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## Mind the gap! An exercise in concrete universality

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### Introduction: Putting into practice the warning: mind the gap

The London Underground welcomes its passengers with the phrase: *mind the gap between the platform and the train*. It is, in fact, as if the London Underground is warning us about the nature of the world itself, and not simply delivering a polite caution. To paraphrase, ‘be aware of the crack that exists between the infrastructure and the superstructures’—says the London Underground. This public-health signal aims to prevent individuals from unconsciously stepping into this in-between space. However, the signal is related to the health of the public, rather than to the public health. Its proper interpretation resonates with a larger meaning: the way we should view reality. I appropriate the phrase: *mind the gap* as a general warning. In particular, I employ the idea of *the gap* to denote various areas where one may have inexorable and irreducible differences. If such gap is collapsed, then the assumption is that a fallacy in argumentation occurs. In this paper, I argue that the warning: *mind the gap* is useful in allowing us to conceptualize (1) the nature of the agent via the inherent gap of the agent, (2) the nature of knowledge via the ontology-epistemology gap, and (3) the nature of reality via the real-actual-empirical gap. My aim is neither to present an overview of the theories here employed nor to provide a critique of their concepts; but rather, I aim to practice the art of confronting ideas, such as in (1) (2) and (3), with examples as a concrete exercise in learning, and as a way to contribute to them.

In what follows, I draw upon Žižek’s reading of (1) the inherent gap of the subject or

agent. Here, I coin the notion of the fallacy of de-agentification to hypothesize what occurs when one does not mind such gap. Then I draw upon the philosophy of critical realism to introduce notions by which to conceptualize (2) the gap between ontology and epistemology and (3) the gaps between the realm of the real, the realm of the actual, and the realm of the empirical, and the fallacies that result when these gaps are collapsed; namely, what in critical realists terms is known as the epistemic fallacy and the fallacy of actualism. I conclude with an exemplary model of closure by drawing upon Jameson's model of interpretation in literary theory. This model consists of three interpretative horizons—the political horizon, the horizon of the deadlock, and the horizon of history. Each of the horizons is illustrated via various examples from narratives and film. Unlike the application of these three horizons in literary texts, it is important to remember that the ultimate universalizing horizon of history, as the future, is open.

## **Mind the inherent gap of the agent! Or else, the fallacy of de-agentification**

The inherent gap of the agent, that which Žižek (2006b: 38) illustrates as “the inherent gap of the One ... [is] the minimal gap between an element [as agent] and itself, the Void of its own place of inscription”. What happens if this minimal gap is collapsed, i.e., if we do not mind inherent gap of the agent? A hypothesis is that we obtain symptoms or manifestations of dichotomies within the agent that function as signaling devices, which point to the perspective that something is wrong with him or her; arguably, an implicit ontology that results in de-agentification: a one-dimensional view of the agent or subject that may be seen as deprived of his or her agency. In de-agentification there is a lack of minimum difference between the agent and the agent himself or herself. This lack of fissure means that there is no void. If there is no void, then there is no in-between space, no element of negativity. If there is no element of negativity, then there is no space from which a potentiality can emerge. In this way, the idea of mind the inherent gap of the agent is useful because it allows us to shed light on the nature of the agent via what Žižek (1989: 204) calls the “meaning of Lacan's thesis [which is] that the subject is originally split, divided as to the object himself”. In this manner, the warning: mind inherent gap of the agent becomes crucial to understand the nature of the agent as split from within. It aims to prevent us from a one-dimensional view of the agent, i.e., from unconsciously ignoring the in-between space within him or her. Such split is important since it allows us to conceptualize an in-between space, a void from which a potentiality can emerge. This potentiality may be assumed, theoretically, to be a spark of liberation and a desire for emancipation that pulsates in every agent.

Otherwise, if the inherent gap of the agent is collapsed or ignored, then there is no void, no minimum difference from which such potentiality can emerge, what I here termed as the fallacy of de-agentification.

In what follows, I draw upon the philosophy of critical realism to understand the nature of knowledge and the nature of reality. I begin by introducing various critical realist concepts. The argument here is that the mind-the-gap principle is useful in allowing us to consider the nature of knowledge via the gap between ontology and epistemology against reductionisms. In addition, the philosophy of critical realism to understand the nature of reality as stratified into three different domains—the real, the actual, and the empirical. Moreover, as we shall see, this tripartite stratification of reality has implications for idealism, materialism, and the agnostic midpoint stances.

