

IJŽS Vol 1.4 Žižek and Heidegger

Reply to Žižek

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Introduction

In the following, I shall merely present a reading of Žižek's excellent, concentrated piece, while proposing some asides to indicate possible alternatives, particularly those opened up by a reading of Heidegger which, elsewhere, he himself has broached, and which in all respects he has made possible. We might be said to play one reading off against the other. Our general hypothesis will be that Heidegger is even closer to Žižek than Žižek believes him to be, and yet he reaches a different conclusion from the same Žižekian premises. Žižek has from close to the very beginning been struggling to define his own relation to Heidegger. The current essay ties another knot in an already tangled thread.

On my reading, the kind of ontic revolutionary action which attempts to open up a space in the current order for an event of the New is precisely the kind of action which Heidegger himself desires. Not, however in his middle period, but in his later. It is a consequence of Žižek's locating the possibility of a promising model of human action in the middle Heidegger that allows him to endorse a more humanistically inspired action than Heidegger ultimately promotes, and at the same time it allows him to understand as political an action which for Heidegger might well be ethical.

Philosophy against democracy: theory and practice

Žižek's essay seeks to determine the relation that should exist between theory and praxis. As a result of philosophy's traditional status as anti-democratic, contemporary politics, blinded by the 'democratic consensus', understands itself to be radically distinct from theory ('ideology'). Philosophy's systematic, totalising ambitions are understood to result in a valorising of totalitarian philosophy, as is exemplified in the political engagements of philosophers from Plato to Heidegger (to Foucault). Žižek however is seeking an alternative to democracy, and for this very purpose seeks to rethink and indeed re-evaluate philosophy's anti-democratic instinct as a promising sign of its possible application to praxis. After all, if we do not concede, as Žižek does not, that being anti-democratic is a bad thing, then the possibilities of a philosophical politics appear in a new light.

The hegemonic view, which wishes to separate politics from the a guiding theoretical insight states that the positing of a politics as an outcome of a theory which understands the totality of what is and/or of history as a single process can only be anti-democratic: there can only be one single party in possession of the truth of history, which understands and responds to 'the truth of the age'. All others simply need to be taught this. Hence, totalitarianism, in contrast to a democratic plurality of potentially hegemonic parties and interests. Philosophy as precisely the grand narrative of metaphysics, the naming of beings as such and as a whole, has always tended in this political direction, believing that any politics could be adequate to their ontological and/or historical theorising, only to turn away from politics in aristocratic indifference after the inevitable disappointment. It is just this dichotomy, of 'ontological politics' and 'merely ontic politics' that Žižek attempts slowly and surely to overcome.

Lacan and democracy

Žižek's dream is an actual realisable philosophical politics. He approaches this problem by considering twentieth century philosophy's most prominent attempts to engage actively in politics: Heidegger and Foucault. The benchmark for this engagement is that thinker who stands perhaps as a provocation to philosophy itself, a moment somewhat other than philosophy at which its truth comes to light and can be reflected back to it: Lacan.

Žižek asks how Lacan stands with respect to democracy and adduces three alternative conceptions:

1) Democratic.

The notion of the empty signifier renders Lacan the ultimate theorist of democratic politics since it represents the necessarily 'empty place of power', the non-natural and non-permanent occupant of the place of power. If one allows this occupancy to be contingent and thus the topic of 'politics' (in Laclau's sense of the contestation for hegemony by a plurality of struggling interests), one remains at the most basic level 'radically democratic'.

2) Anti-democratic supplement to democracy.

Lacan's theory is a provocation of democracy: anti-democratic, but in a way that supplements democracy in what we can infer is a Derridean sense. The provocative opposition is necessary to the very maintenance of democracy as such. Without an anti-democratic goad democracy hardens into totalitarian rule. It can present itself to itself and understand itself only by reflecting itself in its opposite, an opposite whose existence it must allow in order to be democratic. This is akin to the first option, except this deconstruction does not propose itself at a politics but rather as a critic of politics itself, a critic of ideology, the illusion of the natural permanence of the ruling order. This is the traditional Platonic model of the philosopher as opposed to the rabble of democracy, Socrates as the gadfly to Athenian democracy.

On this view, theory remains impotent and presents an ideal which cannot be realised politically and ultimately bolsters democracy itself. "a democracy needs a permanent influx of anti-democratic self-questioning in order to remain a living democracy" (6). Thus the anti-democratic necessity is 'grounded' (8) in the need for more democracy, which is to say that the place of power be open to ever renewed usurpation and hence criticism of its current occupant. In this perspective of the relation between theory and practice, theory deconstructs the appearance of stable meaning, which is to say the apparent completeness of any symbolic system, lacking any inconsistency or emptiness, while politics pragmatically reasserts such significance. However, Žižek indicates that today this relationship has been reversed to the extent that it is politics as 'ideological supplement' to capitalism that threatens meaning.

Although this goes unsaid in Žižek's piece, what we should infer from this is that deconstructive politics is no good in light of this development, and if democracy is complicit with capitalism then the search for an alternative to capitalistic politics will not issue from deconstruction. This was Žižek's point from the very start. If capitalism is the threat to meaning, a theoretico-deconstructive opposition to politics which would dissolve apparently stable meanings is clearly not necessary or helpful in the struggle against capitalism. Indeed it bolsters the impression that capitalist, democratic orders wish to present, that they are rational, organised, decent, humane: the only form of politics that is viable, here at the end of history.

This is why Žižek proposes a third option, that is neither democratic, nor deconstructively anti-democratic. Rather, theory itself must be put into practice against democracy, as has long been attempted by Platonic philosophers, but hardly ever with any great success.

3) Synthesis.

Hitherto, philosophy has been understood to be either democratic and realisable or totalitarian and unrealisable (save in disaster). Žižek's conclusion is neither an ontological politics, in which theory would be adequated by a political democratic project (1), nor an impotent and idealistic critique of all politics, which remains always a compromise of the ontological incompleteness that theory indicates (2). Rather, Žižek is pursuing a theoretical politics that would amount to a livable, achievable project of revolutionary action, guided by a theoretical understanding of the nature of the social whole.

The question is to find a way in which a theory that is not democratic can be put into practice. The trouble is that the two prime examples of non-democratic enactment of theory in recent times have veered towards the fascistic, in Heidegger's case and in Foucault's. And yet, Žižek is keen to seize on the potential that was betrayed in the particular way in which these engagements were actualised. By means of a juxtaposition of what went wrong in each case, Žižek delineates the general contours of this lost potential, thus pointing the way to the future.

