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# Axioms in Ž— *Notes on a Scandalous Appropriation of Philosophy Out of the Sublimity of the Thing*

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## **Abstract.**

This essay is an attempt to work through Žižek's basic philosophy (as a series of "axioms") to the point where it is definitively overcome, through the non-dialectical possibilities inherent in the particular standpoint he has taken. It is shown that, with Žižek, Hegel is not so much gone "beyond" (as one recent commentator in this journal claims), as that dialectics as such is shown to fail altogether. But what is a non-dialectics? The end of this essay develops this question in a return to Deleuze.

## ***Methodological Ontology, or: Ontological Methodology***

Only *after* having wrestled with the one whom I do not wish to designate *bête noir*, do I come to assert what should have come (and gone) first, that is: a methodological ontology, an axiom to determine the trajectory of my ontology of reading, which perhaps, in the end, will suggest the beginning, the first, of my *first anti-principles* (those which determine the world and ourselves as *performances*). We should always insist on

separating out interpretation from the thing itself. One should leave their readings aside, and let the text speak of its own inner conflict, its own unresolved and un-resolvable fractures that, as the thinker moves round and round in their thought, threaten the *whole* with utter destruction, an uncontained failure of the internal motor driving the thought forward, backward, *sideways*. One must balance the absolute transcendence of the *reader* (of someone else) with the absolute immanence of the *read*—the very first “in-itself” that must, from our position of absolute transcendence, become an other-for-itself of the one who has determined this text we hold before our eyes. That is, we must beware the occasional and deadly emergence of the “Evil Eye” (of which Nietzsche spoke on more than one occasion).

In Žižek this is the tension that he cannot resist collapsing into the totality of dialectical enfoldment, and thus he will reproduce,—to spoil the story I will attempt to tell—at the level of the ontology of reading, the very dialecticism that, at the level of the read (at the level of Hegel himself) he will problematize in order to satisfy the (predetermined) strictures of intellectual debate and reflection (thus giving the *appearance* of an openness which in reality is profoundly disingenuous). In other words, we must struggle to separate Lacan, Marx and especially Hegel from Žižek himself, who already predetermines the outcome of his thinking with the form of the dialectic. This is, perhaps, inevitable—an occupational hazard of not only the scholastic tendencies of “theory”, but, more particularly, with the engagement of Hegel and Hegelian thought. Such was the realization of Schopenhauer early in the development of the Hegelian tradition; and such a realization of the “sham” nature of the oppositions with which Hegel dealt was the ultimate realization of Nietzsche—of which Heidegger and Deleuze provide us with the most contemporary reassertions in their focus upon the enigma of difference.

This separation between the thing-itself we read—the thing in its absolute mystery and infinite interpretive complexity (for interpretation, insofar as it is the product of our imagination, is *infinite*: an infinite, asymptotic approach *to the thing*)—and the reading which is produced out of this engagement with the thing, does determine a dialectic at the level of our reading. It is the dialectic of the in-itself and the for-itself: insofar as we make the text alive through our imaginative capacities, we make an in-

itself into a for-itself in us; or, it is the dialectic of the self and the otherness of the text in itself, which we attempt to dissolve in the infinity of our own imaginative interpretations of the text. But the deadness of text which we desire to fully overcome in our interpretation always threatens to hide the true basis of the in-itself of the text *in another*: the text as record of *struggle*. In this sense the text is the most profound image of the impossible resolution, the most faithful expression available to us of our incapacity to find a final resolution from within the *agon* of life itself—the *play* at this-or-that which we transform into the oppositions and maneuverings of the intellect, self-generating its form of certainty and analysis from the nothingness from which this *agon* arises in the first place (that is, the utter *contingency* of the playing-at of humanity).

From this we come upon our first anti-principle, that is, a principle which, from the point of view of the *old* metaphysic (the “onto-theology” which Heidegger designates as the unifying field of Western philosophy as a whole—beginning, of course, with Plato), can only seem to affirm the negation of philosophy—a kind of anti-philosophy. But in fact is it the first principle of a true *aesthesis*—or what we should designate as an “aesthetic agon-ism”. The (dialectical) irony is that this can only appear radically pretentious—but precisely because the *agon* is itself inherently inimical to the presupposition of the discourse, which is the “discourse of the Master” or, more particularly, the discourse of Knowledge. The *agon* which we announce, and which was announced always and eternally by Nietzsche, is the great *parricide*, and threatens us with a future romanticism which we will attempt to *resist*, for our first axiom to undermine axioms is the primacy of *struggle*, from out of which an unending repetitious *agonism* arises, which in turn establishes the field for our anti-principles.

Letting Hegel play—with himself as Hegel—is the first stage in allowing Hegel to speak for Hegel. Only then can we begin to see the “true” Hegel as the Hegel who cannot resolve his own inner tensions and who, because of this, gives us insight into the real—the impossible-real. And this will become the non-dialectical core that is unthinkable as such, the intersecting “plane of immanence” which Hegel must struggle to overcome, but cannot, because of the transcendent *orientation* that his Absolute wishes to establish. There is an utter catastrophe of history that follows behind Hegel and which pushes the dialectic to overcome itself; this Benjamin perhaps was the first to

clearly, *prophetically*, see, and which is the “secret” to his “dialectics at a standstill” (he had the wisdom to understand that only by freezing the infinite movement of the *aufhebung* can the “truth” of Hegel finally appear—and that, through the *particular in time*). In this sense—and only in this sense—should the dictum of Deleuze be understood: that one should “forget Hegel”. This in fact constitutes the first monadic principle of the proper reading of Hegel, for within the non-dialectical core of Hegel—the Drives—there is a powerful antidote to memory, and *anamnesis*—to recollection: the “death” of Nature, the repetitious insistence of the Drives, all this compels the loss of biographical time and the destruction of historical time (the time determined of *meaning*). In forgetting this we think the New in and of itself as difference, and in so doing, we are born into the time of the future, the time of the present, and found the contingency of meaningful time once again, opening the treasures of interpretation—which are the treasures of *play*—for the struggle of the future. In Hegel, we found the thinking of history as *notion*; but here, having found *agon* as the form of the non-dialectical core of Hegel himself which cannot be thought *qua* ‘notion’ we are required to think not in notional terms, but to think as *performance*. This finally brings us back to our ontology of reading: to read is to inhabit the ideas which we make living only insofar as the inherent struggle, of which they are the starkest *image*, emerges clearly for the first time in us.

Is not, then, Žižek the very first of our potential *agonists*? Would not a relinquishment of the onto-theology of Western thought not clarify the essential dimension of *play* as in fact the first place of our anti-philosophy—one that leads us to the primacy of *aesthesis* as determined by *agon*?

And so, therefore, I do not wish him to become my *bête noir*—mainly because there is no body of work of mine to substantiate this pretention. But nonetheless, I will make an attempt to resist the emergence of Žižek as the Dark Beast I must fight and struggle to overcome—things that must occur, that will occur, but only on account of a profound *neighborliness*.

There are three fields that come together in Žižek. We are well familiar with them by now. First, there is, of course, Lacan; this puts us in the field of Psychoanalysis.

Second, we have Marx, and this places us in the field of Marxian *political-economic* thought. I want to stress that Žižek treats Marx and Marxian thought as *political-economics* (a rehabilitation of the profoundly political dimension to the “Economy” and economic thought). But as such he treats it as crucial (a *critical*) juncture point, a conjunctive field in which Psychoanalysis might reconnect with Philosophy, in particular, with Hegel, giving Marx (and Marx’s communist idea) the deeply structured *dialectical psyche* that it needs in order to function as a concrete (a “real”) political-economic agent (or at least, in order that Marx’s form of political-economy be a psychoanalytically tenable *theory*, such that the emancipatory potential of the *critique* of political economy Marx achieved not be lost to pure, specialist analysis of an abstract agent subject to external “economic” factors—a “false” *materialist determinism*). And so we have our third field: Hegelian Philosophy. We could also add a *fourth*: theology—but this is something that emerges from the conjuncture between Psychoanalysis and Hegelian philosophy achieved within Marxian political-economy as Žižek in fact conceives it. For the ‘theos’ we must, of course, substitute the radical *death of God*, but not strictly in the Nietzschean sense; rather, it must be understood in the Hegelian sense. What died was the transcendent God—and, transcribed into the only terms that we really have at our disposal, that is, in *psychoanalytical* terms, this means: there is no “Big Other” in whom one can confide, or place one’s trust. *You* are all that you can trust—or rather, the placing of trust nowhere whatsoever is all that we can “do” for the “self” *is* precisely the location and the substance of the “death of God”. Given the *dialectical negativity* that constitutes the subject as such (what I want to call most horrifically a “dialectical constitutive negativity”), the only psychoanalytically proper *form* a political-economy could take, therefore, must be a properly atheistic/materialist “communism of the Holy Ghost”—i.e., a “post-Christ” society, one where the political economy of the lot of humankind is configured around the death of the transcendent God-who-became-man. We must emphasize the purely *formal*, which is to say *theoretical*, dimension of the Marxian idea of communism for Žižek: he has given us a rehabilitated theoretical field within which the idea might be resurrected and established as once again a viable theoretical *possibility*; he has therefore given us the proper *form* of a political economy without having to spell out its details (the “content” if you will). We must, however, be

careful here with this form/content distinction, for there is a more subtle (Hegelian) logic going on. His not spelling out the material details of his rehabilitated form of the “Communist Hypothesis” is, I am tempted to say, quite deliberate; more precisely, it is a requirement of his own theoretical standpoint. The lack of supposed details on this score is consistent with his understanding of the theory/praxis distinction, one informed by his Hegelianism: *theory is already a kind of praxis*. Or more precisely: an authentic *praxis* is only achieved as a *theoretical shift* which has succeeded in revealing the very “coordinates of reality” (to borrow Žižek’s own terminology)—the ideology which *structures* (and sustains) any *praxis* in the first place. In this way theory also achieves its emancipatory aims (perhaps first clearly indicated by Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School he helped establish with Adorno): one must first be able to clearly perceive that which structures (the reality of) *praxis* in the first place before one can intervene in the world to *change* the existing order—to liberate it from the ideology that enables it to function normally and without interruption. One is tempted to repeat the formula of Nietzsche’s *Socratism* here: “in order to be free from ideology it must first be intelligible (to you)” (Žižek’s reading of They Live in A Pervert’s Guide to Ideology clearly makes the point)—with the perhaps awkward suggestion that we may wish to conjugate Nietzsche’s scorn for Žižek (but we will leave this aside for the moment).