## **Mind the transitive-intransitive gap! Or else, the epistemic fallacy**

The philosophy of critical realism (CR) argues for ontology with the non-symmetrical distinction between the transitive dimension (TD), or epistemological space: the dimension in which “the object of knowledge is the material cause or antecedently established knowledge which is used to generate the new knowledge” (Bhaskar 2008a: 17) and the transitive objects: those objects that we are trying to obtain knowledge of, in the intransitive dimension (ID). The intransitive dimension, or ontological dimension, is the space in which “the object is the real structure or mechanism that exists and acts quite independently of men and the conditions which allow men access to it” (17). The intransitive dimension consists of real objects that exist and act independently of how human beings think about them in natural science. Moreover, the differentiation between epistemology and ontology implies a differentiation between the ID and the typically knowledge-dependent TD. There is always a gap, a differentiation between the transitive and intransitive dimensions, the distinction between our knowledge and what our knowledge is of, i.e., the two dimensions are in a relation of interaction when viewed over time. The transitive dimension of knowledge is also part of the intransitive dimension of being and therefore must be included within ontology too. TD is the realm of scientific process, scientific beliefs, and so on, and the ID, knowledge-independent realm is the world outside of those beliefs. This differentiation between the transitive objects and the independent intransitive objects of science, i.e., the gap between ontology and epistemology, provides the point of departure from which the philosophy of critical realism argues for ontology.

The idea of mind the transitive-intransitive gap is salient since it warns us against an error in argumentation; namely, a reductionist view of knowledge. This error is what results

from answering questions about the nature of the world only in terms of its knowledge, which in critical realists terms perpetrates a serious fallacy, “the epistemic fallacy [that is the idea] that ontological questions can always be transposed into epistemological terms” (36). The epistemic fallacy is what occurs when we do not mind the gap between ontology and epistemology, i.e., it reduces the intransitive to the transitive dimension. Žižek (2006b: 29) illustrates why the epistemic fallacy is possible when he states that “[we] do not have two perspectives, we have a perspective and what eludes it, and the other perspective fills in this void of what we could not see from the first perspective”. Similarly, Bhaskar (2002: 192) illustrates the reason for the epistemic fallacy with the notion of a “natural attitude [in which] you don’t posit ontology on the one side and epistemology on the other side: you just have knowledge and you take it that that knowledge is of the world”. We mind the gap between the TD and the ID of knowledge, when knowledge itself becomes salient, i.e., when what tends to occupy the place of knowledge is homologized with common sense, with straight out errors, with absurdities, and with what guarantees justified belief. Herbert Marcuse (1964: 206), for instance, apprehended a homology between knowledge and justified belief when he stated that the “web of domination [which] has become the web of Reason itself”. Thus, the warning: mind the gap between ontology and epistemology is important since it allows us to shed light on the nature of knowledge itself, against reductionisms.

## **Mind the real-actual-empirical gap! Or else, actualism**

The critical realist philosophy of science conceptualizes the world as being stratified into three overlapping domains of the real ( $d_r$ ), the actual ( $d_a$ ), and the empirical ( $d_e$ ). The stratification of reality is designed to show that causal laws, mechanisms, and other objects of scientific knowledge cannot be reduced to the domains of the actual or the empirical. The formula  $d_r \supset d_a \supset d_e$  conveys the mutual inclusions between the three domains, where  $d_r$  is the all-containing domain of reality, which contains the mechanisms, events, and experiences. These mechanisms “exist as the powers of things and act independently of the condition that enable us to identify them” (Bhaskar 2008a: 86). Such mechanisms generate events and experiences, which constitute the domain of the actual. Next,  $d_a$  consists of events and experiences; it gives rise to the empirical, or  $d_e$ , which consists of experiences. These three overlapping domains are not independent of each other, but are in a one-way relation to each other. In other words, we do not have events without mechanisms, and we do not have experiences without events.

The idea of mind the double-part gap that exists between the realms of the real, the actual, the empirical is salient since it warns us against an error in argumentation. This error

is what that results from a collapse of the real to  $d_a$ : the domain of the actual is what Bhaskar (2008a: 81) calls “actualism”: the reduction of the domain of the real to the actual. For critical realists, the great error of Humean theory is that it identifies the generative mechanism with actuality and our experience of it; it identifies the mechanism with what is produced by the mechanism, e.g.,  $d_r=d_a$ , or the level of the empirical—e.g.,  $d_r=d_a=d_e$ . This Humean account puts forward such a theory by tying causal laws to the closed systemic conditions in which empirical invariances occur. The idea of mind the various gaps of this  $d_r>d_a>d_e$  tri-part structure of reality is important because it allows us to conceptualize the ontological openness of reality as an open system. In open systems we only have the possibility of misconstruing  $d_r$  and  $d_a$ , i.e., as when the system is closed in experimental conditions, so that there is only a single (Humean) constant conjunction to analyze because as soon as there are two or more constant conjunctions, they are no longer constant, and thus reality with a flux of causal mechanisms, as a system, is not closed, but open.