Ultimately, he is seeking not just a non-democratic theoretical politics, but also a non-Nazistic one. Which is perhaps why he finds it necessary to present Foucault as a contrast with Heidegger, for his 'event' (the Iranian revolution) was closer to being a true event — which is to say the appearance of a genuine alternative to democracy, a novelty in contrast to the democratic consensus — than Heidegger's Nazis.

Foucault nevertheless misconstrued the relation between the event itself and its problematic aftermath.

The intellectuals' engagements

In both cases what occurs is an apparent realisation of theory in reality, an actual liveable alternative to democracy was seen in an actual political event to which support was then given, the Nazi's conservative revolution and the Iranian revolution. Žižek refuses the usual reading of the engagements as demonstrating a limitation of their previous position whose becoming-visible precipitated a 'turn', and a turn away from politics. Even if this was how the thinkers themselves saw it. Once again, as in *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek retrieves something valuable in the actual engagement itself. However, the manner in which this is done here differs.

Here Žižek allows himself a distinction which he did not allow himself before, believing it to be a statement characteristic of ideology itself, and one which is all too deconstructive, envisioning practice as a 'fall' away from the level of theory. The distinction is one between form and content, or, more frequently between virtuality and its actualisation (these terms have proliferated in Žižek's discourse since his engagement with Deleuze in *Organs Without Bodies*). This distinction allows him to sympathise with Heidegger's reference to the 'inner truth and greatness' of the Nazi movement (*Introduction to Metaphysics*:213/152). The reason why this distinction has become acceptable to Žižek is perhaps his growing belief in the Benjaminian notion the arising of the new from the lost potentials or 'Lost Causes' of the past, although this is slightly undercut by the remarkable peroration to *For They Know Not What They Do*, which speaks of the Leftist project as precisely a seizing on the lost causes of the past (*For They Know Not What They Do*:272–3). Thus Žižek can say of Heidegger's engagement, that formally it contained promise, but was mistaken in terms of its content.

To nuance this, in the subsequent section on Foucault, Žižek refuses the simple opposition of the event and its compromise, on the grounds that this does not give us the means to distinguish between true and false Events. Perhaps this is also to be applied to Heidegger, who in Žižek (and Badiou's) eyes did indeed mistake an event for a pseudo-event, and although Žižek does not say this, perhaps we are to infer that his distinction between actuality and virtuality ('inner greatness') is rather (at least in Heidegger's case) an attempt to redeem something which should not be redeemed, and did not allow him to distinguish true and false events. The question

raised by the deconstruction of Foucault is: 'given we can identify a virtual core that is respectable in no matter what actualisation, how are we to avoid the Heideggerian mistake of attempting to redeem the irredeemable, a pseudo- or non-event?'

This would seem to be the purpose of Žižek's section on Foucault, for Žižek here asserts that the Iranian revolution, unlike the conservative revolution was indeed a true event. The Iranian revolution produced an alternative to liberal democracy that did not (have to) regress to pre-modern tradition, it revealed a possible future. Žižek therefore does not criticise Foucault's enthusiasm for the event, but merely the way he interpreted it (or rather, interpreted its interpretation): 'Foucault was right in engaging himself, he correctly detected the emancipatory potential in the events' (15). This way leaves one open to an engagement such as Heidegger's, where enthusiasm is placed behind a pseudo-event. 'This, also, compels us to qualify and limit the homology between Foucault's Iranian engagement and Heidegger's Nazi engagement' (15).

Foucault distinguishes, in a way that Žižek has come to identify with deconstructive politics, between the pure event, the 'revolt' and the political interests which later come to appropriate and compromise its absoluteness, as if it were a pure event of novelty without content which only then was assimilated to intelligible interests and the aims of various groups actually existing in Iran at the time. A genuine emancipatory outburst followed by a pragmatic compromise.

Žižek is quite explicit that the problem with this is that it does not let one distinguish different modalities of enthusiasm (15), event and pseudo-event. Žižek however recognises that, at least at one level, Foucault exceeds this opposition between the absolutely novel, virtual event, and its conservative actuality, in the following terms: "chauvinism", "virulent xenophobia", the socio-political reality, they are an inherent support of the Event itself, i.e., their mobilisation gave the Event the strength to oppose itself to the oppressive political regime and to avoid getting caught in the game of political calculations" (13). Relying on such things 'gave the Iranian revolution the strength to move beyond a mere pragmatic power-struggle'. It is here however that we return to the original problem, that "Event turns into a purely formal feature, indifferent towards its specific historical content" (13), and this leads us back to the impossibility of distinguishing the Nazi event from a true event, which the Iranian revolution was: 'it was an authentic Event, a momentary opening that unleashed unheard-of forces of social transformation' (14). 'The Nazi "revolution" was never "open" in this authentic sense' (14).

Žižek wishes to find a politics that would be ontic, and would be in touch with its ontic situation, and which would open up genuinely emancipatory, non-democratic

possibilities from within its current situation. So one which would refuse the alternative of either a passive awaiting of the new or a violent attempt simply to bring it about. Rather it would be an attempt to attack the fragility of the current system at its 'symptomatic moment' and thus make room for the new. To attack the site at which an event which would revolutionise the current order might take place, without precipitating the event itself.

The question is that of the act and of a politics that would be ontic but would open up space for an ontological event, which is to say a radical turning in Western history, which is of course tied up with the democracy to which Žižek seeks an alternative. My worry is that this still seems to distinguish between the opening up of space for the event and the event itself, as if that would be an ontological politics, one which actually brought the event into reality: is Žižek not still stuck within a deconstructionist's opposition? In other words, there still comes the incalculable moment of madness or decision or the moment after the preparation's end in which mere awaiting is all that is left. And here we are back at precisely Heidegger's position. As we shall now establish. For Heidegger, the site for the event, which he calls a 'clearing', is precisely that which man is to foster and watch over, without presuming to have the power to bring about a new event in history.

Heidegger

Žižek criticises those who dismiss Heidegger's thought for its supposed complicity with politics, since in this way they can miss those actualised elements of it which are actually positive, its good questions about the 'basic tenets of modernity', which include its notions of humanism, democracy and progress. They endorse Heidegger with an 'ambiguous conditional' (Conversations with Žižek:28), as if they want him stripped of his inconveniently strident (anti-democratic, illiberal) elements. But for Žižek these are what should be retained and indeed exacerbated, this is the best of Heidegger¹, but it is 'still not radical enough'.