So, we have his Lacan (or Lacanianism); and his Hegel (and Hegelianism). Almost as if squeezed between them we have his Marx (and Marxism), from which emerges (though a seemingly unnatural, unholy birth) a monstrous child: the “communism of the Holy Ghost”. As a purely *formal* thing, it constitutes an interestingly multi-layered signifier, one to which he attaches the utmost *hope* for an authentically emancipated society. The Holy Ghost, at the purely symbolic level, is, in a most insidiously *reflexive* way, a suddenly alive possibility abandoned to ruin by the early Christians when the institutional Leviathan, the Church, arose out of the decay and decadence of the Roman Empire. In the Pervert’s Guide to Ideology, we are taken, at one point, to a field of ruination: decaying, rusting, hollowed-out aeroplane hulls are being reclaimed, slowly, imperceptibly, by Nature. Here, in this slow chaos of destruction, where the drama of the Hegelian stage is there for all of us to see (Nature negating the handiwork of humankind, and so on), we are told that Walter Benjamin’s

conception of History comes to life: it is only when things begin to decompose, to crumble in abandonment, that we really begin to see what their world really was all about—and only in this way does History really become clear: each crumbling, decaying and forgotten *thing* reveals to us a monad of its time, like a prism which, through its distortions, reveals to us the unseen complexity of light (that which first appears to be pure and simple and of little complexity). This is what Žižek's communist idea is all about: looking through the ruins of the communist idea in the recent past in order to see the forgotten and abandoned possibility it possesses *because* of this ruination: the communism of the Holy Ghost that could not be seen *until Marx's idea failed miserably*.

I don't much care if Žižek is, or is not, *really* a "systematic" thinker. What I do care about is that he is a thinker. And I am even less concerned with the question (though I do concern myself, on occasion with it) as to whether he is a "philosopher" or a "psychoanalyst" or just a "Marxist" or whatever. I think that he is all of those things together, or maybe just a few of them put together. What he *is* is a thinker responding to what I take to be a *rupture* as fundamental as that announced (or born witness) by Descartes, the one that most if not all thinkers acknowledge signaled a fundamental *break* with what we have come to call the "medieval" world. A break as cultural and social as it was—and perhaps most fundamentally—*psychical*. Whatever your evaluation of these terms or of Descartes and the significance of his philosophy, most will agree that, five hundred-odd years out, many things that only now are slowly being questioned or rearticulated or abandoned altogether (as failingly or awkwardly as it might be attempted) were easily within Descartes' grasp (but not, say, within Aquinas' or Augustine's). But what seems to be, more and more, exceeding the grasp of a thinker like Descartes or the thinkers of the later Enlightenment, or even of those of nineteenth-century Romanticism (now two hundred years hence) is the world into which we find ourselves increasingly pulled: the world of biogenetic manipulation/intervention (the two-way manipulation and intervention that Žižek often mentions: paraplegics able to control external objects with their thoughts, and the reverse: the possibility of our thoughts themselves becoming the object of control or manipulation); a world of biologically/evolutionarily catastrophic ecological devastation (sufficient to dangerously alter both planetary climate *and* evolutionary-biological trajectories, inducing extinctions,

etc.); a world witness to the breakdown of classical deterministic physics (the hotly disputed implication of quantum theory); where space & time can themselves be theoretically manipulated (in relativistic physics we have to contemplate the possibility of *time travel*); and a world in which we have the power to manipulate matter & energy at atomic and subatomic levels (another consequence of relativistic physics, coupled with an understanding of quantum theory), further darkening our ecological/evolutionary prospects. The one factor that is common to all these developments, the one thing that marks *our* world from the world of Descartes, the Enlightenment and the world of the Romantics or of the Nineteenth Century as a whole, and the one thing that also, I am afraid, marks us off from the Nietzschean world of difference and multiplicities that was supposed to be the mark of the “post-modern” is *radical contingency*. We might even call it, as some (even in quantum physics) do—“intrinsic randomness”. Quentin Meillassoux has provided a kind of philosophical axiom for our age, a formula for what is neither “modern” nor exactly “post-modern” (and which is most certainly not post-post-this-or-that—the very *obsession* to categorize time historically in this way should be read itself as a most ideologically *revealing* feature about this dying age of ours that struggles to give rise to another). The axiom is: the only absolutely necessary *law* is that laws are contingent (the law of the “necessity of contingency”). It is not exactly an axiom, or rather, its status is ambiguous: it can be proven *negatively* from within the world *before* the rupture, which determines it as a *theorem* as it were, clearly *carved* out of the ruination of the old system; but it cannot strictly be *proven* within the system that *follows* the rupture because the “system” as such is in the process of becoming, of forming and taking shape. Ironically, a claim such as the “necessity of contingency” is precisely that which radically *opens* (anti-determines) the very notion of proof itself: if a fundamental requirement of any proof is that the assumptions which determine the proof must themselves be *fixed* as true *assumptions*, then, by definition, an absolutely *necessarily* contingent truth is one for which there *necessarily* exist no fixed assumptions relative to which a proof can be derived. Yet—is this not precisely a statement of the claim, a kind of image of a “proof” of it? There is more to say on the significance, and the status, of Meillassoux’s supposed discovery or his “new” philosophy (or whatever is said about it), but what is clear is that his formula



encapsulates succinctly the *essence* of the “post-modern” *weltgeist* in such a way as to suspend the ideological obfuscation that surrounded those attempts to articulate it. For it was, as we are realizing perhaps only now, that what exploded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the last hope for certainty and the locus of *necessity*: the self. His formula very simply concentrates the logico-psychical impasse of the “subject” as such, even though he is attempting to break the “correlationist” bind into which all previous philosophies (he says) had gotten themselves into: the subject/object bind. I say it is “logico-psychical” because it rests, on the one hand, on that perhaps overused and ill-understood *proof* of the logician Kurt Gödel: the infamous “Incompleteness Theorems” of the 1930s (which should be ranked alongside of quantum and relativity theories as marking the decisive victory of *contingency* and radical openness over the closed but infinite determinism of the post-Renaissance world); and, on the other, is an articulation of the *constitutive negativity* of the (psychoanalytical) subject (of “subjectivity” as such). It is a claim which cannot be proven positively in the system (or framework) from which its truth is certainly known (and, dare I say, *felt*); it falls out only decisively as a *negation* of the previously sacrosanct system of necessary, determinate truths, of stable substances and subjects, and so on. Indeed, it emerges as a decisive “critique of Critique” (as Badiou calls it in his “Preface” to *After Finitude*<sup>1</sup>). In this way we might take the significance of Meillassoux’s “necessity of contingency” to be the *formula* for this fundamental rupture—that *thing* to which thinkers are called to respond, be they “philosophers” or “psychoanalysts” or “Marxist political-economists” or whatever. Is not the very significance of this rupture, from a purely denominative and symbolical level, precisely the problem of designating *new* boundaries, *new* borders, of finding *new* territory and *disputing* old ones? We thinkers are ablaze and somnambulate, half blinded by the catastrophe of which we are also the *perpetrators*, searching the ruination of our fields, of *History*, afoot with the un-mapping cleverness of an anti-archaeologist, finding and creating ruins, and allowing Nature to reclaim the things that we had thought once so very *useful*, but which now become our runic prisms (we dialectical ones)....

So, though I am not bothered by the fact that Žižek may or may not be systematic or whatever else we might, or might not, want to label him, I *am* bothered by

the *trajectory* of his thinking, by what it treats inadequately or obliquely, and what it seems to endorse politically or socially. I believe that, should we formulate a few axioms of his thinking—those that would not require *proof* if you were not already committed to a certain field of thought (but which he might try, in places here-and-there, to justify in some way or other)—then we would see that, quite clearly, there is a *systematic direction* to his thinking, and that it, quite clearly, points in the direction of the *communist hypothesis* (which I insist we formulate as the “communism of the Holy Ghost”). I am bothered because I am not so sure that the axioms add up to this Hypothesis, or that, if they add up to any determinate *form* of sociopolitical-economic configuration at all, then it *cannot*, most certainly, be anything like a *determinate form of society as such*. Indeed, if, as some have realized, there is a missing dimension of “feminine *jouissance*” to his analysis (that to which Lacan necessarily turns towards the end of his career), then precisely what emerges at this level must either be a (horizontally) *matriarchal* society of some form (that is, something like the utopias designed in the many feminist science fiction novels of the 1960s, 70s and 80s), or some form of *nomadism*. Is it not interesting that Žižek’s two *bête noirs*—the *feminine* and the Deleuzian (socio-political) *rhizomatics* (the nomadological anti-oedipal *socius* of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*)—arise precisely where and when his emancipatory politics is strongest, that is, when his “theoretics” is about to *climax*? If he was not so deeply committed a psychoanalyst (and this is the label, the most obvious, for him from which we should not shy), then this would be pure, vulgar *ad hominem*; but unfortunately, the medicine he’s taken, and which he dispenses, is a bitter one for all. Or, to switch metaphors: we must inflict upon him *a wound that heals*. Hegel’s Owl might take flight only at dusk; but we wield the Ax of salvation only at *dawn*.