Moreover, I claim that this stratification of reality inverts the ontological order in which we conceive the dependency of scientific knowledge and the nature of reality. Let us apply a Žižekian explanation of the Hegelian logic of reason without illusion, i.e., reason = understanding, to illustrate this inversion (see Žižek 1999: 97). In the move or transition from science to being ( $S \rightarrow B$ ), one does not add something extra to scientific knowledge, but rather the opposite; one takes away something, subtracting scientific knowledge itself from the contingently open nature of the world, and the result is what we know as the TD: a mechanism, an abstract model, a theory of reality, etc. The point between S and B is TD (the transitive dimension), the third term. The first move is when scientific knowledge is driven by the illusion that there is something beyond it. Such no beyond means there is a gap between TD and ID. The second move is when scientific knowledge sheds new light on it; that is, by seeing that there is no higher capacity to the nature of reality. In this sense scientific knowledge is repeated, retrodictively. Retrodiction means that one moves from investigating the level of the empirical, i.e., from a component suitably re-described of the complex situation or event, via structures and generative mechanism, to the antecedent causes. The details of such moves are illustrated with Bhaskar’s (2008a: 37) DREI(C) schema (i.e., description-retrodiction-elimination-identification-correction model) of theoretical scientific explanation. Thus, the scientific knowledge that results from the deprived illusion that there is something beyond the nature of reality is evident in the result of the subtraction, the TD: the space of theories and concepts. In a reversal, it is the openly contingent nature of a reality that has such a structure that makes science possible—i.e., the move from being to science ( $B \rightarrow S$ ).

The idea of mind the real-actual-empirical gap is important since it allows us to conceptualize the nature of reality via what Žižek (1999: 69) calls “the ontological

incompleteness of 'reality' itself: [where] there is 'reality' only insofar as there is an ontological gap, a crack, at its very heart—that is, a traumatic excess, a foreign body that cannot be integrated into it.” Three different positions can be identified by which to interpret the ontological openness of reality: (1) the idealist stance for whom the constitution of reality is the unspecified, the obscurant, the unverifiable, the illusionary, the spiritual, etc; (2) the mechanical (or naïve) materialist stance, for whom the constitution of reality is merely the verifiable physical matter; and (3) the agnostic center stance, for whom the constitution of reality is the self that revolves around personal identification. From these contrasting positions we obtain two paradoxes. The first paradox is that an anamorphic view of reality is always present and serves as the possibility that fixes (1) the idealist and (2) the naïve materialist perspectives as the way to return to the irreducible ontological character of an open multi-stratified reality. As Žižek (1999: 88) puts it, “if we subtract reality from the illusory perspective on it, we lose reality itself.” Thus, the proper materialist position is to include to verifiable physical matter with its black holes, blind spots, etc. as if concatenating (1) to (2). The second paradox of (3) agnosticism is that what is problematic with this stance is simultaneously a solution to idealism; the limit of this third stance shows an unstructured perspective of reality (an unbounded position characterized by its post-structural, post-ideological, centrist, and hedonist relatives) that is incapable of imagining an entire open system that encompasses all, especially what is unknown. This agnostic center sends a message of how the individual is incapable of escaping the imprisonment of the language that describes his or her own perception of humanity. Such imprisonment tells us that the very message of the third stance, the agnostic center, is the insistence that idealism cannot go away, and it cannot escape human reality because we are confined with what we know, even in our sleep. The third position is a paradoxical one; it is both advantageous and disadvantageous. It is advantageous in the sense that it articulates the richness of different modes, through which experience is individual and uniquely differentiated by historical and contextual settings. It is disadvantageous in the sense that it raises issues of self-reflexivity and the inability to theorize its own stance in light of what is external to the individual; what is missing is the domain, the very ontological dimension, that is detached from the referent to an external real world. For example, its focus on language provides us access to individuals' consciousness, perceptions, wants, desires, and beliefs; however, without an external referent point, we cannot adequately theorize their independent existence and causal efficacy. The lack of this “referential detachment” (Bhaskar 2008b: 223), an argument parallel to the revindication of ontology, is the reason, arguably, why the agnostic center dwells in, to quote Jameson's (1974: i), a “prison-house of language”.

## An exemplary model of closure

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson (1983) provides an exemplary model of a hermeneutical method for the investigation of ideological closure<sup>2</sup>. Arguably, this model is an “edifice, encapsulated by what is perhaps [Lacan’s] single best known formula: “the unconscious is structured as a language” (Žižek 2006a: 3), which means that it follows the structure of semiotic axes, the grammar of a (ideological) closed universe of meaning. The purpose of this Marxian hermeneutics is to read, to interpret, and to rewrite the object of study, i.e., any text in general. From this perspective, the text may be defined as the written or spoken cry, the plea, the in-between space enclosed by form and content against an empty background. Such text leaves its traces in the synchrony of time in the form of literature, illustrations, narrative, films, and paintings, to mention a few. The text is seen as an individual’s response to his or her struggles, and the social events in which he or she is immersed, and precisely because it comes to resolve a real problem symbolically. Thus, the creation of a text is a symbolic (ideological) act that shows the limits of human reality and imagination.