Heidegger without Nazism, or Heidegger understood later to renounce all politics, including Nazism, in his later work, reduces him to a mere humanitarian: in other words, to Hannah Arendt, whom Žižek identifies as the first 'liberal Heideggerian' (19, italicised). Elsewhere, Žižek has identified one of the three dogmas of contemporary thought as 'everything Hannah Arendt says is right'! Somewhat akin to Derrida's *Of Spirit*, which does not allow itself the simple condemnation of Nazism as if with a clean conscience, as if an opposition would not operate on the same terrain or in the same terms as that which it opposed, Žižek

implies that if one accepts the Heideggerian critique of humanism (or the human, perhaps the individual atomistic subject as subject of 'human rights') one cannot simply repudiate Nazism on humanitarian grounds, and thus oppose it abstractly in this way. And to oppose it on democratic grounds would miss the point too, which is precisely to find an alternative to technological democracy. In many ways, one might read Žižek's whole piece as an attempt to find the correct way in which to determine where Nazism went wrong. And when one is attempting, as Heidegger was, to find an alternative to humanism (in the metaphysical sense) and democracy, this is not at all easy. Indeed, by 1969, it is clear that even Heidegger himself, among the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century, still had not found another way out. This struggle to exit in his wake might be said to characterise the entire trajectory of Žižek's thought. For Žižek, the failure of Nazism as an application of Heideggerianism does indeed mean that one should renounce 'ontological politics', which is to say one that would be adequate to the current sending of being, and thus one that would be able to bring about by sheer force of will a new sending, a new relation between man and the whole of beings. Staging an 'encounter between global technology and modern humanity' was what constituted the 'inner truth and greatness' of Nazism for Heidegger which is to say its ontological import (cf. Introduction to *Metaphysics*:213/152). This would be grand politics, capable of changing the face of the globe, the very way in which beings appeared to man, as technological energy-resource.

Žižek's politics

Žižek believes his own vision of politics to remain true to one element of Heidegger's thought of which — here at least — he believes Heidegger to have fallen short. It follows from Žižek's own elaboration of the ontological difference which here he believes eludes Heidegger, but which elsewhere Žižek himself attributes to Heidegger. First let us determine the nature of this politics, and then the nature of Žižek's understanding of the ontological difference.

Žižek see politics as spanning the ontico-ontological divide, by acting among beings in a way that opens up space for a radically new revelation of the same, an event in being-history, a new event of being. Later Žižek speaks of a 'trauma' as an ontic occurrence which necessitates an entirely new understanding of the whole of beings, a new set of 'ontological coordinates' (23). It is as if ontic politics would seek out the trauma, the real which the current system has disavowed in order to constitute itself, which is nevertheless present in the 'symptom', the return (to

consciousness) of the repressed. Elsewhere he speaks of this politics as attacking the current system precisely at the place of its 'symptomal knot'.

We have struggled in the past to define just what kind of politics Žižek wants in the Ticklish Subject (Heidegger Beyond Deconstruction:105–27), and it seems to us that here Žižek is more clear. It is one that prises and holds open a space for the new. This was already signalled at the end of *For They Know Not What They Do*: here the leftist project was defined as looking out for signs of the new, and always with respect to missed encounters, failures, lost causes, whose revolutionary potential must be revived in the name of the future (*For They Know Not What They Do*:272–3). But crucially, this politics is not 'ontological' in attempting to itself bring about the new. It merely makes clear the incompleteness or inconsistency of the current regime and thus destroys its ideological appearance of necessity and ahistoricity. Thus it opens up a history once again and the possibility of the future.

Politics is ontic, but it has the grand ambition of preparing for an ontological event, a fundamental alteration in the way in which the whole is viewed, the way in which it appears to us, the very scope of the possibilities belonging to contemporary existence. It must focus on the void in the whole, the clearing as the place in which it might be possible for an alternative to present itself, since it is here that the inconsistency of the current regime cryptically reveals itself. 'The true courage of an act is always the courage to accept the in-existence of the big Other, i.e. to attack the existing order at the point of its symptomal knot' (40). This attempt to open up, to reveal to view the contingent suturing of a symbolic world is contingent upon a recognition of the ontological difference as merely a void in beings as a whole, the 'inexistence of the big Other', and since Heidegger lacked the former courage we may attribute this ultimately perhaps to the perceived theoretical deficiency of his understanding of the ontological difference. An act attacks order at the place of its symptom, the void wherein its incompleteness appears or 'is'.

But this symptomal place of the void in the current order is precisely the place of the thing, which is precisely the 'topic' of Heidegger's later work, which was indeed, in quite a strict sense, the 'topology of being' (*Poetry, Language, Thought*:12/84), the study of entities for which only the nodes are important and the rest of the structure can bend and move, as in Lacan's knots (Delanda 2002:25–6). Is there not something stereotypical about Žižek's reading of 'Green Gelassenheit' here,² as a mere passivity? Heidegger is quite clear that it is a preparation, and that the thinking which it involves is a form of acting. And we believe this preparation to be precisely the opening up of sites for such an entity as 'the thing'. Things, by their distinctive setting up of a certain space around them, and their remaining finite and

hence always promising a new void, give us hope of a new world. This thing is precisely what Žižek means by the trauma, which politics is to attempt to bring to the fore by pointing up the truth of the symptom, thus demonstrating the fragile keystone of the current political-symbolic edifice. Žižek believes this kind of politics to be both licensed by his own radicalisation of the most basic sense of Heidegger's ontological difference.³

Žižek's radicalisation of the ontological difference

Not for the first time as we shall see, Žižek identifies the ontological difference as the difference between the entity and the void or nothing. It is the nothing that is not a thing which limits the totalisation of beings as such: that there is something other than beings *within beings* means that the latter cannot form a totality. Beings as such cannot form a whole because there is something which limits them, that is not a being: 'ontological difference means that the field of reality is finite' (21). Originally at least, when Heidegger remained close to Kant — and this is the position in which Žižek here confines him, for the sake of criticism —, this non-wholeness is a non-wholeness of the phenomenal, since it is grounded in the finite perspective of human beings, whose situatedness makes it impossible for them to perceive the entirety of beings or any one beings, imposing as it does the necessity of a *horizontal* vision of the whole. Nevertheless, in itself, noumenally, insofar as we think it rather than experience or understand it, the whole of beings *is still complete*, and can be intuited so by an infinite, creative or originary instinct that would belong to god.