Let us, then, work with his axioms. What are they? We shall cull them from the three fields—

### ***His Lacan***

Certainly the most fundamental structure of Žižek’s thought is that provided by the Borromean Knot of the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real. Out of these *three holes* arises, as a kind of elusive swirl, the *subject* as such, i.e., *subjectivity*. It would seem

that Žižek never veers from subjectivity—ever. Nothing substantially important about our psychical life and its profound and insidiously slippery *inscription* into a supra-individual *symbolical/imaginary* order can be grasped without this *locus*. One fact about the subject that we should clear up immediately is this: there is no “substantial” self in the sense that the substance of the self is its very absence. I don’t mean to muddy the waters here by talking about Buddhism (another of Žižek’s Dark Beasts, which I tackle elsewhere), but I cannot help but be reminded of an ancient Buddhist debate about the ontological status of *śūnyatā* or “emptiness”—did the Buddha teach that the truth of the self was that there is not a self to be found? Or, did the Buddha simply not commit to any positive doctrine whatsoever—the affirmation of a standpoint of being *purely noncommittal*? Many contemporary scholastic defenders of, for example, the great *śūnya-vadin* Nāgārjuna will often claim that he did not teach emptiness as a positive doctrine—he even *negated* ‘emptiness’! Rather, they insist, he taught a much more profound non-doctrine: *having no doctrine*! I don’t think there is an “intellectual” resolution to this deeply scholastic debate (one that threatens to be repeated today in Buddhist academic circles); I rather prefer to take the much more naïve position and view the “doctrine” or “non-doctrine” as such as a *description of an experience* (and I don’t want to get entangled with more scholasticism about ‘experience’ either). Precisely *this* brings to mind something Žižek likes to say about Plato’s torturous *Parmenides*: all those several theses on the ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ and so on can be read as descriptions of precise *experiences*—by which he means *psychoanalytical* ones (or at least, experiences that can be given a psychoanalytical *gloss*)—or, more importantly, the *impossibility* of certain experiences, and so on. So, let us always keep this in mind when we talk about the subject or “subjectivity”: what’s at stake here is the possibility of certain experiences, or rather, in this case: *precisely* an impossibility. The subject—and this I am in agreement with Žižek about—is the site of a radical impossibility that is only *now* dawning on us. If, as some scholars say, the subject as the locus of “interiority” was something only realized in a decisive way *after* Plato (some put its emergence as late as Plotinus in the Second Century AD), then we can say that we are now at another watershed moment in the history of the subject—in fact, we are at the endpoint of the history of the “interior” (substantial) subject and are at the threshold of the decisive

emergence of something else altogether (to quote Lacan, we're at a point where we can grasp in a profound way that "*substance is already the subject, before it becomes the subject*"<sup>2</sup>). I say "something else altogether" because, again, all that we know here, right now, is what is failing—what notions are disintegrating and what Benjaminian historical, dialectical truths are beginning to shine through the prism of this crumbling notion. We can as yet only *gesture*, somewhat playfully, jokingly or perhaps *cruelly*, at this emergent fact—but we still do not know quite what to say, for it (whatever 'it' is) is not finished appearing. We are helping it to appear—and here is where I will display to you my Hegelian affections (which will perhaps soon recede from view, and become a nonappearance). We should mention in passing one potential objection to these claims: they are Eurocentric and a bit pretentious, in the grand style of too many a philosopher from the Old World—what about Buddhism, which had already announced the *absence* of a self, and so on? There is much to be said to this reply, but we can only limit ourselves to this: the 'self' that the Buddha and later Buddhists were negating (or at least criticizing) was *not* the self of the post-Platonic world; rather, it was an already trans-individual and archaic Self—the "Ātman" of the Vedic philosophers of India—that was said to be the *ground* of the individual or "empirical" self (which we can call the "jīva"). The Platonic conception of *psyche* for example, did come along with a story about reunion with "the Good" (as we find elaborated in Plotinus), and a story about *metempsychosis* (not exactly reincarnation), but—and this is a debatable point, surely—the individual *self* (or soul) and the "One" were in an ontologically antagonistic relationship in a way in which Ātman and the jīva were not. About the seeming Eurocentrism: I take this as a valid, necessary and fruitful *challenge* to rub the two (or more) notions of 'self' against one another and see what happens. And if we want to insist (as I would) that there is a certain "constitutive" dimension to the realization of the sort of self that had existed from Plato but which is no longer tenable (the theoretical apparatus or structure by which such a self is analyzed and understood *itself must first constitute the subject to be analyzed*—let us recall Freud's crucial response to those who wanted to challenge the *facticity* of his 'Unconscious', etc.), then we should insist on the same for the non-Western conceptions: their 'selves' (so to speak) must *first* be (existentially) constituted within an analytic framework in order to be critiqued,

deconstructed, etc. The challenge, then, is really to conduct a bi-directional critique which, in turn, could hold out the possibility for a revolutionizing of each standpoint of subjectivity. (More on this methodological axiom of “multi-polar philosophical pluralism”, or some such thing, later.)

With the formula for Lacan’s *subject* already given above, it would be natural to mention the name of Hegel. Indeed, perhaps we should take the time to hear what Lacan had to say about this, and him, before I ripped his words from their textual source. He was asked, by a philosopher once, why he kept calling the unconscious “the subject”—to which Lacan responds by saying that he keeps the subject only “to get you talking”. Let us listen to him speak at length:

And yet it would be quite insane not to retain the term. Some happy accident in the philosophical tradition has perpetuated the line that began with Aristotle’s *Organon*, ... Read, or reread the *Categories*, ... and you will see from the start the difference between the subject and substance.

This is something that is so crucial that the two thousand years of philosophical tradition I was talking about have been trying to do just one thing, trying to resorb that. The man who is regarded as the pinnacle of the philosophical tradition—Hegel—suggests with, I have to say, dazzling brilliance, something that negates what we touch upon in dreams, namely that substance is already the subject, before it becomes the subject, as we saw just now with Freud’s formula [“Wo Es war, soll Ich werden”].

It all starts with the initial trauma of Aristotle’s assertion, which introduced the most rigorous divorce between subject and substance. That has been completely forgotten.

That the subject has outlived the philosophical tradition demonstrates, if we can put it that way, that we really are behaving like intellectual failures.

Is that not a reason to abandon the term ‘subject’, now that the time finally has come to invert its usage?

Lacan places the *opening* of the problem of the subject, then, with the rigid dichotomy established by Aristotle and only finally dissolved by Hegel—something that, of course, could not really be accomplished until Freud and then until Lacan himself. So, what I called the opening of the “interior subject” from Plato on, we should read, here with Lacan, as the emergence of a *fundamental difficulty*, instituted by Aristotle’s rigid dichotomy of subject/substance, which, from our standpoint now (the standpoint in

which the *death of God* is something firmly conducted from the standpoint of subjectivity as such), is coming undone, if it has not already altogether fallen apart.

### ***His Hegel***

But more to our immediate question—*the question of Žižek's Hegel*. It would seem that the most important thing that Žižek takes from Hegel<sup>3</sup> is, of course, a certain preoccupation with the *Dialectic*. Žižek's subject is dialectical as much as all of his readings of various dichotomies, dilemmas and oppositions are. He is known—quite rightly, if the fact is not itself often *frustrating*—as a master of the dialectical *reversal*. The logic of this strategy is easily seen in two of his more classic moves: the one in connection with the reality/appearance dichotomy that typifies traditional philosophical discourse, and the other, connected to this, is the now well-worn *impasse*, as he claims, between capitalism and communism—a seeming opposition which is in fact a *contradiction* for which (it would seem) no dialectical *synthesis* is conceivable which would relieve the contradiction and achieve a sublation of the two in a new unity. The former is the more general, so perhaps we should begin with it.

In traditional (or, if we can speak of such: *orthodox*) philosophical discourse, to distinguish between 'reality' and 'appearance' one must posit some conception of 'truth' that shall determine what counts as a reality, and what must be taken as pure *illusion* or, as the phrase has it, *mere appearance*. The classic illustration of this is the appearance of a bent stick in a bit of water (in a glass or pond or a lake); the stick, being a perfectly rigid physical body only appears to be bent because the light which creates the physical appearance to us is distorted by the effects of the water (and we can tell a story about the difference between the speed of light in water vs. the air, and so on). But philosophers are often not content with such naïve materialism; Plato is the premier example here. What we have here is in fact, he would argue, a *double illusion*: the stick, water and so on are *already* an appearance of something yet more brilliant and—perfect. In order to even speak about or recognize a stick, for example, I must have first a *true idea* of what it actually is: the pure idea of it, unmixed with any distracting factors. In this way do I truly recognize that: (i) there *is* a stick to begin with and (ii) the stick is crooked, rather than straight. In both instances I must draw again on my *idea* of the

*perfect, pure stick itself*—and idea which, in turn, must already contain within it the notion of *perfection in itself*—Plato’s infamous “the Good”. We might describe this doctrine as the doctrine of “eidetic recognition”: one recognizes (literally, re-cognizes) that which has already stood before one as a *perfect reality*, complete in and of itself; the (subsequent) Idea (*eidōs*) is, then, the recovery or “recollection” of this original, perfect reality which one regains only by eliminating the dimension of time (i.e., *change*). By way of this purification<sup>4</sup>, one attains to the Idea which is in effect a total “accounting” of the portion of reality which shines through this particular aspect of the world in its changing or temporal aspect. Then can this particular moment of time or change, in the thing that presents itself to the knowing soul (i.e., the individual *mind*—the one moving towards *gnosis*), be *compared* or *measured* through the vision of this Idea: does this particular thing presented before me, with which I already had a prior encounter (as pure knowing soul to *whom* the totality of the One Real was presented), *measure up*? First there is the perfection of Being; then that which can grasp this though a knowing ground (soul-mind), for which there is an Idea (but only “like can know like”—so the real which can be known by the soul-mind is itself mind); then, through the idea, a particular (entity) is either recognized as being consistent with this idea, or not.

With Hegel, however, recognition is not so static: there is a *dynamical* involvement of the subject who recognizes, with and *in* the substance (entity) recognized. There is a *development* of an Absolute Spirit from a condition of self-alienation towards full inner explication, which results in the Absolute Idea: full unity of subject (the knower) and object (the known, appropriated into the Idea, and therefore brought to its own completion, by means of a *concept*). The movement here is, from an ontological point of view, from the self-alienation of Nature, to its first moment of Self-ness to its full Self-Awareness as Spirit. But exactly homologous to this progression is the unfolding of the *freedom of Spirit*, and this necessarily entails a consideration of the notion of “right”—hence a “philosophy of Right”. In order for the *freedom* (absolute self-determination) of Spirit to be fully expressed or articulated, it must pass through three moments: “abstract” will (what Hegel calls the “personality”, immediately given to itself, i.e., as an “in itself”); self-conscious will (i.e., one “reflected from its external existence into itself”, a “subjective individuality in opposition to the universal” or the “inward”

presentation of the external world to the will); finally, the “unity and truth of both these abstract moments—the Idea of the good not only apprehended in thought but so realized both in the will reflected into itself and in the external world”. In this final or last moment (stage) of the realization of freedom, it is, Hegel says, the “world-spirit whose right is supreme”—that is, everything is subordinated to the absolute right of the world-spirit in the sense that everything has been already *appropriated* to Spirit as its own absolute self-determination.