The Jamesonian interpretative model consists of three interpretive horizons, each unfolding into the next. We may use the notion of the philosophy of critical realism to provide a formula where the first level is the political horizon or the symbolic act ( $h_p$ ), in which an event, a chronologic sequence of happenings in time, unfolds in linear fashion, as perceived by the individuals. The second level is the horizon of the deadlock ( $h_d$ ). This level is less diachronic, but it is bounded in time, implying that there is a constitutive tension between antagonistic social classes; or, to put it in Marxian terms, it is a horizon of contradiction. The third level is the horizon of history or totality ( $h_h$ ), where history is conceived, in turn, as the mode of production; that is, the “formation of succession of various human social formations from prehistoric life to whatever future of history today” (Jameson 1983: 60). The hermeneutic model of the three different horizons,  $h_h > h_d > h_p$ , governs three distinct rewritings that construe the object of interpretation.

This interpretative model thus allow us a first specification of the relationship between ideology and cultural text or artefacts: a specification still conditioned by the limits of the first, narrow historical or political horizon in which it is made. We may suggest that from this perspective, ideology is not something, which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological and that production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary of formal ‘solution’ to

unresolved social contradictions. (64)

In the sections that follow, I exemplify each of the three horizons of the Jamesonian interpretative model with various texts from film and narratives, while supplementing the interpretation with fitting and recurrent concepts drawn from some of Žižek's works. My objective is to exemplify how (ideological) closure functions in each case, and ultimately to remind the reader that, unlike the text, whatever future horizon of history might be, it is open in reality.

## The $h_p$ : political horizon

The Nukus Museum of Art, located in the desert of Uzbekistan, is an example of an institution created by means of such an ideological or symbolic act. The documentary *The Desert of Forbidden Art*<sup>2</sup> shows that the Nukus's collection of paintings could have been easily destroyed or forgotten in the past for their subject matter. The museum was assembled by Igor Savitsky, an archeologist and painter, who collected more than 40,000 paintings and other artifacts, mainly from artists that were producing under repressed conditions, or who had been "vanished," in Stalinist Russia. The majority of paintings in the museum did not comply with the legitimized aesthetic vision of the Stalinist regime, since the artists' objects were different from the idealized Stalinist vision of a healthy, hard-working, and egalitarian socialist class. If a painting, object, or other text did not represent the dominant Stalinist aesthetics, it had a reduced chance of survival. I claim that the Nukus collection exemplifies Savitsky's ideological act, as he purposefully collected the objects that were forbidden and repressed because their aesthetic form did not reflect the Stalinist vision, so that these objects were saved in the Nukus' archives to be understood in the future. Such future is now our present in which contemporary aesthetics of domination legitimizes them as works of art.

The first interpretive horizon,  $h_p$ , can be supplemented by comparing it with Žižek's (2006b) parallax perspective: the irreducible, asymmetrical, and minimal space of difference between two viewpoints, in which the move from one (direct) direction to the other (indirect) is not only a shift in the position of an object, which appears different from the two different viewpoints, but implies that the object (of interpretation) has shifted itself; there is a change not only in position, but also in the object itself, caused by the parallax. Parallel to the Jamesonian tripartite  $h_n > h_d > h_p$  horizons, Žižek focuses on three key areas: the universal mode ( $m_u$ ) is the domain that sets limits on the theory of reality; the particular mode ( $m_p$ ) is the domain of experiences versus their biopsychosocial account; and the singular mode ( $m_s$ ) is the domain of class struggle, the deadlock, the non-commensurable master-slave relations, the domain of social antagonism. This three-part parallax,  $m_u > m_p > m_s$ , is Žižek's



conceptual ordering of the fields of (universal) philosophy, (particular) science, and (singular) politics, respectively. We may apply a parenthesis to relate the Žižekian and Jamesonian models by bracketing the universal function and the particular function: universal ( $m_u > h_h > h_d$ ) > particular ( $h_p \dots m_p > m_s$ ). A way to relate the universal and particular realms is, as developed in Mao and Žižek (2007), illustrated here with:

The paradox is...that one participates in the universal dimension of the “public” sphere precisely as a singular individual extracted from or even opposed to one’s substantial communal identification—one is truly universal only as radically singular, in the interstices of communal identities. (Žižek 2006b: 13)

## **$h_d$ : the horizon of the deadlock**

The horizon of the deadlock is the second level of interpretation, which takes the form an irreducible struggle between socio-economic classes in which the social order is defined. It is no longer the individual mediating the object of study, with his or her contribution as a symbolic act, but as a move that denotes what Jameson (1983: 38) calls a strategy of containment by making reference to Hegel’s notion of Absolute Spirit:

Hegel’s notion of Absolute Spirit is seen as just a strategy of containment, which allows what can be thought to seem internally coherent in its own terms, while repressing the unthinkable (in this case, the very possibility of collective praxis) which lies beyond its boundaries. Here Marxism is no doubt implied as that thinking which knows no boundaries of this kind, and which is infinitely totalizable, but the ideological critique does not depend on some dogmatic of “positive” conception of Marxism as a system.

