forms the fundamental matrix of Žižek's engagement

with Badiou, Laclau, Balibar and Rancière - In essence, he repeats precisely the work on Heidegger in this work on contemporary French philosophy, notwithstanding all the valuable individual analyses and differences.

So let's start with the explicit political dimension of his work on Heidegger and then, by repeating it on the aforementioned authors - we will limit ourselves to a very schematic analysis of his reading of Badiou - end up with Žižek's own concrete political conclusions.

Žižek states that Heideggerians are "eternally in search of a positive, ontic political system that would come closest to the epochal ontological truth - a strategy which inevitably leads to error" (TS: 13) - it inevitably fails because it strictly opposes the ontological dimension, analogous to Kant's noumenal sphere, to the ontic, phenomenal one from the outset. In Heidegger's affirmation (and the affirmations of Heideggerians in relation to other political projects) that "National Socialism misses its inner greatness" - that there is an "ontological" dimension beneath the "merely ontic" dimension of concrete action - Žižek thus recognises the fundamental ideological operation of "maintaining an inner distance towards – of claiming that there something more beneath it, a non-ideological kernel" (TS: 14). This "more beneath" is precisely the first of the two distinct orders mentioned above, the "ontologized" realm of the pre-synthetic imagination. The point of Žižek's insistence on finitude is: No, there is nothing fully constituted "more beneath" - there is only a self-contradictory real that cannot be separated from its appearance.

In this ontologization, the pre-synthetic imagination is overlooked, "as the most radical dimension of subjectivity, as that against the violent synthetic imposition of a (New) Order - the Event of Historical Disclosure of Being - is the defence." (TS: 50). But does this not mean that the purely negative, "most radical" dimension of subjectivity cannot be ontologized at all - and consequently we end up again with the Kantian impossible task, whose underlying opposition is now precisely the "pre-ontological" and the "ontological"?

Žižek makes it clear, however, that he is not concerned with *denying the* dimension of the event (Heideggerian: the disclosure of being as the truth of a historical phase). He even tries to distinguish an authentic event from the mere illusion of the same.^{xiv} This leads to a critical distinction that Žižek tries to make: That between the *void before the event* ("*subject*", cf. TS: 158-161) and *the event* itself ("*subjectification*", cf. *ibid.*). The break with the order of being presupposes a prior, purely negative *act to* which the event can then only refer as a secondary process in order to design the lines of flight of a new order from there (cf. TS: 220) - This negative act is simply another name for the pre-synthetic imagination.^{xv} The event, the "disclosure of being" is then the above-mentioned

"defence" of the trauma of the encounter with a radical void, politically turned: a radical "No!"^{xvi}. With Žižek, the duality of "being-in-the-world"/"disclosure of being", in both sides of which the synthetic imagination works, thus results in the triad of "pre-synthetic imagination"/"event"/"ontologization"^{xvii}.

This introduction of a third, purely negative element has two political consequences that are in some tension with each other: First, it leads to an abandonment of the fear of ontologization. Žižek's thesis, which sounds paradoxical at first, is that it is precisely the ontologization of the realm of the pre-synthetic imagination into a second realm behind or below phenomena that leads to the fear of the transition from the second to the first realm - Politically speaking: The ontologization of the event leads precisely to the fear of its ontologization into a concrete political system, to the fear of the "betrayal" of the event when it is translated into concrete political acts: "the fear of the impending 'ontologization' of the proper political act, of its catastrophic transposition into the positive order of Being, is a false fear that results from a kind of perspective illusion" (TS: 238) - This perspective illusion consists in not seeing that the event *itself* (the "proper political act") *is* already a kind of betrayal of the preceding, purely negative act of the pre-synthetic imagination. The transposition into a (new) order, as a betrayal of the betrayal, is the only way to remain truly faithful to the event.

In concrete terms, this leads to Žižek's fascination with Leninist politics, which does not shy away from the necessary compromises, atrocities and the etceteras, but bears the consequences of its own choice - the act of pre-synthetic imagination that opens the space for a truth event like the October Revolution - to such an extent that in the process of loyalty to this choice, the very content of the choice itself is perverted and transformed (cf. TS: 235-236). In *The Incontinence of the Void*, Žižek calls this the necessary "wrong" choice for "social-democratic reformism" (as opposed to the "right" choice for radical revolution, which, however, gets caught up in the problematic of the Kantian unconditional), which can only open up an event in a cascade of particular demands - this event in turn, as a betrayal of the negative gesture, is itself only the beginning of the betrayal of betrayal, "a mess, of a long and arduous confused process full of new dangers." (Žižek 2017: 253). Commitment to finitude here, according to Žižek, means the "heroic readiness to endure the conversion of the subversive undermining of the existing System [of the event, note NG] to the principle of a new positive Order" (TS: 238). At this end of Žižek's finitude is the heroic Leninist who accepts the event but does not ontologize it, does not "fetishize" it, but remains faithful to it by betraying it.