To return to our (rather pedestrian) case: prior to its recognition as ‘stick’ there was simply no stick, that is: there was a pure “thing” (*Sache*) a substance-in-waiting, prepared to *be-come*. “Since a thing lacks subjectivity,” Hegel writes,

it is external not merely to the subject but to itself. Space and time are external in this way. As sentient, I am myself external, spatial, and temporal. In so far as I have sensuous intuitions, I have them from something which is external to itself”.<sup>5</sup>

From the ontological point of view (which in the Hegelian point of view means: from the point of view of the self-determination of the *telos* of Being: Absolute Spirit), the object, then, is “completed” *by* the subject in its appropriation—its *use*—of the thing external to him. Thus, only when it becomes the *property* of a subjective *will*, does the object (from its *own* side) attain completion as a something-for-another. ‘Property’ is the moment of the *sublation* of the particular subject and the particular object (which is itself only a moment of the fuller unfolding of the absolute *freedom* of the Spirit, as Hegel tries to capture in his *Philosophy of Right*). Thus it was not an *historical* thing-object originally, but merely a *dead*, inert (i.e., “alienated”), “external” *material* thing on the way to being *recognized*, to be sure, as the labor or the property (the “mixing” of will with external *object*) of a subjective will. (This is finalized when everything is always and already recognized by Spirit as its *own*, i.e., as its “property”.)

We should *not* read this as subjective idealism; we should read it for what it is: a column of wood with peeling bark and so on is not a ‘stick’; a ‘stick’ is constitutively part of a world of self-conscious creatures that, in a most violent act, call this entity *into being*—into being a constitutive part of the self-consciousness of *man* as a moment of the self-determination of Spirit. A ‘stick’ is just the elementary level (self-alienation) of being-with-self-consciousness; *making* the wood stick into, for example, a *wooden*



*walking stick* moves (or “elevates” in Hegelian language) it from its merely dead, natural state to a constitutive condition of human being (a part of the *culture* of man). If this violent negation through signification indicates an elementary fact about *being itself* (namely, that *being is already and always structured by the symbolic violence of naming*) then it would seem that *reality is already on the side of the appearances*, that being is an appearance—there is no “true” reality “behind” the appearance, for reality is precisely that which induces the illusion that there is “something *more*”... Here, the content of the ontological claim is precisely inextricable from its form—the form of the dialectic itself. From Plato we found an Idealism determined, in the first instance, by a totally static realm of perfect Being; the “Idea” is only access to this reality which is itself a consequence of the original “unity” of the individual soul and the perfect Being itself.<sup>6</sup> In Hegel, we find a kind of inversion, through the dynamical ontology of Aristotle, of this Platonic metaphysic: the Idea is not access to a preexistent *Being*, but the becoming of the unity between (knowing) subject and (known) object, the surpassing of the opposition between being and having or being and knowing (thought), and the absolute *appropriation* of all things in the absolute self-determination of Spirit. What Žižek struggles to determine is exactly this absolute *freedom* by not having it refer to the ground of an “Absolute Spirit” but by the absolute groundlessness of “spirit” as the non-coincidence between two Voids: the “material” Void and the Void of subjectivity, the Void of Matter and the Void of Mind, as it were. As Lacan said, and as we have already pointed out, “substance is already the subject, before it become subject”. There is, therefore, no “end” to the dialectical unfolding as such: the dialectic, for Žižek, is (at least from a strictly “abstract” standpoint) “all there ‘really’ is”. And yet, the creative power for him is this double non-coincidence of Voids. If we were to try and find a formula for Žižek’s Hegel, perhaps it is simply this: it aims to free the freedom of the Absolute Spirit *from Itself*.<sup>7</sup>

### ***His Marx***

Perhaps it is precisely *here*, sandwiched between the dialectic of Hegel and the vanishing, slipping signifiers of Lacan and the *subject of lack*, that *we find Marx and*

*Žižek's Marxism*. What has Marxism always been—at least since the Frankfurt School and “Critical Theory”? It has been a theoretical apparatus that has on the one hand attempted to detect ideology in all of its insidious and elusive forms, which means: the ideology of *Capitalism* (the predominant sociocultural/economic determinate— notwithstanding the various critiques of old-fashioned Marxism for being too deterministic<sup>8</sup>); and, on the other, through this theoretical realization of the depth of ideological enslavement, to *suspend* the theoretically described ideological structuration of society in order precisely to allow for the space (a moment) of radical *emancipation*— social, political, economic and cultural emancipation. But old-style materialistic Marxism cannot do; “dialectical historical materialism” was for many reasons a failure—both in theory and in practice. The first thing that must be realized is that Marx’s inversion of Hegel’s “absolute idealism” must itself first be reconsidered—but *in light of the psychoanalytical depth we can bring to Hegelianism itself*. That is, we must first accept the deeper truth of Hegel’s inversion (or radicalization) of the reality/appearance dichotomy that typified traditional philosophical conceptions of ‘being’ and so on. We arrive at, then, the “Zeuxian” truth that reality simply *is* structured in such a way as to coax us into believing that there is *more* than meets the eye—that there is a “truth” waiting to be uncovered. The truth is that there is just *more appearance*. The *locus* of our own encounter with this elementary structure is *subjectivity*. Hence, if there is to be an ideological critique, it must begin with the *ideology of being itself*: reality is *already* “ideological”, and the zero-level of this ideology is the self itself (as it were). With *this* elementary structure of ideology in mind, we may then return to the inter-subjective and political-economic realms, where we may understand the “reality” of commodities and their incorporation into the (Lacanian) structure of subjectivity to yield the particular configuration they have in the political-economic system of commodity exchange and capital flows we call “(global) Capitalism”. The crucial detail that Marx did not have at his disposal was a *properly dialectical subject*. He certainly, and brilliantly, managed to find the proper dialectical form for the material commodity-system in relation to the money-system—but this system is dialectical properly only if it is also “subjectified”. Marx was right to “objectify” and materialize Hegel (and also show how subjectivity itself is insidiously “objectified” by Capitalism in a rather dehumanizing way); but he threw the

baby (pure *subjectivity* in itself) out with the bath water (absolute idealism): his notion of the subject (or of “universal humanity” and so on) was doomed to become deeply idealistic and, as it were, not properly materialist in conception. Now, having replaced the subject into its proper place within the political-economic whole (which now must be understood as a proper dialectical totality, “subjectivized” according to the psychodynamics supplied by Lacan), it is possible to understand the true or “authentic” form of socio-political emancipation: it is not the wholesale take-over by a newly universalized *class* (that’s going to be a purely social, psychically *empty* category in the old Marxist theory); rather, it is the subversion of the existing order by a kind of collective *suspension* of active participation in the social order—the “end” of the psychoanalytical “session” as it were—in a *hopeful awaiting*, to see what happens. This active withdrawal occurs not as a retreat but as an accomplishment of *theory* itself, which, by pursuing the dialectics of ideology, serves to reveal the coordinates by which the social order functions, thus allowing a negative space of withdrawal in which one could determinately *refuse* to do anything. I am tempted to say that this is Žižek’s answer to the Daoist “action of non-action”—*wu-wei*.

### ***The Communism of the Holy Ghost***

This brings us, then, to the fourth of Žižek’s axioms, his *atheistic-materialist theology*—what I am calling the “communism of the Holy Ghost”. If Žižek’s answer to Marxian revolution is the action of no action (in which by not “doing” anything, *everything is changed*—here we have another precise Hegelian/dialectical reversal), then what is his answer to the “permanent” revolution? It must be some form of Communism—this we know already (he is, after all, unapologetically *Marxist*). But another problem faced by classical Marxism was that, because of the poverty of its conception of the *subject*, the form of society itself would seem to be rather inconceivable dialectically: “history” would seem to come to an *end*, at which point, through a supposedly necessary dialectical progression, the dictatorship of the proletariat—Communism itself—would fall away on its own, leaving human beings in their dialectically consummated condition of *being* (a “universal” form of being-human). This would almost seem to be a kind of Buddhist state of absolute nirvanic tranquility, a state of universal contentment or equanimity,

where conflict would cease to exist, where, that is, there would no longer be any *class* conflict, the very (dialectical) engine of history as such. Strictly speaking, from a Hegelian standpoint, this would simply have accomplished nothing more than yet another stage of preparation for another moment of the dialectic: a return to the primitive condition of mere being-for-self, a (higher, sublated) form of the “state of nature” in a Hegelian sense. Of course, this is totally wrong; there would be no “end of history” and no absolute, final universal contentment, for we would have to have a *real subject*: and this means there would still be *desire*. At the end of the Lacanian road the subject *still* desires—subjectivity refuses to remain still, “calm”, reposeful in some nirvanic condition of “emptiness”. Žižek here does *not* engage in utopian speculation; rather, he asserts a kind of Hegelian pragmatism, modified by the Lacanian subject: the life of the post-revolutionary community will still be a life of *struggle*, of permanent struggle. But the *form* of the society in this case would be nothing other than the community of the struggling mass of human kind itself—the struggle of the Communism of the Holy Ghost, i.e., a social formation with no “Big Other”. In other words, the *conflict* that is the dialectical motor of capitalism would simply be converted or *universalized*, through the disruption of the coordinates of (capitalist) reality accomplished by theory, emerging, after the disappearance of capitalism, as conflict-in-itself and “for” nothing else, in effect making the purposelessness and utter terror of *jouissance* the “goal” of the society. But “goal” not in a teleological sense, for this is precisely what Žižek manages to eliminate from his Hegel; rather by “goal” we would mean the very “structuration” of the social order itself precisely *is* a register or “encoding” of *jouissance*. Žižek cannot give any details—there is no utopistics here. But he does give us the general shape of this society: we have called it the “Communism of the Holy Ghost”.