This is why Žižek criticises Kant from a Hegelian point of view and has always done so, but here he also rebukes Heidegger with it. As if the non-totality of beings were just something that appeared to human beings. But this is *precisely* the illusion under which metaphysics laboured for Heidegger, that there were a god's eye view, a view *sub species aeternitatis*, from which one *could* see beings as a whole, it is a perspective of 'original infinitude' from which human perception is viewed as fallen. Elsewhere, Žižek is prepared to attribute his own radicalised understanding of the ontological difference is indeed Heidegger's own. And yet, perhaps strategically, he is not prepared to do this in the current essay. With regard to the "draft" of the withdrawal of Being which attracts us by its withdrawal, Žižek aligns his own Lacanian terms directly with Heidegger's: 'In Lacanian terms, this "draft" of the withdrawal is the gap in the big Other' (*On Belief*:108).⁴ And later, albeit in a more indirect fashion, he connects Heidegger's notion of being as clearing and event with

some notion of the void: 'he gave occasional hints as to how his notions of Clearing and Event resonate with the Oriental notion of the primordial Void' (*On Belief*:11).

But Žižek is at his most explicit in *The Parallax View*, where he states quite clearly that the ontological difference does not name a difference between beings and something transcendent to them but remarks the incompleteness of beings as a whole, as well as the absence of anything exceeding this 'whole' (*The Parallax View*:23–4, cf. 38): 'Ontological difference is not between the Whole of beings and their Outside, as if there were a Super-Ground of the All. In this precise sense, ontological difference is linked to finitude [...] which means that Being is the horizon of finitude which prevents us from conceiving beings in their All. Being cuts from within beings: ontological difference is not the "mega-difference" between the All of beings and something more fundamental, it is always also that which makes the domain of beings itself "non-all"' (*The Parallax View*:24). Despite the creeping Kantianism of the phrase 'which prevents us from conceiving beings', the tendency of Žižek's statement is to render Heidegger a Žižekian-Hegelian when it comes to the ontological difference: in other words, he aligns his own understanding of the ontological difference absolutely with Heidegger's own. And indeed we believe, although it would take too long a reading to show it here, that this is precisely the way in which later Heidegger is to be understood. But this is the *later* Heidegger, not the middle, and this will have consequences for how the later Heidegger's conception of action is to be understood.

It is this non-all which Žižek identifies as the two-faced 'real' of (late) Lacanian thought, one which gives the impression that there is a substantial real beyond the whole, but which is really just the non-totality of the appearance of anything, which gives the impression that the thing exists fully in itself *independently* of these perspectives on it — the curtain that creates the impression of something beyond it, as Hegel writes in 'Force and the Understanding', and which Lacan takes up as an image of his notion of fantasy. Thus the real is something that is a consequence *of* perspective, and Žižek compares it with the shift between perspectives, the parallax, since it is only here that perspectivality itself is revealed. The real is the singularity *of* any one perspective. Or rather, Žižek states that the real is to be understood as that which *makes* any vision 'anamorphotically distorted', the anamorphosis being an element of a view which is visible *only* from a certain perspective, as with the skull in Holbein's *Ambassadors*. (In other words, the real is not a consequence of perspective, it is what *causes there to be* perspective.)

Since it is not itself substantial, it may be defined as that which differentiates one perspective from another, or as Žižek says, it *is* the gap between perspectives

(23).⁵The real then is the non-totality of appearance itself, the fact that it structurally *cannot* be viewed from no position at all, but can only be seen perspectively (cf. *The Puppet and the Dwarf*:77).⁶ It is this non-totality, the *real as non-totality* that is *being*. And yet, while we have seen Žižek attribute this understanding to Heidegger himself, in the current essay he refuses to: 'It seems that Heidegger was not ready to draw all the consequences' (23). Heidegger would not be able to exceed the Kantian position, where this finitude is only a matter for us.

Now, it seems that this refusal on Žižek's part allows him to distinguish his own political position from Heidegger's: 'This limitation of Heidegger has a series of philosophical and ethico-political consequences' (23). Chief among these is that, for Heidegger, historical destiny exists on another level to ontic occurrences, and nothing ontic, nothing that we as human beings do can affect the course of being's inexorable unfolding, its Gestalt-shifts, its turns, the sudden revelation of beings as a whole in a new way. In a revealing example Žižek states that this is why Heidegger cannot recognise the Shoah as unique, this event which shatters the ontological coordinates of its time, as a trauma does (23). This is to say that it cannot be made intelligible within the current scheme of things, it is not possible from the point of view of the present and itself shifts the limit of what counts as 'possible'. It thus necessitates a new scheme of intelligibility, a new way of thinking.⁷

If something can happen that the current totality of beings does not contain even in potential, then this indicates that the current totality is in fact *not* total. Thus the trauma opens up a space which the contemporary horizon cannot encompass with understanding, and it thus opens up the possibility of a new order. Žižek seems to understand this trauma, perhaps the precipitation of the trauma, as an *act*, which is to say something carried out by man, as the holocaust undoubtedly was: it is not something that *being* makes possible but something that man does which is impossible, an extreme act, much like the revolutionary anti-democratic act which Žižek desires. Again, it is perhaps because the Nazis had the courage to attempt something new that they could execute such an impossible act as the extermination,

For Žižek however it is not this which distinguishes between the false event of Nazism and the true event of Stalinism. He often points out that the Stalinist purges were the more terrifying for their randomness and unpredictability (cf. *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*:68). Indeed, elsewhere Žižek has indicated, after Agamben, the danger of absolutising the Shoah, as an unnameable event which somehow exceeds any form of logic. For Žižek this prevents one from specifying how it is indeed part of a logic and was the result of a certain history and so on.

But once again this is very close to Heidegger's vision of the holocaust, one which for all its faults, at least honestly admitted that in truth the holocaust itself changed nothing. Heidegger's point with respect to Nazism is perhaps precisely that to believe in this uniqueness is to adopt Nazism's own understanding of itself, which is that it had by force of will brought something entirely new into the course of history, but in fact it was merely another, albeit extreme, manifestation of a nihilistic destiny which exceeded it. And yet here Žižek does imply that for him the holocaust *was* unique, which constitutes another example of Žižek's slightly moderating his earlier avowals of proximity to Heidegger). This is why Heidegger could say two world wars changed nothing, when it came to what is ontological and historical, it brought about and was nothing like a new event in history. If Nazism is not a true event, is Žižek licensed in saying that the *holocaust* was, that the holocaust was truly novel and unique, and something like a negative absolute, compared with which, nothing is so bad?