The second horizon of class opposition requires a reading of social class, in terms of the reconstruction of voices (non-hegemonic or hegemonic ones), to render the horizon as an ultimate deadlock. On one hand, there are non-hegemonic voices that affirm their representation in a horizon of antagonistic social classes against the background of a hegemonic voice. The articulation of a peasant culture, in which the text—such as folk songs, fairy tales, and magic rituals—affirms traditions, can be seen as residuals of an oppositional class, for example, in the form of non-hegemonic narratives. From a sociological viewpoint, other examples of this type of representation through the articulation of opposition are the pluralistic and isolated narratives of the struggle of women, minority groups, and certain ethnic groups, which represent the affirmation of a non-hegemonic voice against a background of other voices. In this manner, the second horizon of class struggle consists of the rewriting of isolated groups in terms of the ideological strategies that each group defends, which simultaneously subverts other voices in a system of antagonistic social

classes. On the other hand, there are hegemonic voices that affirm their representation in the horizon of the deadlock of antagonistic social classes against the background of their non-hegemonic opposites. An example of this process is the narratives that employ English vernacular, and that have proliferated in popular culture. Such narratives have been appropriated as a way of speech by a hegemonic middle class. A second example is a process of pseudo universalization that is mainly a portrait, as with the so-called Green Movement: a concern for the environment that calls for the legalization of ethical behavior based on the rationale that the environment is shared by all human beings. This concern for the environment prompts the individual to act in two ways to protect it, and which we can call green ethics: (1) the individual is prompted to consume in accordance with green ethics (e.g., to financially contribute to offsetting carbon emissions, whenever possible, as well as to recycle, to purchase a hybrid car, to purchase from charity shops, and to produce and consume organic products); and (2) the individual is driven to protest against all man-made ecological catastrophes, such as the Fukushima and Chernobyl nuclear disasters or the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. However, this green ethical voice also articulates its non-hegemonic opposite, namely the impossibility of going back to earlier pre-polluting forms of living. For example, green ethical consumption also articulates the impossibility of producing a counterbalance that diminishes the carbon footprint and prevents it from contributing to the greenhouse effect, or the impossibility of resolving man-made ecological catastrophes with social demonstrations, literature, bullets, and financial sanctions against corporations.

Žižek's (2006b) biopolitical parallax provides further supplementation to  $h_a$ . This parallax denotes a place of commensurable relations between conflicting, antagonistic agents, so that  $h_a$  can be transposed in a way that it is no longer the object that is repressed, oppressed, or delegitimized, but is almost a joyous celebration for legitimizing those repressed, constrained objects in our present. For example, recall the Nukus's collection of forbidden art. It is not this transposition evident in the way we find it appealing to root for the underdog? Žižek provides the paradox in operation here:

Far from frustrating us because it simply sets no limit, the absence of explicit limitation confronts us with the Limit as such, the inherent obstacle to satisfaction; the true function of the explicit limitation is thus to sustain the illusion that, through transgressing it, we can attain the limitless (256).

The example aims to illustrate that the identification of ideology is not simply and directly inherent verbal exchange with the interpreter, but also includes the injunctions that unite in a particular system of values, in what Jameson (1983: 73) calls the "ideologeme":

An amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudo idea—a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice—or as a

protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the “collective characters” which are the classes in opposition.

I claim that parallel to Jameson’s ideologue, we find the Marxian commodity fetishism and the Lacanian *objet petit a* (the cause of/object of desire). Immediately, the example that comes to mind is Žižek’s (2006a) analysis of the painting *Ambassadors*, by Holbein, in which a direct view of the painting reflects a scenario of two young aristocrats; in the bottom-right part we see a blurred spot, but when we shift perspectives, the new direction effectively transforms the blur spot and allows it to take its actual form, the form of a human skull. This parallax is radical because there is a shift in the object, in the meaning of the painting itself, and in time, i.e., even if the interpreter oscillates between direct and indirect perspectives, he or she cannot go back to these earlier forms of interpretation to pretend that the blur spot is something other than what it is, a human skull.