Here, I suppose, in this adumbration of Žižek’s theoretical standpoint, which we should designate as our “axioms in Z”,—here is the end of the line. It is wildly out of proportion to the prolixity and volume of Žižek’s theoretical works and if the sheer imbalance be the measure of the “justice” of our assessment, then it is profoundly unjust. Some have commented that Žižek has produced far more than any single commentator can actually read, let alone keep up with. And still others have commented on the sheer volume as itself Žižek’s symptom, psychoanalytically speaking. And he

himself openly admits that fulminating (if we may so designate the vociferousness with which he conducts his discourse) keeps the terror of silence at bay, the terror that, should one cease to speak, a despairing *chasm* that is the empty subject, and empty abyssal *self*, would stare back at him. But our purpose here is simple: to engage Žižek's theory precisely at the point where it seems to, on its own axial premises, become either vague, obscure or where the axioms of his standpoint don't seem to amount to what they *ought* to amount to. And I suppose this brings the essay back to Žižek as someone whom I simply cannot dismiss, though many want to (though again, who am I to even make this gesture—the “outsider”, the *de facto amateur?*); back to what I cannot quite find the words the express about Žižek as both theoretician and as a phenomenon in itself. Allow me a few words of *amateur phenomenology*...

Reading Žižek is frustrating. I would like to say that this is simply because his writing is precisely like that of the supreme intellectual figure in his work (and perhaps in his *life*, should we *personalize* this essay even more heinously). Of course I mean Lacan. As many Lacanian psychoanalysts point out, the extreme difficulty of Lacan's thought derives from his self-conscious attempt to write not merely to inform or instruct, but to write from the standpoint of the fundamental psychical structure his own theoretical work is aimed at: I mean the *Unconscious*. In a way that productively mirrors the many-layered brilliance of a Platonic dialogue, where literary form and philosophical/intellectual content achieve striking unity and coherence, Lacan manages to speak as the Unconscious itself, while also managing to theoretically *represent* it within the context of the overall structures of the *psyche*. In this way do we have, to borrow from the Chilean-born Lacanian psychoanalyst Raul Moncayo, an *evolution* from the pure static structuration of the psyche with the usual Freudian terms (Id, Ego, Super-ego) to a dynamically unfolding interrelated *system* of psychical *registers* (Imaginary, Symbolic and Real—which bear no simple or obvious one-to-one relationship with the traditional Freudian triumvirate). But what Lacan lacks in the way of linguistic “clarity” (how does one define this in any case?—as Aristotle once remarked in an ethical treatise, one ought not seek more certainty (read: clarity) than the *subject* itself can offer), he makes up for in the way of *unconscious productivity*: engaging his text deeply is also an engagement of the unconscious itself, displayed in a rather

beautiful and surprising literary/poetical form. In each instance of obscurity, however, (and I am not qualified to make an expert opinion on this issue) it is associated with some *fundamental* psychological impasse or basic fault line, which in turn can be formulated as a precise *psychoanalytic experience*. Here, perhaps, we come to the first of several issues which have plagued my engagement with Žižek: he's not *practicing* psychoanalysis on an individual in a strict, psychoanalytically "controlled", context (insofar as we can suggest some plausible notion for 'control' here that is *clinical*, rather than strictly *statistical* in nature). Žižek's work as a psychoanalyst is the work of *application* or extension of the theory into a larger domain, that of the socio-cultural and even political-economic. This in itself would not seem to be inherently problematic; for Lacan's own thought itself grows from a rich matrix of intellectual disciplines (history, literature, philosophy, linguistics, and so on). But we should add the proviso "...as far as it goes". And this is the question: what is the psychoanalytical *limit* of this extension and application? Even though, if Žižek is faithful to Lacanian psychoanalysis as a theoretical system, it would follow that each of his "readings" of socio-cultural or political-economic phenomena would necessarily have a strict correlate in the psychoanalytic *experience* of analysand-analyst (that is, a *clinical correlate*), a homology is just that—a correlation. It is not an identity. So far, so good, for the obvious point to make here is this: Žižek is not doing clinical work; he's doing something else, and therefore the evaluative criteria ought to be adequate to this other thing. Fine. So what is the 'thing', what is the 'task' to which the theory is devoted? Well, as I see it the thing, the task, is this (the 'problem' as it were): he is a Marxist at the end of the day, and the problem must not be couched in individualistic or clinical terms because what he is dealing with is a sociopolitical or sociocultural problem, and sociopolitical or sociocultural problems require sociopolitical or sociocultural *solutions* (ok, the framework of problem/solution might not be best, but let's stay with it for the sake of argument). The thing that Žižek desires is to have the communist idea rehabilitated; it is, for him, a kind of Benjaminian fragment, a decaying and half-forgotten dream that is in tatters, and, in this state of desolation, of utter *ruination*, here is where we begin to see its *truth*: that the theory of Marx was missing something crucial, and that, once this thing is replaced, we might reconstitute (dare I say *resurrect*) the idea and bring it back to life ... to *breathe* life back into it (thus the

“Communism of the Holy *Spirit*”: the *breath of God as the communal life of humankind*). His solution to the socio-psychical impasse or deadlock between capitalism and communism is to simply dislodge the impasse *from within*: to show the dialectical relationship between them, and to point out that there is in fact no primitive polarity or dichotomy at all—that is, there is no “big Other”, etc.: communism is not opposed to capitalism as its absolute other; rather, each is already the other. But this is, again to repeat, well enough as far as it goes—which is as far as subverting the ideological entrapment (the fear of the big Other, and so on) of the idea of communism. But the work here, which is the work to subvert and suspend the coordinates of reality, which are deeply and perniciously *ideological*, only brings us to the point where we now must address the determinate *form* that the society must take. But not only this. What is the analogue, socio-politically speaking, to the *goal*—and it has one!—of the analytical encounter, the *clinical* encounter? Here is where things get unclear, profoundly so. On the one hand, one has the option of replaying the classic dialectical *reversal*, and problematizing—I would say *attacking*—the very dichotomy of analytical practice (person-to-person, analyst-analysand engagement) vs. sociopolitical praxis. It is in fact a version of the theory/praxis dispute; and here we can dogmatically repeat Marx’s “thesis” on Feuerbach: the clinical experience is one shared between two individuals—two “minds”—whereas the sociopolitical side operates at the level of social formations, i.e., the practical/political level. Now, we might add another level of complexity to this dispute. What, again, really *is* the ‘subject’ in Lacanian psychoanalysis? It is a kind of *production*, a kind of *social formation* in itself: from the mirror-stage onward, the self is constituted from a standpoint of negative identity, trying to become something only in relation to something else—an “other”. This “other” dimension of the self is constitutive of the self, not adjunct to it. In other words, the self is a kind of “constitutive negativity”, a subject that is *lack*. Ultimately, there is *no* self, meaning: there is no other against which to define oneself. But this negation of otherness can only be experienced as an inextricable psychical conjuncture of both *pleasure* and *pain*. This brings us to the very core of Lacanian psychoanalysis: the conjuncture of pleasure and pain is precisely *jouissance*. It is the “freedom” of the loss of the other which had sustained the very seemingly impermeable boundaries of self/other, which are here experienced as *lost*.

This ecstasy of loss is the dialectical reversal of the very conditions of the subject's psychological difficulties. Now, it follows logically that, should we accept the problematization of the dichotomy above (that between the clinical and the sociopolitical), then there must exist an equivalent (or "homologous") *experience* of jouissance at the sociopolitical level. In other words, if the logic of problematization is such as to attempt to *collapse* the distinction (or otherwise subvert it), then there must exist equally in the sociopolitical what most determinately exists in the clinical. So, again, the addition of this further complexity in fact aids the clarity of our analysis, simplifying the question down to the following: what is *jouissance* socio-politically speaking? Once again, there is a problem, and, indeed, it really has to do with the very nature of subjectivity: who or what is the locus or the place (the *topos*) of *jouissance*? We certainly would seem to understand the condition of the subject *before* the moment of jouissance (it is the subject in relation to the ongoing presence of the Other), and we would certainly have some sense of the subject *of* jouissance itself (which, strictly speaking, would *be no 'subject'* at all, for the ecstasy of jouissance is the moment of a fundamental *loss*, the absolute disruption of the subject *as the subject of the other*). But, to borrow from Žižek himself, what about the long duration *after the party's over*—i.e., after the revolutionary moment of jouissance has been achieved?

I have a hypothesis as to what the answer might be, from Žižek's standpoint. Ok, we no longer—we new Marxists (meaning, we, the properly rehabilitated and *psychoanalyzed* Marxist theoreticians)—believe in that stuff Marx, in his youthful fervor, talked about under the heading of "universal being" and so on. We don't believe, furthermore, that Marxian-Hegelian stuff about the return to some primitive but properly sublated condition of authentic human being/existence. But here is what we should believe in: we should believe in the Galilean formula for the fundamental psycho-analytical/ontological condition from which we emerge into the anguish of our psychoanalytical/sociopolitical deadlocks, and back into which we must revert *following* the resolution of those deadlocks—"and yet *it still moves*". We have no illusions here: "it" still moves, meaning, we have an elementary psychological/sociopolitical ontology of "something less than nothing": the immanent pulsation of the *Drives*. Any psychological or sociopolitical formation must be measured against the elementary background condition



of this “something less than nothing”. It follows that (to conclude my hypothesis) what we have discovered here is not the actual *substance* of the social (or even psychical) configuration of *jouissance*, but the very conditions of its possibility. And all that we can “do” (i.e., the only avenue of “praxis”) is *struggle*, together, to see that those conditions are met “in the real world” (the “communism of the Holy Ghost”). But, and this is most important, they must first be “met” on a *theoretical* level, if they are to be met at all. The theory in this case is constitutive of the realization of those conditions, and even a constitutive element in their very “being”, in strict consistency to the demands of the Hegelian dialectic.

This, of course, seems wildly ridiculous and profoundly impracticable if one is not already sympathetic either to the Hegelian philosophy itself, or to Žižek’s new almost Platonic celebration of the Idea and of ideas (and this we can attribute to the same in Badiou). It seems hopelessly naïve and idealistic, if one is not already convinced that his Marxism has yielded, properly, a *monstrous* theological child (the communism of the Holy Ghost). But this is just as it *seems*.