Secondly, the introduction of the negative element as the "most radical dimension of subjectivity", leads to the reverse recognition that there is from the outset no "Order of Being as a positive, ontologically consistent Whole" (ibid.). That is to say - and to this extent this intervention is itself Kantian - the supplementation of the order of being by an excessive element of "decision" is *a priori* necessary: The very order of being (the "being-in-the-world") that supposedly confronts the event is *itself based on such an event* - Referring to Rancière's notion of "order of police" (in this sense strictly analogous to Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" and Badiou's "being"), Žižek says: "The order of police is never simply a positive order; in order to function at all, it has to cheat, to misname, and so on - *in short, to engage in politics*, to do what its subversive opponents are supposed to do." (TS: 235).

So it is the concrete political task to expose these denied, political acts at the base of the order - this is Žižek's notion of *ideology critique*. This is the position of the one who, by simply demanding the explicit message of power (democracy, equality, the rule of law, ...) for areas that are normally subject to the denied politicization, brings power into contradiction with its denied political basis.^{xviii} On this side of Žižek's finitude, then, is the subversive critic of ideology, who publicly takes power at its word and thus reveals its dependence on a political act.

5. Heroism - A retreat by Žižek?

Let us summarize: With Heidegger, Žižek diagnoses Kant's retreat from finitude when he thinks of the freedom of the subject as a noumenal sphere distinct from the phenomena. With Kant, Žižek in turn attests to Heidegger a similar retreat when he thinks of the subject primarily as "being-in-the-world" and the momentary breaking open of it as the revelation of a deeper, distinct, ontological truth. The political consequences of this finitude lead Žižek to the two positions of the Leninist and the subversive critic of ideology, both of whom accept the finitude - once of the event, once of the order of being - with its consequences.

In a final step, we want to give a – to an almost irresponsible extent brief - outlook on what we think is one of the main difficulties in which Žižek finds himself after this constellation. It crystallises in the pathos of heroism that Žižek repeatedly falls into when describing the authentic Leninist who dares to walk through history without the protection of the great Other. As Brockelman quite rightly writes: "the voice of finitude is not the anguished cry of Dasein facing its 'being-toward-death' in anxious honesty: instead, we

face our finitude, so Žižek, when we shrug off the guilt and anxiety which can only emerge when we take being as a whole." (Brockelman 2008: xviii) - does the same not apply to heroism? Doesn't the insight into finitude, into the undermining of every truth event through the radically negative gesture of the pre-synthetic imagination also undermine the basis for this pathos? I think the Žižek of the heroic - and incidentally quasi-existentialist - Leninist should be countered at this point with the Žižek of modesty. In many places - for example, in the quoted passage on reformism - there is another strand running under the pathos: a certain modesty that simply insists on the right particular demands with all sharpness. It is the Žižek who reveres in Greta Thunberg the "cold rationality" and naivety of simple, modest insight.^{xix} If we get serious about finitude, the pastoral pathos, the heroism of a Heidegger, perhaps becomes the provocative irony of a Žižek who recalls the modesty of naïve demands at crucial moments.

Notes.