At another level, one can see why Žižek alters his position here, for the fact that (he and) Heidegger have said this with regard to the holocaust could be seen as another way of denying the possibility of such a thing as an act, a truly novel act brought about by human will alone, a miracle that produces something new. And that is precisely what Žižek is arguing for here, and arguing that it is something in which Heidegger does not believe. (Although again, the Nazi event was *not* such an act, it just — rightly, for Žižek — believed in the act's possibility.) For Žižek, because Heidegger does not recognise being as *immanent to beings*, as a void therein, he cannot think that historical destiny can be influenced by us, or that an ontic *Geschehnis* can have ontological historical effects, which is ultimately what Žižek wants: to salvage the possibility of a revolution initiated by human beings, the 'act'. This is what Heidegger is supposed to have shied away from, because he had believed that Nazism was such a politics which *could* bring about or indeed *was* an ontological event, and that had issued not only in disaster but in a retention of the status quo, onto-historically.

However, contra Žižek, we do not believe that Heidegger made such a withdrawal. Or at least, we believe that if Heidegger did withdraw from politics, he did *not* withdraw from the possibility of human action. Heidegger does believe in ontic acts having effects which might properly be called ontological. These take the form of our preparation, hope, fostering, 'shepherding' those singular beings known as things, in order that a place might be found within beings for a revelation — by contrast — of the truth of the contemporary configuration of beings. The thing would be the 'placeholder' of the void.⁸

That the historical nature of being's revelation is revealed here gives us hope, hope for new — a new turning in being's heart, whereby a new side of beings would be shown to us —, for the emancipatory new with respect to technology, a freedom to take or leave it: *Ge-lassen*, both a gathering and a leaving, an attitude to technology which acknowledges its non-independent nature, its dependence upon a revelation of beings that is itself finite, as should be acknowledged and as is becoming apparent today with the impending end of fossil fuels and the environmental change — not to say, devastation — that their incineration has brought with it.

Being for Heidegger would be nothing besides the singularity of the dying, finite thing, which is to say immanent to them, as the void of their finitude, a finitude not based on the subject's finite positioning within them, such that they always have a non-apparent side held back. The thing would be the shrine of the nothing (*The Thing*:179/171), the gravestone marking its place, marking place of the dead-absent within the living-present, which acts as a memorial amidst today's oblivion to being. And human action would foster such things, worship these voids. And does not Žižek himself describes the Lacano-Freudian 'thing' as a 'tombstone' (*For They Know Not What They Do*:272), the 'lost cause' of the Left?

The lost potential of the past, for the future

The formally satisfying structure of Žižek's essay means that in the end he returns to the tale with which he began: Chesterton's tale of concealing one corpse, one dummy, one *mort*, one symptomatic moment, by condemning the entirety of a system: condemning one episode along with the rest of a thinker's thought taken to be of a piece with it. Žižek's point is that psychoanalysis has taught us to expect a qualitative distinction immanent to the field of conscious knowledge, the moment which we disavow as that in which truth appears, the truth of one's desire, the truth of one's singularity. All the while, Žižek has referred to Heidegger's singularity, his radicality, his uniqueness, being blunted by either democratic critics or reinterpretations. Heidegger also saw that despite being individualistic, contemporary democracy was the enemy of singularity.

Žižek attempts not to untie the knot of the symptomatic moment of Heidegger's Nazism but to scrutinise it ever more thoroughly. He has indeed over several books been fixated by this 'deadlock'. And for him it illuminates back and forth the whole of Heidegger's *oeuvre* with a different light, the light of the *subject* peeping through a discourse which otherwise appears to deconstruct any such thing.

(I must confess that in an earlier work (2005) I myself have attempted to be un-Žižekian and to demonstrate that Heidegger's later thought is so different from his early work that the elements of the early work which tended towards the Nazi engagement cannot contaminate the later work, which is itself however not at all apolitical. And indeed, at the same time, I still have doubts about Žižek's naming of the symptomatic moment of the whole 'subject', 'the truly problematic and central point', as Žižek himself recognises.⁹ I do not believe a revolution can now be stirred by any form of human suffering or exploitation, only the exploitation of nature and its 'suffering', the 'environment' as the master-signifier of a new political discourse and movement.)

Heidegger was 'almost right', and with his 'decisionist' attempt to wilfully change the course of being's history, to bring being out of its abeyance by means of a political gesture (if indeed he had such grander ambitions beyond the university, which is — for him — nevertheless central to the spiritual life of a nation), he discovered the structure of the revolutionary act, in the sense that he believed here in a livable political project that was not democratic, the third of the three options with which we and Žižek began. Although Žižek does not quite say it, what is problematic for him, and what is perhaps the reason why Heidegger could in Foucauldian fashion fall for Nazism rather than Stalinism, is the notion that politics can *bring about* ontological change, world-historical change, a change in destiny (a prevalent word for Heidegger at the time). For Žižek this would be 'ontological politics', while, in a way that avoids both this and the 'ontic politics' of pragmatic compromise which characterises the deconstructive tradition and which allows one to produce (contra Laclau, for instance) a non-democratic theory which nevertheless takes into account deconstructive insights, Žižek is seeking a politics which can open up the space for ontological change without willing it or believing it can bring it about.

This is necessary in order to allow the future to present itself as New. If one moulds the future after one's own image, if one expects anything, the future will not really be the future, so one can in no way will the future or bring it about by force, one can only make room for it. If one attempts to mould the future, one closes out the other. If, on the other hand, one partakes of an ontic politics that opens up space for the new, one allows the event to come. Again, does this not seem reminiscent of the later Heidegger's position, in which one cannot bring about a turn in the unwinding of destiny by will alone? Here, man does not have the power to do such a thing, but one can prepare for such an eventuality, make it possible. In this context, Derrida speaks of this as making the *impossible* possible, the impossible, which cannot be conditioned by the present. One can only prepare for a turn in being's history. In any

case, for Žižek, Heidegger was right with regard to the form of revolutionary action, but gave it fascist content. But was he, by Žižek's own lights, if the ontological form of politics is not acceptable? In what sense did Heidegger get it right save in his opposition to democracy? Žižek seems to want more. Perhaps his notion that humans can affect *something* with respect to the ontological.¹⁰ 'Our task thus is to *repeat* Heidegger and retrieve this lost dimension or potential of his thought' (31). For Žižek, this lost potential is a far Leftist form of revolution. He consistently states that Heidegger had no time for communism. But let us examine Heidegger's thoughts on communism.