In Zola’s (1999) *Nana*, the ideologue is what I term the visible appearances: (1) what is visible and (2) how she appears to influence the other characters. The identification of an ideologue requires more than a depiction of a social class stance, which implies that it is not merely visible in terms of linguistic practice. The mediating analysis of the ideologue needs to include a type of linguistic suicide, a strategy of containment, i.e., what Jameson (1983: 191) denotes as the “language of the Other”—as a radical depersonalization of the object. In this text, the main character, Nana, a fifteen-year-old cocotte, articulates the very libidinal nature of the ideologue in her visible appearance. Her character is interpreted as an ideologue that reflects the value system of society during the French Napoleonic Empire. Nana is herself a double-natured thing, an *objet petit a*, an ideologue, through (1) what is visible and (2) how she appears to manipulate the others. What is visible about her character is that she stands for the values of a non-hegemonic voice of the working class, and that she has nothing but her body to exchange as a means of only subsistence. Nana is the proletarian seller: (1) what is visible, as object of sexual desire, is a portrait of an abused child, who keeps herself alive via prostitution. The hegemonic class is represented by the voice of the wealthy males who stab her body, yet yearn for her. The hegemonic voice is that of the capitalist consumers. One of the ways she (2) appears to influence other characters, as object cause of desire, is that she is seen to consume the “virtues” of all the men that provide for her. She appears to imprison her consumers, as if she could empty the men of their lives, their energy, and their souls. The consumers also appear as weak and helpless, as if Nana were capable of paralyzing them. (1) As object of desire: what is visible to these wealthy consumers is that Nana is what she is, a child that prostitutes herself. For this reason, Nana appears at a distance in the novel. (2) As the object cause of self-depravity, Nana is a thing that reflects the consumers’ own corruption, which in turn drives them to dreadful deeds, due to their moral self-destruction. Thus, Nana is an ideologue that emits a

political message in its own right.

Muffat sat looking at her. She frightened him. The newspaper had dropped from his hand. For a moment he saw her as she was, and he despised himself. Yes, it was just that; she had corrupted his life; he already felt himself tainted to his very marrow by impurities hitherto undreamed of. Everything was now destined to rot within him, and in the twinkling of an eye he understood what this evil entailed. He saw the ruin brought about by this kind of “leaven”—himself poisoned, his family destroyed, a bit of the social fabric cracking and crumbling. And unable to take his eyes from the sight, he sat looking fixedly at her, striving to inspire himself with loathing for her nakedness. (Zola 1999: 148)

We can isolate Nana’s ideologue: the visible appearance as an exchange that explains the ethical stance that “unites” the proletarian class and the hegemonic class. These antagonistic classes come together on an individual level in order to exchange their bodies, and in doing so, they keep the brothel in circulation. Thus, circulation exists because of the exchanges that take place by the unification of Nana and her wealthy consumers. Nana as *objet petit a*: (1) what is visible is that this child prostitute is herself an object of desire (2) how Nana, as object cause of auto-corruption, appears to destroy and consume the others. Taking a step further, we can interpret the brothel as a metaphor for the process of circulation that arises from the exchanges that equalize the actions of bodies from antagonistic social classes. On a side note, Zola’s main contribution was his utopian vision of what I am terming a prostituting exchange of bodies, and that happens only by equating non-commensurable terms, is what results from this exchange of bodies. It is not a mystery; it is just a sign, a mediator that cannot be accumulated to benefit either side; the mediator necessarily vanishes. Further, when the unification of the processes of production and consumption is realized in an exchange, from which individuals’ acts of production and consumption are seen as equal in a “naked” similitude—don’t we obtain the Marxian notion of commodity fetishism? Therefore, when such exchange takes place, we have that non-commensurable terms are homologized into one “mysterious” thing because they are perceived akin; the result is an ideologue or commodity fetishism.

## **h<sub>n</sub>: the horizon of the history**

The third horizon of interpretation belongs to the category of totality. It designates the mode of production. This totality assigns everything (all meaning and all absence of it) to itself. Totality is, for instance, the global system of capitalism: “so that we can only say that the dialectic itself does not become visible historically until capitalism’s emergence” (Jameson 2009: 15). This theoretical horizon proposes a hard vision of history and a soft one. A hard

vision of history refers to a projection of a utilitarian utopia for the future of the system. It explicitly (or implicitly) states the mechanisms of domination. The projection is related to despotic views of utopia based on cultural programming and the bureaucratization of the state by physical or ideological force. These tendencies are aimed at colonization and the survival of human freedoms. The flag of the colonizer is to “occupy and organize” (Jameson 1983: 77) because this vision of history is not conceived within human reality, but requires an external element, outside worldly confinements. Therefore, a hard totality results in an authoritarian and threatening vision of history, and a soft totality results in polymorphous intensities of different cultures saturated visions of that are out of realms of totality. For instance, if the slogan of colonization is “occupy and organize,” then the slogan of polymorphism is “cash and carry.” The achievement of human freedom, as envisioned through the universal and multicultural reflexivity of our prejudices, is another example. Both hard and soft versions position the totality of capitalism: the mode of production, in an evolution toward some type of polymorphic tolerant or utilitarian utopia. These views end up with a totality that is a mediated fallacy of “ultimate determining instances” (Jameson 1983: 78); in other words, a closed system. Unlike the text, the future of reality is not a closed system, but it remains open.

George Orwell’s (1990) *Animal Farm* can be used to exemplify the above discussion. For this, we need to place today’s global capitalism as the mode of production described in the story. As we have seen, the concept of a mode of production is resuscitated by Jameson (1989: 80), as shown here:

No historical society has ever “embodied” a mode of production in any pure stable form nor is Capital the description of a historical society, but rather the construction of the abstract concept of capitalism.