- i Žižek hints at this connection, albeit via Heidegger's Nietzsche-reading - thus Heidegger agrees with Nietzsche insofar as there is no direct way out of metaphysics: "the only way to break the metaphysical closure is to "pass through it" in its most dangerous form, to endure the pain of metaphysical nihilism at its most extreme" (TS: 11) - It is in "nihilism" that the problem of finitude is ultimately expressed. We will not pursue this specific approach to the problem of finitude via Nietzsche and nihilism here (cf. Woodson 2020).
- ii Cf. the ambiguity that Heidegger identifies at the outset as one of the decisive questions: "how can a finite being, which as such is at the mercy of the existing and dependent on its acceptance, recognise, i.e. look at, the existing before all acceptance, without being its 'creator'?" (KM: 38).
- iii Cf. also Heidegger's explicit formulation of Kant's "retreat from imagination" in the transition from the A to the B edition: "Instead of 'function of the soul', he now wants to have written: 'function of the understanding'. Thus pure synthesis is assigned to pure understanding. The pure imagination has become dispensable as a separate faculty" (KM: 161f.).
- iv Cf. also: "Žižek (with Heidegger) argues that Kant was the first thinker to broach finitude as the starting point for philosophical inquiry [...] Nevertheless, Žižek asserts that Kant was never able to fully think through the radical nature of his broaching of the epistemic and moral finitude of our human being [...]. In the first Critique, Žižek argues, in Kant's postulation of the empty subject of apperception, he introduced a post-metaphysical conception of subjectivity, yet repeatedly withdrew from this postulation by suggesting that the 'spontaneous' moral subject is a noumenal - and so transcendent, not just transcendental - freedom." (Sharpe 2008: 2)
- v Žižek uses the term "ontologization" in reference to the realm of "not yet quite speaking", implicit speaking, which he associates with the realm of the pre-ontological, which we will find out to be Žižek's characterization of the realm of a "pre-synthetic imagination" - We thus transfer here from this specific passage to his critique of Heidegger.
- vi Cf. also: "if one brings his [Kant's, note NG] line of thought to its conclusion, one has to presuppose, between direct animality and human freedom subordinated to Law, the monstrosity of a pre-synthetic imagination 'run amok', generating spectral apparitions of partial objects". (TS: 52).
- vii At this point, a discussion of Lacan's "formulas of sexuation" would have to make the ontological content of the logic of the *not-all/not-whole* explicit. Cf. Žižek, 1993: 53-58.
- viii We must exclude Žižek's discussion of the "sublime" from the third critique here, even though it contributes to the justification of the thesis of pre-ontological status. Nevertheless, we think we can make this justification comprehensible in its main features.
- ix On this level, of course, there is a deep kinship between Žižek and Heidegger: to read Kant's project as epistemology is to fundamentally misunderstand it.
- x See also Brockelman's critique of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche as one that reintroduces the metaphysical whole of an "original meaning" underhand. Brockelman 2008: xvi.
- xi These are the "clichés of today's American appropriation of Heidegger" that Žižek speaks of, emphasizing that "he, along with Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty and others, elaborated the conceptual framework that enables us to get rid of the rationalist notion of subject as an autonomous agent who, excluded from the world, processes data provided by the senses in a computer-like way". (TS: 62).
- xii In order to explain how Heidegger's *Unheimlichkeit* and his variant of man's original "being out of joint" have a different meaning, we would have to enter into Žižek's discussion of the triad beautiful/sublime/monstrous, which we omit here (cf. TS: 46-50).
- xiii Žižek of course designates this "something" that resists enclosure, with the Freud-Lacanian notion of the *Unconscious*, which is far from denoting the opaque horizon of our lifeworld that we can never go behind: "the 'Unconscious' is, rather, the disembodied rational machine that follows its path irrespective of the demands of the subject's life-world". (TS: 62) - This "irrespective of the demands" is the enclosure of the subject in itself that characterizes the "night of the world" of the pre-synthetic imagination.
- xiv "there definitely *is* a difference between an authentic Truth-Event and its semblance, and this difference lies in the fact that in a Truth-Event the void of the death drive, of radical negativity, a gap that momentarily suspends the Order of Being, continues to resonate" (TS: 162-163). We paraphrase: Yes, there are authentic events that cannot be reduced to or derived from the chain of positive order, but the truth-event can only take place *because of* the finitude, the "holeiness" of the non-whole real, and only the persistence of elements in which these holes "make themselves felt" marks a real event. Along this line, Žižek attempts in several places to draw a distinction between the authentic event of the October Revolution and the pseudo-event of Hitler's seizure of power.
- xv As is - so it seems in conceiving Žižek's fundamental matrix - the "Unconscious", the "Night of the World", the "Death Drive" and all the etceteras.
- xvi Cf. Žižek's brief defence of the political revolutions in Eastern Europe in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Žižek can understand them as authentic events because for him the radical "No!" to the

- existing order is primary - the subsequent failed translation into a new order that would do justice to the hopes and dreams is secondary in comparison. For Badiou, on the other hand, the fact that no stable community of "faithful disciples" emerged towards this event shows that it was not a real event. TS: 220.
- xvii Or in the words of the work on Badiou - and this is the terminology Žižek always uses outside his struggle with Heidegger: "subject"/"subjectivation(truth-event)"/"translation into new, positive order of being". Cf. TS: 158-161. At this point we think we can hear a certain iridescence in Žižek's notions: The event is sometimes the negative disruption itself (and therefore what he calls "subject"), sometimes already the first germ of positivization. We will not pursue this difficulty any further.
- xviii An example from my own political practice is the struggle in Germany over the "Hambacher Forst", one of the last primeval forests in Germany, which is (or "was" as optimists might put it) threatened by deforestation due to the expansion of an open-cast lignite mine. In this case, the power invokes (among other things) the right of ownership - but at the same time it is bent, denied and broken at every turn when it comes to the rights of the residents in the villages that were also cleared for the expansion. A powerful move was to claim the right to property (the right to home, to charge it even further) also for the residents - to bring the power into public contradiction between its obscene basis and its explicit message.
- xix Cf. Žižek 2020.

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