Heidegger's communism

After his Nazi engagement, particularly in the gigantic and tortured works of the 1930's when an entirely new relationship with language was being wrought through a violent struggle with his mother tongue, was Heidegger's relation to communism so simple? In fact, there are many passages where Heidegger refers to communism in a way that is more sympathetic than his consistently scathing remarks on capitalism (or 'Americanism'). Something deeply symptomatic of the age speaks from out of communism, and it knows it: "No matter which of the various positions one chooses to adopt toward the doctrines of communism and to their foundation, from the point of view of the history of being it is certain that an elemental experience of what is world-historical speaks out in it. Whoever takes "communism" only as a "party" or a "Weltanschauung" is thinking too shallowly, just as those who by the term "Americanism" mean, and mean derogatorily, nothing more than a particular lifestyle' ('Letter on Humanism':258–60). Communism is *more* than a mere politics: the essence of communism is 'neither "political" nor "sociological", neither "*weltanschaulich*" nor "anthropological", but rather a conceptual grasping of 'the jointure [*Fügung*] of beings as such as a whole' (*Geschichte des Seyns*:191).¹¹

It may equally reveal the world as power and energy — '[T]he word of Lenin: Bolshevism is Soviet power + electrification. That means Bolshevism is the "organic", i.e., organised, calculating (and as +) conclusion of the unconditional power of the party along with complete technologisation' (*Parmenides*:86/127) — but it does so more *explicitly* than capitalism, by distributing this power across all human beings, thereby bringing its humanocentrism and *Gestell*-like relation with the real to light. In many ways it is the absolutely extreme form of this, where the distribution of power, by becoming equally shared, sinks into inapparence. In this way it is perhaps *more*

symptomatic of its age than capitalism, while retaining the self-same understanding of the earth.

In a way, despite Žižek's statement that Heidegger does not recognise the communist revolution as an event, is he not doing just that when he says that it brings the truth of the age to the fore: does it not thereby partake (knowingly?) in the event of the age, which is to reveal the world as energy and power, to set upon it as resource? Heidegger's fascinating analysis of power and communism in *Geschichte des Seyns* expresses the twofold nature of Heidegger's stance towards communism and capitalism: on the one hand he stresses the essential sameness of these apparently opposed state-forms, and on the other he privileges communism as a more self-aware form of politics.

All state-forms today would be alike in considering political affairs in terms of power, just as a pre-revolutionary bourgeois politics does for Marx. The difference between these forms is merely one of revelation: one does not see that one is dominated by power in democratic regimes, whereas it becomes quite blatant in a dictatorship (*Geschichte des Seyns*:189). For Heidegger this means that all politics would remain indifferent and would not question or truly respond to the event of manifestation characteristic of its time, in which being is revealed as power: 'Power [*Macht*] is thus the name for the being of beings' (*Geschichte des Seyns*:182). Heidegger goes on to say that power becomes unconditional not in its uninhibited exercise by a dictator, but when it is shared among all in communism, when its ubiquity renders it tacit, invisible: 'The empowering of power [*Ermächtigung der Macht*] in the unconditionedness of machination, and from out of this is the essence of "communism"' (*Geschichte des Seyns*:191).¹²

Is this the kind of event which Žižek sees in the October revolution? For Žižek, despite the way in which things ultimately actualised themselves, the potential of a genuine alternative to democracy (and fascism) was opened up here, making this a true event, an event of the truly new. This Heidegger perhaps does not admit, seeing communism as merely the generalisation of what exists already in capitalism, and a revelation of the ontological state of affairs *already in existence*. But this for Heidegger is a necessary precondition for the eventual manifestation of the new. It is just that for him, unlike Žižek, communism was only a forerunner of this, not its eventuation.

Retrieving the past

Žižek, seemingly more and more attracted by Walter Benjamin, follows his interpretation to the effect that the October revolution repeats the French revolution and redeems its failure, the potentials that failed to be actualised in the actual unfolding of the event. Naturally this is not a question of a fate which pre-existed events, for the angel of history stands on the threshold of the present looking *backwards*, which is how one reads history, in itself a retrospective *recounting* of events, the ordering of a narrative which can be seen as tending towards a messianic moment of judgement or revelation, some sort of end to history, whether achievable or not.

“*The New can ONLY emerge through repetition*”. (31) On the other hand, this insight is not new, for sixteen years earlier Žižek wrote this:

the compulsion to *encircle* again and again the site of the lost Thing, to *mark* it in its very impossibility — as exemplified by the embodiment of the drive in its zero degree, in its most elementary, the *tombstone* which just marks the site of the dead.

This, then, is the point where the Left must not ‘give way’: it must preserve the traces of all historical traumas, dreams and catastrophes which the ruling ideology of the ‘End of History’ would prefer to obliterate [...]. Such an attitude, far from confining the Left within a nostalgic infatuation with the past, is the only possibility for attaining a distance on the present, a distance which will enable us to discern signs of the New. (*For They Know Not What They Do*:272–3)

The virtual is betrayed by its particular actualisation, for which Žižek rehabilitates his Lacanian phrase, ‘*in x more than x*’, a description of the object *petit a*, that in you which I love, which is nonetheless beyond you. Žižek presents a fascinating reading of the early Heidegger’s notion of time and repetition along these lines, whereby the genuine future is contained in the past as ‘hidden, non-realised potentials’, and the authentic future is a retrieval of this past (32).

It is thanks to this combination of Deleuzian virtuality and Benjaminian redemption that Žižek can now alter the position he took in *The Ticklish Subject* and retrieve the emancipative potential of ‘actually existing’ fascism, the genuine ‘inner greatness’ which Heidegger noted. This is what allows him to re-invoke the distinction between form and content which he might formerly have been more

cautious about, as befits a Hegelian. A deep past that has never been part of present experience and so remains always in the future, as something entirely other, entirely unconscious to the present, is a *trauma*, something that entered us in the night without our registering, but whose after-effects are shaking us and silently guiding our behaviour. The futurity of the trauma for Žižek consists in the fact that this event from the past can erupt¹³ and itself destroy the present symbolic order, thus making room for something new, *without* — we are compelled to presume — bringing about this new order, just erupting as a formation of the unconscious, becoming manifest as a symptom of the current arrangement of consciousness and calling for (and so making *possible*) something new.