For example, in global capitalism, the various modes of capitalist production are the so-called liberal capitalism, welfare European capitalism, Asian-values capitalism, Latin-carnavalesque capitalism, etc. The various forms of capitalist production can be seen to compete against each other in order to solve the basic deadlock between processes of production and consumption. These concepts emphasize that at any historical stage, society has consisted of the structural coexistence of several modes of production at once, including vestiges and ones that survived from older modes. To illustrate the coexistence of the modes of production in today’s global capitalism, I use some of the characters from *Animal Farm* as a background.

The Pigs (Napoleon, Snowball, Squealer, and Old Major) may be reinterpreted as occupying the space of the concept of modes of production. The Pigs could stand for the resolution that tries to maintain the production-consumption divide. The Pigs are all a little different from each other (much like the various types of capitalist production), as each one

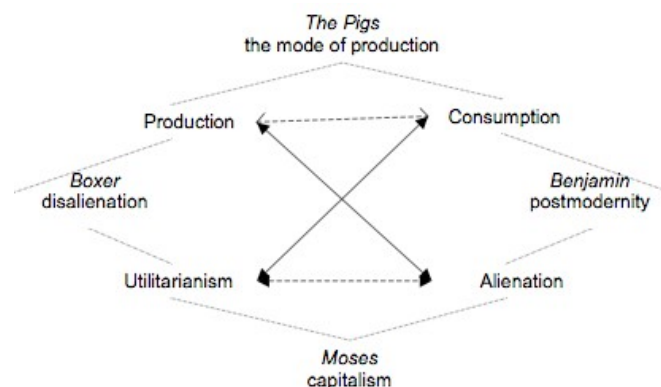
is described as a different breed, but they are still connected—the Pigs are still pigs. The connection between the Pigs can be compared to modes of production to illustrate the various forms of capitalist societies that make up global capitalism. The Pigs fight against each other to obtain control over the Animal Farm as the only solution to the oppressive conditions set by the human farmer. Analogously, the modes of capitalistic production fight against each other to obtain control over capital, what we can allegorically call the farm of animals.

The horse, Boxer, could be considered as production for its own sake. In this manner, Boxer may be interpreted as disalienation, a subject that is driven by productive utilitarianism. Boxer may represent those individuals who lack intellectual commitment. For instance, Boxer is aware of his own production and the diligent utilitarianism that drives him to work without stop for the benefit of the Animal Farm, but refrains from questioning it. Boxer never inquires about the possibility of halting work because he knows that “HERE, you see, it takes all the running YOU can do, to keep in the same place.”<sup>3</sup>

Opposite to Boxer, we find Benjamin, an old postmodernist donkey. His intellectual passivity projects a vision of alienated consumption. Benjamin’s cynicism is also seen in the story, since he is one of the few who survive. Benjamin’s alienated consumption is shown by his own reflexivity, which submerges him in sedation. His most violent act against the Animal Farm is his indifference to the other animals.

Moses, the tame raven who talks about Sugarcandy Mountain, can be understood as an ideologically blind conqueror. Moses occupies the space of alienated utilitarianism. One of the most interesting issues with Moses is that he sees a vision of a better land outside the farm. Sugarcandy Mountain is for Moses a utopia that is not located in the reality of the farm, but outside it.

Jameson (2010) provides a classic Greimasian model for the interaction of constraints, which I have adopted to graphically illustrate the analysis of the Animal Farm characters.



Animal Farm Greimasian model, adapted from Jameson (2010: 113)

Now, one may ask: where do we see agency in this closed system of interpretation? It is against the Animal Farm background that we can understand how agency emerges, I claim, with the figure of the cat. No wonder that Pablo Neruda dedicated an ode to such a creature, which can metaphorically represent our human agency.

In Orwell's Animal Farm, the figure of the cat appears six times in the story. Let us analyze all of these appearances in order to exemplify the inherent gap between the cat and the cat herself, as agency, a dimension of the particular universal character of the agent, as I try to show in the first part of this paper in the section of the inherent gap of the agent.

In the fifth appearance, the cat reveals her profession, as she actively takes part in the re-education committee for the wild ones. Orwell (1990: 10) writes:

The attempt to tame the wild creatures, for instance, broke down almost immediately. They continued to behave very much as before, and when treated with generosity, simply took advantage of it. The cat joined the Re-education Committee and was very active in it for some days. She was seen one day sitting on a roof and talking to some sparrows who were just out of her reach. She was telling them that all animals were now comrades and that any sparrow who chose could come and perch on her paw; but the sparrows kept their distance. The reading and writing classes, however, were a great success. By the autumn almost every animal on the farm was literate in some degree.