I remain unsure about the overall trajectory of Žižek’s thought, and I am therefore deeply ambivalent about Žižek himself. I accept that the conditions for the possibility of *jouissance* can be well-understood, but as for the achievement of *jouissance* itself, and the “day after” I am a realistic pessimist: to borrow a phrase from contemporary ideology, it’s just not sustainable from a socio-political standpoint. The level of the flesh-and-blood, bodily human organism, a disastrous meaning-machine if there was ever one, is all that really counts in the end, for, to borrow from another ideologist, in the end, *we’re all dead*. So too for all sociopolitical formations: they have their time, wither, and die. While it is important not to mystify the historical dynamics involved, at some point, the psyche of the individual is *lost* in the outer ecstasy of the social, political and economic fields, and they become, for rather mundane reasons, “other”—a profound source of anxiety and frustration as Freud realizes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. At a certain point (and there may even be some empirical data to suggest the limits here), social formations become so profoundly anonymous that they exude a spectral force on us, and, by the inertia of its banality, sweeps us along. “Theory” in the critical sense, was meant as a tool for each of us to *detach*, systematically, and *realistically*, from the

momentum of bureaucracy and the venality of its anonymity—but to detach only to arrive at a fundamental standpoint of life wherefrom a new struggle, and oppositional struggle, emerges clearly for the first time. This, to now bring my short and wildly incomplete assessment of Žižek, is what Žižek really rests the entirety of his whole philosophy on, this is where he is a philosopher *par excellence*, more than anything else: the fundamentality of *struggle*. His “ontology” is just this: the “ontology” of struggle as the basic or elementary experience of being-in-the-world. In the closing section of a recent book in which he is interviewed by Korean intellectual Yong-june Park, Žižek articulates the actual form this struggle takes today: “demanding the impossible”<sup>9</sup>. Could this be the elementary, substantial *core* of a society?

“Without clear limitations between the possible and the impossible”—what a System will and will not allow—“you cannot have a minimal stability that is probably needed for regular life”. But—“what is impossible?” he asks at the end of the interview.

Our answer should be a paradox which turns around the one with which I began: *soyons réalistes, demandons l'impossible*. The only realist option is to do what appears impossible within this system. This is how the impossible becomes possible.

This is what cynics are telling us: “Yes, we need revolutionary upheaval every 30 years so that people can see that you cannot really change everything in the long term, and you must return to the old game.” For example, there is no conservative today in France whose point of pride is to say “I was there in ‘68 and I was demonstrating but later I became a realist.” No! One must blur the line between what is possible and what is impossible and *redefine* it in a new way. So this would be for me the great task of thinking today: to *redefine* and *rethink* the limits of the possible and the impossible.

But—and here is my uncertainty—the limits of this definitional and theoretical endeavor are themselves established by certain *ontological* limits which, ironically, are the very outcomes of the theoretical process itself. How to reconcile the ontological limits with the goals of the new Marxists?

And I will admit it: I am deeply pessimistic about the prospects of humanity. No, there will be no mass extinctions (though we now know in excruciating scientific detail that this is a possibility from various sources: in evolutionary biology, from atomic weapons, and from the purely contingent events of cosmological origin, i.e., asteroids, the death of our sun, and so on); the earth will persist and readjust to the horrible

ecological condition into which we are putting the planet. And no, there is no primitive condition of “harmony” and so on to which we “must” bring our societies and ourselves. All of that is ideological pabulum, in the last analysis—and all of us *should* strive to live better, more healthily, and so on and so on. But the fact remains—the fact of the thing, the Drives, and the elementary conditions of psychical and social discontent. Each age must resurrect itself and be reconfigured around the fundamentality of this basic, ontological struggle. Each philosophy or each thought-system must come to terms with this, in all of its plain and discomfoting detail.

So, I suppose I pledge allegiance to this: to struggle.

What’s *our* struggle going to be? *This* is the question for all time. This is our *concrete universal*. It is the *place* of the universality of conflict, of struggle, and the persistence of this dynamic—its repetition and re-articulation—for as long as humanity exists (a *transcendental struggle*). Even if we manage to change what ‘humanity’ is in itself (the ongoing “biogenetic revolution”), it would seem that struggle would not and *cannot* be eliminated. It will be the *skip* in the simulation that is and will be our reality (whoever this ‘our’ turns out to be), that tells us not only that this is what the real is, *but that this is the real of the illusion*. (And so on and so forth...)

—Or so it would seem—

Now, perhaps, is the moment not enact a *reversal* of all values and perspectives adumbrated in the essay, which were, in any case, meant *merely* to elucidate Žižek’s own standpoint. And I was able to find a part of the *Steppenwolf* within myself that was amenable to this standpoint of renovated Communism, the hidden kernel of *jouissance*, and to the fundamentality of *struggle*. But if my hypothesis of *jouissance*, which presupposed, in any case, a criticism of the character of Žižek’s psychoanalytic *analysand* (with which you might want to be done by citing the ancient expression *de gustibus non disputandum est*), stood forth as unconvincing or, in the end, still inconclusive, then perhaps this was simply for want of trying harder to come to what might be *impossible* in Žižek’s theoretical landscape. Yes, he insists on *demanding the impossible*, but we do not wish to indict the demands made; we wish to subject to tribunal review the very possibility of his ‘demanding the impossible’. I claim (if I may)

that *only* when Žižek turns *affirmative*—or when, which amounts to the same, we attempt to bring him round to the affirmative—here is where we are met with a gaping *hole*: the return not of the repressed, but of the *oppressed* parallaxic subject, the Holy Will of the Communism of the Holy Ghost, which is paralyzed by its own theological appearance as the *waiting*, the suspense of theory which *is* the first moment of Žižek’s *Divine Terror*. There must be, I claim (again, if I may), a *rapture* for which we must await. In fact, we are never allowed to transition (to transform the will) from the parallaxic subject to the anti-subject of *jouissance* (a subject that transgresses the limit is no longer a proper psychoanalytical subject).

Let us recall for a moment Antigone, read by Lacan brilliantly (and uncannily) in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (Seminar VII). Antigone was *beyond death and therefore beyond that very oedipal order that constitutes the subject, dialectically, for Desire qua lack*. In this precise sense, she is an *anti-subject*—an “anti-Oedipus”. Indeed, the difficulties with theorizing *jouissance* itself—that is, *in itself*—reflect the incipient collapse of the oedipal order from within its own determinate standpoint. And this was the triumph (in my view) of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: it is a sustained engagement with *jouissance* from its own side—from the “other side” of psychoanalysis (to borrow the title of another of Lacan’s *Seminars*). *Jouissance* is the singularity in the oedipal framework, where Desire *qua* lack is transmogrified into, and becomes, Desire *qua* production. This movement is strictly homologous, I claim, to an evolutionary movement from Hegelian subjectivity to Nietzschean anti-subjectivity, from (as we will see) a constitutive dialectical negativity or *reactivity* (even if the subject responds to its own mirror-image in its formative moment—the moment of *recognition*), to a creative, affirmative *activity*. But the movement from Hegel to Nietzsche is *not* itself a dialectical passage<sup>10</sup>. Rather, the movement or passage from the one to the other is achieved as the *birth* of a new form of negativity or negation, and this comes in the form of the eternal return of the same, or what Deleuze would call “repetition for itself”. Returning to Antigone: having transgressed the oedipal limit (the Law—Creon), she lives “beyond death”. But this is nothing other than the purity of the Drives in themselves (the death drive “liberated” as it were from the oedipal Law), and this we know to be a form of repetition. In this way we come upon a *new* form of negation, a negation that is

active and creative, rather than (when subsumed in the oedipal order) purely negative and re-active. Whereas with the Hegel-like dialectical negation inherent to Desire *qua* lack (the dialectics of *recognition*) we have a reflexive spiral, a kind of abyssal *vortex* with a perhaps conical topology, when the dimension of *jouissance* is accommodated in this system, as Lacan eventually realized, one finds the dialectics of negation transformed into a topology of Desire *qua* production, one which has no interior/exterior distinction: it is a pure “surface”, the Möbius. It follows that the subject as such is itself *overcome*—negated—and we are left with an anti-Oedipus in Antigone herself, a non-subject. And such cannot be assimilated back into the Hegelian/oedipal order—hers is an order, a logic, *beyond Hegel*. This passage is from the dialectics of recognition to the topology of production is irreversible, intransitive, anti-reflexive, and above all, *non-commutative*: having transgressed the “limit” established by the Law (Creon), she has passed a kind of point of no return. Indeed, she has become a “pure” self—that is, one wholly outside the oedipal order<sup>11</sup>.

Only limiting one’s analysis to the purely oedipal “side” of psychoanalysis leaves one necessarily within the throes of purely “reactive” nihilism. Nothing here can be, strictly speaking, *affirmed*. Nothing is active—the subject as such is reactive in the sense that it responds always to the threat which the Law poses to its activity. Of course, Žižek is well aware of this very dimension of subjectivity and encodes its logic as what I have designated the “parallaxic subject”. So, on the level of the subject as such (which is to say, of course, at the level of the strict *psychoanalytical* subject—the “analysand” as individual), *jouissance* retains its liberatory power as an excess that forever remains beyond the order of society, a “surplus value” that cannot fully be integrated into the social order (indeed, this is what *jouissance is*, abstractly considered). But the logic of Žižek’s Marxian thinking is here broken by this very excess: what to “do” with it? The only possible course of action—the only determinate solution to the problem which is global capitalism itself—is not action but *more theory*. At the precise moment of the affirmation of a determinate *will*—action—we are given Marx’s famous Eleventh Thesis of Feuerbach, and this becomes the “true” form of action, in classic Hegelian dialectical fashion<sup>12</sup>. He is worried about “false action” which is action that is doomed to reproduce the very Order which we are supposed to *negate* through

that action. Thus we come to the problem of Hegelian dialectics, rather, the ineliminable and inherent problem of the dialectic itself: every affirmation has been preceded by a negation, and any affirmation itself will be met by a necessary determinate negation in the form of a *critique*. This is the *only* possible situation into which the dialectic can evolve, for it is actually driven by a repressed *telos* in the form of “*freedom*”. In this way Žižek’s subject is frozen by an endless hope; thus, only can there be the promise of the *rapture* (violence) of “God”: the constitutive *people* of the Communism of the Holy Ghost (concrete universal of the *idea* of Communism) finding the right (future) *moment* for their self-affirmation. This is the form of Žižek’s “Divine Terror” or “Divine Violence”, which Simon Critchley is exactly right to criticize as Žižek’s “fantasy”<sup>13</sup>: wait and see, “[d]on’t act, never commit, and continue to dream of [read: *theorize*] an absolute, cataclysmic revolutionary act of violence. Thus speaks the great obsessional,” Critchley concludes with an obvious allusion to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, a figure who is the precise *obverse* of Žižek<sup>14</sup>.