The imposition of a new order following the traumatic eruption is explicitly identified by Žižek, albeit in an anti-Heideggerian context, as a new event of being, a new 'ontological disclosure': 'what Heidegger misses is the suspension of the dimension of the (being-in-the-)world [...] as the most radical dimension of subjectivity, as that against which the violent synthetic imposition of a (New) Order — the Event of Historical Disclosure of Being — is the defence' (*The Ticklish Subject*:50).

For Žižek, Heidegger has no notion of such a thing, a subjective act that would create a void, a hole in the current symbolic explanation, a rent that can only ever be patched up but never eradicated altogether. He defines trauma as occurring when 'an ontic intrusion gets so excessively powerful that it shatters the very ontological horizon' (36). Identifying the holocaust as such a trauma, Žižek shows how it is the intrusion of a void into the current order that demands a new order, an entirely new epoch in the revelation of the whole. Traumatic returns lead to a 'loss of reality', which is to say that the symptom shows that the symbolic order one had used to bind reality together in truth hangs together by a merest thread and does not finally make sense. Hence the 'loss of ontological horizon'.¹⁴

For Žižek — and here he seems to be consistent with his earlier exposition in *The Ticklish Subject* — what is at work here is an ahistorical subject, a drive that aims to destroy and thus make room for a rebuilding of any symbolic construction, a counter-natural drive that 'cannot be reduced to an epoch of being', 'modern subjectivity bent on technological domination' (37). This is the 'non-metaphysical core of modern subjectivity itself' (34) which Žižek has always considered Heidegger to have overlooked.

There *is* an ahistorical core in Heidegger's notion of the history of being, and it is precisely *Ereignis* itself, the event is ahistorical, as — once again — Žižek elsewhere acknowledges: 'each epochal experience of the truth of Being is a failure,

a defeat of thought's endeavour to capture the Thing. Heidegger himself — at least in his great moments — never fell into this' (*For They Know Not What They Do*:137n2). The difference which Žižek and ourselves formerly insisted upon, that the point of disagreement was in naming this ahistorical moment 'the subject' has to some extent been ameliorated if we accept that Heidegger's understanding of human action, in his later works, is closer to Žižek's own understanding of revolutionary action than he believes.

Conclusion: to oppose democracy *without* communism?

To summarise then, Žižek has elsewhere broached something like the interpretation of later Heidegger that we have here attempted to present, and yet here, he refuses it. On this reading, Heidegger does allow room for ontic political action, in the form of the attitude towards the thing as placeholder of the void in the current order, which fosters it as a symptomatic moment of the truth of beings as a whole. But this reading can perhaps only be made of the *later* Heidegger, not the more militant middle order. And indeed the former Žižekian Heidegger in fact issues from *the failure* of Nazism. The problem with the middle period, as Žižek recognises, is its attempt to control being's destiny by human will, while the later Heidegger — and Žižek himself — acknowledges that all humans can do is prepare a site for the event, by making a clearing within beings.

What then does Žižek glean from Heidegger's middle period which he could not derive from the later? It seems to us now that it is only the wilfulness of the human act and its violent language of attack, its overtly 'revolutionary' attitude. But this seems to us to be unnecessarily humanistic in locating the symptomatic point of the current world in something which concerns communism, and that is human suffering and exploitation. What if the symptomatic point of the current configuration of beings were not the human exploitation enjoined by capitalism but the natural exploitation enjoined by technology under the sway of 'systematic en-framing' (*Gestell*)? The symptomatic moment is that characteristic of the contemporary order which captures its most fundamental essence, the destruction of which would constitute a revolutionary alteration of this order. In this case, the point at which ontic, revolutionary action should be directed, in order to open up the space for a new revelation of beings (a new event or *Ereignis*), might rather be here. This we believe to be Heidegger's later view.

Man's only task is to keep in mind the fragile things of nature and to their finitude, the deathliness which technology attempts to close out in favour of constant

presence, its realisation of the Western understanding of being in practical form. Once man has done this, it is then in nature's power, or perhaps god's, to reveal something new to us (not man but 'only a god can save us now'). We just have to remain open to the possibility of this revelation, while constantly preparing sites for it. The question is perhaps whether there is any *politics* that could do this, or whether such an action would not rather be *ethical*?

This is why we might point to nature as the source of the revolt rather than humanity: nature still retains its otherness and as it *loses* this otherness in being transformed into technology's resource, it cries out for this. Full technologisation of production would free the worker from toil but would not remove capitalism. The source of value and that upon which the system depends would merely have shifted, and nature would now be the one exploited for its value. If communism itself has an exploitative attitude to nature just as much as Nazism and capitalism, does this not suggest that there is *not* the potential for a genuine alternative to the most radical essence of the present age *even in communism*?

Thus Heidegger closes down *more* options than Žižek and thereby sets himself a still more difficult task.¹⁵ He refuses both of capitalism and communism on the grounds on their humanism and historical situatedness, their shared exploitative relation to nature. And this is why he is perhaps reluctant to repudiate Nazism absolutely because he is worried that this will indeed leave him with *no options* at all. It is *this* that relieves him of Žižek's somewhat 'convenient' exit route from democracy in terms of communism, a potential which already existed. Heidegger's task is yet more challenging: how to oppose democracy *without* the possibility of communism. Not Nazism, not capitalism, not communism: is *any* politics appropriate for Heidegger, appropriate in the sense of operating on the level of being-history and destiny? Can it in any way aid in the preparatory, meditative, action which Heidegger deems necessary on the part of man in the hoped-for appearance of the thing? Is Heidegger perhaps trying to think an alternative to democracy which does *not* already exist, even in potential, an attempt which cannot simply delve into the potential of the past and retrieve the New as a different actualisation of a past potential? Heidegger certainly attempts to think another form of action to the contemporary busyness of praxis, one which attempts to bring about the new by watching over the thing as the site of the futural event.

But is it possible to have a *politics* of the thing? Is it in politics that the New can be prepared for? Are we to explain Žižek's unexplained refusal of an interpretation of Heidegger which he had previously provided as allowing him this presupposition, that it is in *politics* that the event must be prepared for? Does his own

earlier interpretation of the *later* Heidegger not suggest rather that revolutionary action is rather a task for ethics, or perhaps neither of these, certainly not in their traditional acceptation. Of course, Žižek's whole point has long been to oppose the deconstructionist view of politics, but that does not mean that the latter is not in some fundamental way correct. The question is whether a revolution that did not take place at the level of politics would be extensive enough to prevent the ever mounting devastation of the earth from reaching its consummation.