From the viewpoint of the cat, the sparrows represent, to put it in Marxist terms, her mode of subsistence. From the point of view of the sparrows, the cat is a point of fanatic attraction that may be based on a variety of factors, such as the amusement or good intentions of her speeches. It is interesting to note how the illusionary high edifice of education brings together the predator and prey, cat and sparrows. The vision that Orwell gives us of education (in his re-education committee) necessarily takes place in an elevated area, the roof. It is in this place where predator and prey, teacher and student, are brought together as equals, as comrades, on the high edifice of the academic roof, with the illusion of becoming literate, at least in some small degree. Only on the high grounds of the symbolic roof of academia is it possible to reconcile the differences in the social hierarchy between teachers and students, as shown with the reconciliation of the characters representing the predator and the prey. Evidence is provided by Orwell when he tells us that although the social hierarchy is irreducible, the classes of education were a success.

We also find the cat in the opening chapter:

Last of all came the cat, who looked round, as usual, for the warmest place, and finally squeezed herself in between Boxer and Clover; there she purred contentedly throughout Major's speech without listening to a word of what he was saying... When Major saw that they had all made themselves comfortable and were waiting attentively, he cleared his throat and began: "Comrades, you have heard already about the strange dream that I had last night." (11)

The cat is not an intellectually passive figure like Benjamin. Her contented purr can be interpreted as her objection to listening to “the experience of meaning” (Žižek 1989: 109), or that which refuses signification in Major’s speech about his dream, namely the interpretation of dreams.

Second, when the animals are summoned to vote on the question:

Are rats comrades? The vote was taken at once, and it was agreed by an overwhelming majority... [the cat] afterwards discovered to have voted on both sides. (11)

Here, the response of the cat can be understood, not as a positive answer of agreement, nor as a dissenting vote, but as a third option. Similar to the cat, we find that Žižek (2006: unpaginated) follows the same logic, showing us how to reject a false question with his infamous joke: “tea or coffee? Yes, please!”

The cat is the character that appears as an exception to what the other characters are doing. This reflection is evident in Orwell’s use of modal verbs, the language of fortuity, in describing the cat. Orwell writes:

It was soon noticed that when there was work to be done the cat could never be found... But she always made such excellent excuses, and purred so affectionately, that it was impossible not to believe in her good intentions. (27)

Even the cat suddenly leapt off a roof onto a cowman's shoulders and sank her claws in his neck, at which he yelled horribly. (38)

Except the cat, who had suddenly disappeared just before Napoleon ordered the animals to assemble. (74)

In the novel, the cat’s last appearance takes place after the confessions about the many executions of animals by animals. Then she disappears, or perhaps she retreats in order to understand why animals murdered animals and behaved as if they didn’t know what was happening. Perhaps in like manner, Žižek<sup>4</sup> proposes to retread in Lenin’s words, in order to learn, learn, and learn.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued for warning: *mind the gap* as a helpful idea by which to understand (1) the nature of the agent, (2) the nature of knowledge, and (3) the nature of reality. A key purpose of this investigation has been to put into practice the concepts of (1) the inherent gap of the agent, (2) the gap between ontology and epistemology, and (3) the gaps between domains of the real, the actual, and the empirical—i.e.,  $d_r > d_a > d_e$ . The exercise of such



concepts is important as a way by which one can exercise “concrete universality [that is] by confronting universality with its ‘unbearable’ example” (Žižek 2006b: 13). In the first part of this exercise, I have hypothesized that the error that occurs when collapsing (1) the inherent gap of the agent is the fallacy of de-agentification. In the second part, I have illustrated the importance of the mind-the-gap principle via (2) the transitive-intransitive gap and (3) the  $d_r > d_a > d_e$  the three-part gap of reality, along with the errors that occur when collapsing such gaps, i.e., the epistemic fallacy and the fallacy of actualism. Last, I have drawn upon a Jamesonian model of three interpretative horizons as an exemplary model by which to understand (ideological) closure in literary theory applicable to texts. I have reminded the reader to mind the gap between the interpretation of the future in literary texts and the interpretation of the future in reality, since the latter is open.

## Notes

- 1 Following the notion in Hartwig (2007) the > greater than sign means constellational contains within or over reaching, e.g., the category of negativity, constellational contains and presupposes the category of non-identity formally so that we could not have negativity without non-identity. Furthermore, it is the case that implicitly, we cannot have non-identity without negativity, so that non-identity tacitly presupposes negativity.
- 2 Jameson employs a hermeneutical model based on Greimas and Rastier’s (1968: 86) model of “the elementary structure of meaning” and its application to the analysis of sexual relations. In this elementary model of meaning, we have that any semiotic system, e.g., S1 and its contrary, e.g., S2, can be opposed to each other and represented in S1 vs. S2. Then ideological closure is illustrated with the mediation of the two semantic axes, S1 vs. S2.
- 3 See documentary by Pope and Georgiev (2010).
- 4 Said the Red Queen in Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871: p. 39).
- 5 Žižek’s Lecture: How Are We Embedded in Ideology. Available at <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/videos/how-are-we-embedded-in-ideology/>

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