Žižek, then, is in the same unfortunate position as Adorno was at the “end” (as it were) of his own “negative dialectics” (which was itself conceived, as it turns out, in opposition to Hegel’s dialectic). Of course, we cannot accuse Žižek of not understanding the trap into which Adorno had found himself when the inherent *telos* of Hegel is eliminated in favor of what we should designate a “dialectics of immanence”. But we should take it as *symptomatic* when he explicitly attempts to distance himself from Adorno and “negative dialectics”. In this connection we should again take a page from Prof. Critchley’s telling critique of Žižek’s faltering (and deeply ambiguous) embrace of Benjaminian “divine violence”, the only subjective position into which we can come given the psychological predicament represented by global capitalism<sup>15</sup>. As Critchley understands it, the parallax is a concept that is meant to indicate, or to locate, “the radical non-coincidence of thinking and being”, a theme—no, *the* theme— that haunts the philosophical tradition ever since Parmenides. “Žižek’s methodological claim,” writes Critchley, “is that this non-coincidence between thought and being requires a *dialectical* articulation”. He continues:

To avoid misunderstandings, this dialectic is not positive—that is, it does not culminate in a higher positivity, synthesis, or reconciliation of opposites, as in Hegel’s *Aufhebung* [and so the telic dimension is thereby eliminated]. It is rather

characterized by what Žižek calls *Versagung*, a denial, privation, or failure: a not that expresses the *knot* at the core of that which *is*—its traumatic kernel. As Žižek insists, this ‘that which is’ is materiality itself, and therefore his method is a dialectical materialism understood in a new sense. That is, not the ossified stupidities of Soviet-era *Diamat*, nor the aestheticized resignation of Adornian negative dialectics . . . , but something rather novel: namely, Lacan’s teaching of the *pas-tout*, the not-all that circles around the traumatic kernel of the Real. It is a dialectic that forces us to fact an insurmountable parallax gap at the heart of that which is.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps Prof. Critchley is being too generous, or too much the scholar-intellectual—and we must ask: is this “novelty” of Žižek’s not a mere dangler of no consequence, this *Dialektik von dem Versagung*? In fact, as we noted already, we find Žižek suspended in inaction, precisely Adorno’s situation. Therefore, we must ask: is this mere coincidence, or is the coincidence a consequence of the attempt—shared by *both* Žižek and Adorno—to save the Hegelian dialectics of *Aufhebung* from its *telic* idealism, a form of its *salvation* which would seem to surpass even the supposed “inversion” of Marx himself (the basis of their critiques of capitalist society and culture)? While this *Versagung* would certainly be novel (it provides a rich and dynamic analysis of ideology), it leaves Žižek in the same position, ultimately.

Indeed, assuming that precisely here—at the point where the Lacanian side of Žižek attempts to make the leap into the Marxian—this is where Žižek ultimately fails, that is: here is where Marx and Lacan would seem to part company. And my claim is: because Lacan *has ultimately surpassed Hegel*. More surprisingly still, there is, I claim, a radically *non-dialectical* dimension in Lacan that shows up precisely as the *failure* of Žižek to determine an *affirmative* socio-political-economic stance that is not itself subject to another turn of the dialectical-materialist *critique*. Indeed, my claim is essentially that it is *jouissance* itself that constitutes a necessary aporia in the (or *any*) dialectic—that which refuses dialectical appropriation and therefore which refuses dialectical critique. It is precisely what no socio-political order may “house” or contain, and so therefore, in a telling irony, it must be papered over with the Communist hopes (and fantasies) of Žižek, who is subtly derisive of it in any case. *Jouissance* for Žižek is actually just the collapse or impossibility of Symbolic articulation and thus a moment of

“the Real” and so is not given its own positive articulation, an articulation as an “in itself”.

In the quotation given above, Critchley says the following, which I suppressed with the ellipses dots: “... although there are often unspoken proximities to Adorno and one sometimes wonders whether Adorno and Žižek have adjoining rooms in the same Grand Hotel Abyss”. What was, however, Adorno’s foundering—the impasse of his “negative dialectics”? In order to see this, we would do well to return to a gem of scholarship accomplished early in her career, Susan Buck-Morss’s fascinating study *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*. This will reveal to us the *spirit* (!) that both Žižek and Adorno share, but which has been rendered almost totally agnostic (and perhaps even *pessimistic*—or morbid) by Žižek’s furious rush towards the possibility of a *Communism of the Holy Ghost*.

Adorno’s “negative dialectics” is aimed at preventing the reproduction of the social order (“reality”) within consciousness. “The whole point of his relentless insistence on negativity,” writes Buck-Morss,

was to resist repeating in thought the structures of domination and reification that existed in society, so that instead of reproducing reality, consciousness could be critical, so that reason would recognize its own nonidentity with social reality, on the one hand, and material nature’s nonidentity with the categorizing consciousness that passed for rationality, on the other.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, consciousness and “reason” (the structures of thinking) must become profoundly *non-participatory* precisely in order to preserve its *relation* to that reality: that consciousness which negates must *not* posit itself as a *participant* in that reality (as already determined by the existing material conditions of the society—as a “product” of the bourgeois social reality which speaks in terms of “natural laws” etc.), since to do so would be to lose precisely that *distance* necessary for thought to *negate* (in thought) what already exists. This “non-participation” would seem to be necessary in order to release the subject (consciousness) and reality towards that which is not or is yet-to-become (the New), which Adorno refers to as precisely that which is “nonidentical” (and which we should designate as the absolutely *different*). As Adorno wrote, “non-participation [*nicht-mitmachen*] was absolutely necessary in order to keep alive the capacity for experience of the nonidentical”<sup>18</sup>. The passage continues:



... being consumed, swallowed up, is indeed just what I understand as 'participation' [*Mitmachen*] which is so totally characteristic for the new anthropological [type]—the lack of curiosity. No longer wanting to know anything new, above all anything that is open and unguarded. The guardedness as well of the revolution....<sup>19</sup>

But it was impossible to affirm the “new” as the new or the “nonidentical”. It could never even be acknowledged by “consciousness” as the new because that consciousness which does not must relinquish its negation by reference to a prior identity—insofar as the “nonidentical” is that which is absolutely *different* from what is, then there would seem to be no reference point, no frame of reference within which to *determine* the negation. Therefore consciousness would seem to have no recourse except to seek to relate itself, somehow, to this “new”; so, as the nonidentical, it poses to consciousness a dilemma: either identify itself with this absolutely different as that which potentiates an essential *escape* or freedom from *what is* (the “identical”), or, reject it as merely another moment of self-alienation which is overcome only by referring that which consciousness negates back to a prior identity—the “reality” of the given from which consciousness seeks refuge (i.e., through its *negative dialectics*). Perhaps the lingering *spell* of Benjamin’s “dialectics at a standstill” is to be found precisely here (in this phenomenology of Adornian dialectics), something, it seems, Adorno was suspicious of because of its messianic/prophetic tendencies, but just here we see the radically austere *form* of Adorno’s own dialectics of emancipation—his answer to the grandiose and dangerous *Messianism* of religions and “revolutionary” political movements. And so it is that we arrive at a *paradox* that, as Buck-Morss points out, “even dialectics couldn’t dissolve”:

But at the same time [as non-participation opens up the horizon of the new—the “non-identical”], in order to prevent identifying with the given, thought could never experience the new as new: ‘Only he who recognizes the most modern as the ever-identical serves that which would be different’. Hence, in the name of revolution [she continues] thought could never acknowledge a revolutionary situation; in the name of utopia, it could never work for utopia’s realization.<sup>20</sup>

The “novelty” that Critchley generously finds within Žižek’s dialectics serves merely to intensify or even *codify* the “nicht-mitmachen” inherent to Adorno’s negative dialectics. Indeed, the *Versagung* accomplishes two things: it de-aestheticizes the

dialectic (the subject is the site of an irremediable, ontological gap that cannot be closed even by the emancipatory possibilities of *aesthesis*—the *creative work of artistic production*, that which *works* in the *surplus-value* (excess) of sense-expression, *negating* form in order to *develop* content), while preserving the *pathos of distance* that would seem to be necessary for *theory* itself—for its *speculative excess*. But, when it comes to the speculative excess of theory itself—the only “true” form of action possible from this dialectical point of view—do we not find a re-articulation of the very “aesthetic” dimension supposedly avoided (as Critchley thinks) through Žižek’s *Versagung*? Rather, this “refusal” is nothing but Adorno’s “nicht-mitmachen” by another name, and it is a mere concept used to hide a reality—the reality of the “aesthetics” of theory itself, a pseudo-Nietzschean aesthetic, that of the *pathos of distance*.

“Our virtues,” writes Nietzsche, “are conditioned, are *demanded* by our weakness....”