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Endnotes:

¹ The purpose of Žižek's invocation of Emmanuel Faye's discovery of Heidegger's philosophical grounding of Nazism in his seminars on the State from 1933–5 is perhaps invoked by Žižek to undercut those whom he has just railed against, who do not read Heidegger because his thought is taken to support Nazism. That is precisely why this thought and these seminars in particular are interesting, because Žižek is interested in just that, the practical actualisation of theory.

² Why the apparent mockery? Elsewhere Žižek has agreed with us that the environment question is unquestionably the most important and pressing of our time.

³ But in this way it would be the outcome of a thinking that stood at the 'end of metaphysics'. Would Žižek be happy to situate himself here? To be considered part of that 'community of the question' which meditates on the possibility of thought at the end of philosophy? (*Writing and Difference*:98) If he aligns himself within the tradition which thinks the ontological difference, does he have any choice in the matter?

⁴ Žižek is referring to Heidegger's celebration of Socrates as the 'purest thinker of the West' who stood fast in the draft where all who came after him would flee, the one who dared to write nothing. It is curious that Žižek should understand Heidegger to be saying that a *human being* (a 'subject?') acts as the place-holder for this void: 'Socrates was the only one who endured in this gap, who acted as a stand-in and place-holder, who, for his interlocutors, gave body, occupied the space of this gap. All subsequent philosophers concealed this gap by providing a closed ontological edifice. [...] It is crucial here that Heidegger defines Socrates in purely structural terms: what matters is the structural place (of the inconsistency of the Other) he occupies, in which he persists, not the positive content of his teaching [...] 'Socrates' names just a certain POSITION [*sic*] of enunciation' (B:108–9). But then again, one almost finds these exact words in Heidegger's 1969 Seminar in Le Thor: 'Being, however, for its opening, needs man as the there of its manifestation. [/] [...] The human is the place-holder [*Platzhalter*] of the nothing' (*Four Seminars*:63/108). We have argued elsewhere that man is this place-holder, he has this access to nothingness *as such* because of his peculiar relation to *death as such*.

⁵ Žižek uses something like this argument in *Looking Awry* to explain or excuse his 'sinthomatic' use of film examples, these peculiar interludes which make Žižek's works both enjoyable and peculiar to him, as well as occasionally frustrating for us. This is why it is useless to complain that Žižek's works should become less symptomatic and more academic, disciplined etc, for it ignores their performative-Lacanian aspect, which is to enact singularity.

⁶ It is here that Žižek for the first time draws close to a thinker he admits to never having had much time for, contrary to almost every philosopher of the twentieth century, Nietzsche (*Conversations with Žižek*).

⁷ And indeed the Shoah-event has stirred just such an attempt to find a new way of thinking, beyond totality and identity, in post-war thought, beginning particularly with Levinas and Adorno.

⁸ 'Socrates was the only one who endured in this gap, who acted as a stand-in and place-holder, who, for his interlocutors, gave body, occupied the space of this gap. All subsequent philosophers concealed this gap by providing a closed ontological edifice. [...] It is crucial here that Heidegger defines Socrates in purely structural terms: what matters is the structural place (of the inconsistency of the Other) he occupies, in which he persists, not the positive content of his teaching [...] 'Socrates' names just a certain POSITION [*sic*] of enunciation' (*On Belief*:108–9). But then again, one almost finds these exact words in Heidegger's 1969 Seminar in Le Thor: 'Being, however, for its opening, needs man as the there of its manifestation. [/] [...] The human is the place-holder of the nothing' (*Four Seminars*:63/108). For a more expansive exposition of my reading of Heidegger's thing, see my *Heidegger Beyond Deconstruction*.

⁹ 'Heidegger is fully aware that the "derangement of man's position among beings" [A quotation from *Contributions to Philosophy* (237/338)], the fact that man's emergence somehow "derails" the balance of entities, is in a way *older than Truth itself*, its very hidden foundation [...] for Heidegger,

the Truth-Event can occur only within such a fundamental “ontological imbalance”. The truly problematic and central point is that Heidegger refuses to call this “ontological imbalance” or “derangement” *subject* (*The Fragile Absolute*:168n.58).

¹⁰ The following passage from *The Ticklish Subject* should give some clues here. Perhaps the title of the present essay is a deliberate modification of the earlier phrase ‘a step in the right direction’, for in a footnote to the title, Žižek adds ‘in the wrong direction’ (n.1): ‘what [the Habermasian] criticism rejects as proto-Fascist decisionism is simply the basic condition of the *political*. In a perverted way, Heidegger’s Nazi engagement was therefore a “step in the right direction”, a step towards openly admitting and fully assuming the consequences of the lack of ontological guarantee, of the abyss of human freedom’ (*The Ticklish Subject*:21).

¹¹ In the same way, the theory of communism, Marx’s work, understands the contemporary situation in a particularly enlightened way, as Heidegger quite often acknowledged: ‘Because Marx by experiencing estrangement attains an essential dimension of history, the Marxist view of history is superior to that of other historical accounts’ (‘Letter on Humanism’:258). ‘Marxism is indeed the thought of today, where the self-production of man and society plainly prevails [*herrscht*]’ (*Four Seminars*:73/387).

¹² De Beistegui (2007) has provided a fascinating reading of these passages.

¹³ Or rather, events *become* traumatic only after the fact, when a new symbolic arrangement is able to attribute to them a traumatic import — as Žižek would now say, the real reveals itself only when the (symbolising) perspective *shifts*.

¹⁴ Žižek suggests that we are left confronting the raw ontic thing, but this seems to regress to a pre-parallax real outside of symbolic determinations which would betray it, a notion which Žižek has spent some time refuting. A purely ontic thing would be one that did not appear, that was a mere void, perhaps this is how we are to understand it: anxiety is a moment when beings swirl away, and we are left to stare into their retreat, helpless and abandoned, as Heidegger so brilliantly describes in ‘What is Metaphysics?’. Žižek himself recognises this elsewhere: ‘In the second part, however, the perspective is as it were reversed: the immersion in the life-world itself is not the original fact, but is conceived of as secondary with regard to the abyss of *Dasein*’s “thrown-ness” [...] which is experienced in the mode of anxiety [...] it is ultimately from this abyss that we escape into engaged immersion in the world’ (*On Belief*:106–7).

¹⁵ Heidegger says in his interview with *Der Spiegel*, ‘a decisive question for me today is: how can a political system accommodate itself to the technological age, and which political system would this be?’ (*Der Spiegel*:104/206) Heidegger continues: ‘I have no answer to this question. I am not convinced it is democracy’ (ibid.).