‘Equality’, a certain actual rendering similar of which the theory of ‘equal rights’ is only the expression, belongs essentially to decline: the chasm between man and man, class and class, the multiplicity of types, the will to be oneself, to stand out—that which I call the *pathos of distance*—characterizes every strong age.<sup>21</sup>

Both Žižek and Adorno share the common deficit of the Hegelian dialectic, which is that it is seeking a freedom that is a compound illusion on its own terms: the “subject” is only the subject of a dialectic, and the world is reduced to a series of unfolding *appearances* (as Žižek likes to repeat, “reality is on the side of the appearances”), yet once the subject is purified of its own illusions of metaphysical privacy (the illusion of a determinate “core” which is alone the creation of the subject and essentially detached from the “external world”), the only “thing” that is left is privation—a deprived subject. We are brought only to the door of passive nihilism, the proverbial baby (the self as *productive*—i.e., as “will to power”) having been through out with the bath water (self as *essence*). There are, with dialectics, as Deleuze continually pointed out, only “sham oppositions” which hide precisely that element of *difference* that is the *driving force* of all oppositions themselves. “It is not surprising,” Deleuze writes,

that the dialectic proceeds by opposition, development of the opposition or contradiction and solution of the contradiction. It is unaware of the real element from which forces, their qualities and their relations derive; it only knows the inverted image of this element which is reflected in abstractly considered

symptoms. Opposition can be the law of the relation between abstract products, but difference is the only principle of genesis or production; a principle which itself produces opposition as mere appearance. Dialectic thrives on oppositions because it is unaware of far more subtle and subterranean differential mechanisms: topological displacements, typological variations.<sup>22</sup>

It is this “subterranean” level that is key—which we might re-translate as “chthonic”. It is the chthonic element that has been obscured by Hegelian dialectics, and, ironically, *most especially obscured in Žižek’s Hegelian appropriation of Lacan*. The split subject which is designated by Žižek as the site of an irresolvable *parallax gap* is nothing more than an expression of the failure to completely, finally, *affirm* the ontological difference—which is, as Critchley expressed it, the “non-coincidence of thought and being”. This, however, is itself an expression of a symptom—but which one? It is a symptom of repression, but in reverse. It isn’t the case that the determinate historical-material conditions (“being”) prevent the subject from expressing its “true” inner essence as *free*; rather, if we grant the enfoldment of the subject into “being” itself, we must come to another conclusion: that the “non-coincidence” evidenced for the Lacanian in its endless circulation within signifying chains is nothing but the inability for the subject to become productive—to *determine* itself in accordance with Desire. It is this *drive to express a determinate self*—the “will to power”—that is prevented by the determinate historical-material conditions, not “repressed”. The parallax gap is a “sham opposition” not because there is “no primitive polarity” between essence and subject, or being and thought, in the first place—the supposed innovation of Žižek’s Hegelian appropriation of Lacan—but because there is a chthonic tension that is obfuscated. And this shows through as merely “the Real”, which is, of course, dialectically determined in relation to the symbolic. But beyond this lies the chthonic “real” of Antigone, for example—she is an expression of the real, and no longer seeks to articulate it. That is, she is “beyond” the signifying chains of the oedipal order, whose trajectory is always already determined by the Limit established by the Law, the Symbolic oedipal Order. She has been taken over by a *will-to-power*, and in this sense she constitutes the foundation—the founding—of an order of *values* beyond “good and evil”: Antigone is desire as production, as creation. Her desire here “beyond death” is the *Triebe* in and of

itself, an outflowing of value-productivity. Here, the unconscious is no longer “structured like a language” but like a digestive tract.

From Antigone’s side, there is no ‘equality’ any longer: she is alone, a *one* (the remainder of the *non-all*) beyond the oedipal order of egalitarian values and communal deference. The “parallax” has been cast aside, and what is witnessed is not the “non-identity between thought and being” but rather the chasm between the one who would found a value, and the rest, living under them—between “man and man”. Admiration of her seductive beauty can only be *from a necessary distance—that of ‘pathos’*. She is no “Other” and no Other rises up from the Symbolic order to determine her. She no longer recognizes a “Big Other” which in any case now *stands at a distance*, eventually exhausted as a Creon finally concedes to his own demise (Creon would eventually represent the *nonexistence and impotence of the Big Other*). Antigone herself *is the differential element that is always obscured by the “sham oppositions” of the Hegelian dialectic*. In other words, Antigone is really the non-Hegelian, non-dialectical element of Lacan himself. She is the precise location of the abandonment of dialectics altogether, that “real of difference” that cannot be re-inscribed into the oedipal order of the Symbolic—she is beyond it, and so *beyond even death*. As the death-drive in and of itself, which is always to be understood in Lacan in close association with the *forces of creation*, she is the motor of Desire, or rather, the involution of Desire: Desire turned in on itself to become nothing but a *drive*, for she *is* the product of an *incestuous* union (Antigone herself represents the *immanent* failures of the oedipal order).

So, it would seem that we come to the end—the immanent *end* of ‘theory’ as conceived within the ambit of the Hegelian tradition. The road has taken us from Lacan, into the *parallax*, past *Aufhebung* and into Žižek’s Marxian *Versagung*, at the point where *affirmation* fails by design. Yet, from within Lacan, we see that this impasse (which Žižek sees as something Lacan’s own theory must face) is illusory, a consequence of insisting on some form of *dialectics* with no discernible limit. Oddly, everything Žižek was at great pains to put behind him (or allow to cower within the shadow of Hegel)—the anti-Hegelian troika: Nietzsche, Heidegger and Deleuze—comes now rushing back. Indeed, once the non-dialectical element is seen from within Lacan’s own standpoint, we begin to appreciate the full force of the basic observation of

Heidegger's that Nietzsche brings the Western tradition of philosophical theory to a *conclusion*, and that, ironically, Hegel—at least Kojève's Hegel, who was Lacan's—was “right” about one thing: history *does* come to an “end”. But it is history *qua* philosophy, philosophy *qua* history, the history of the wandering *Geist*. What has concluded is “Reason” in history, or history as “rational” ... which is to say—“God is dead”. We may wish to replay Hegel, but the cards have already been dealt and played, and another game is a mere reshuffling. As one passes through Lacan in search of more ‘theory’ one will inevitably come up empty-handed.

Philosophy, as we found it in the ambit of the great Greek tradition, awaits its new wonder again from within and out of *Nature*. Or we could say, which is putting the point in reverse but nonetheless equivalently (assuming one can find the proper inversion—the proper *transvaluation*), that Žižek's “something less than nothing” precisely *is* this non-dialectical core within the Hegelian dialectic, an *aperture* through which it is possible to reconceive *Physis* from an entirely new perspective, that is, from the perspective of *the one beyond good and evil*, that is, from the standpoint of *the one* who has succeeded in affirming the *will-to-power* as the only value—Nature founded by man (in man) as Value. This would constitute both the Alpha and Omega of ‘philosophy’ as such, an inflection point: the *last* of the philosophical possibilities of Western philosophy as expressed in a determinate will (the will-to-power, the will-to-*creation*), and the *first* of the possibilities beyond the framework of all transcendent Values—the first of the *immanent* Values of man in himself as *productive of* Desire. We no longer worry about “truth” in the transcendent sense; we affirm, we create, and the elementary (non-dialectical) expression of this is Žižek's “something less than nothing” from which even the parallaxic subject, given over to the endless dialectics of recognition and Desire *qua* lack, emerges. Perhaps the expression here is, with Wolfgang Schirmacher, “homo generator”, man as generator—of Values.

In other words, just as with the pre-Socratics, who looked on with wonder at *physis*, speculating into its order and logos, at the eventual loss of mythos and the subordination of everything to logos or the Nous (Anaxagoras), so too we await a renewed speculative wonder after a *physis* aflame with a transmogrified *mythic* depth only possible to *homo generator*, man as Value-founder. It will be man who will be the

creator, and the divine world is “this” world, and to look into the heavens will not be in search of the logos, but in search of the *symbol*—the mythos—that man himself is capable of founding *here*. Everything is inverted in this world, everything changed, but in the change, a repetition of the same. This is the time not of being *or* becoming, but, as Deleuze posits for Nietzsche’s philosophy, the *being of becoming*<sup>23</sup>. Thus, the proper question, before we arrive at the place where a *science* of political-economy in which determinate human subjectivity is never eliminated and always already constitutive of is, *who is the one, the man, of science, that affirms the being of becoming?* That is—*who is the scientific one*, the one capable of the being of becoming? I do not ask here “what is science” for that is the question indebted to Plato; we ask: *who is the one* for whom science affirms the value of the being of becoming? The ‘one’ is the one who can affirm this as will-to-power, the will-to-creation, and he (she—Antigone, Zarathustra out for a pleasant walk together) is our New Sophist, the one who always must be negated in the Socratic dialectic, and the one always under suspicion—the one who dares affirm the singular *one* of man (woman) in himself (herself) as that *beyond which* nothing remains to be done (affirmed). From this basis in a “natural philosophy” it will be possible to think a political-economy much in the way Marx managed to think within the ambit of the Hegelian dialectic (which in any case yields only an indeterminate affirmation and an indeterminate will which is *capable* of this affirmation). This is no longer the tiresome “labor of the negative” which defines Christianity, Hegelianism and even Science itself (as the dialectical labor over theory/interpretation and experimentation/refutation, and so on). It is no longer the burdensome task of gradual accumulation, which Hume envisions (English patience). It truly the *Joyful Science*, the *Joyful Wisdom*—a science which already presupposes the standpoint of *jouissance*, the *Triebe*, in and of itself. This is science *as play*—a play at excess (and it was *not for nothing* that Heidegger undertook an examination of *Dasein* from the point of view of ex-istence, the ecstasy of being<sup>24</sup>).

Here is where I must leave you; I only promise that I have myself undertaken to map out the territory wherein the transition from Žižek’s Hegel and Lacan yields a *Nietzschean* possibility which it was, in my opinion, the task of Heidegger and Deleuze to elaborate, working against the basic distinction which haunts Nietzsche’s work—the

spirit which he sought to overcome: the distinction between the “real world” and the merely *apparent*. Dialectics is not enough here; this much Lacan knew, and this is why “the Real” begins precisely as the Symbolic becomes impossible: the real “is” the impossible-symbolic. Philosophical “theory” is not, strictly speaking, possible from within the Real in and of itself (there *is* no real “in and of itself”—the real is here a *pure absence*). But what of this “something less than nothing”? This is the non-dialectical element which already works beyond “good and evil”—and insofar as Plato always identified the “good” with absolutely *complete* (and fulfilled) “Being”, we know that this “something less than nothing” is itself “beyond Being”. What remains? For the Hegelian/Lacanian sphere, this is the *Treibe*—at least this “something” is on the side of the Drives. But, as I tried to show here, this is nothing but Desire *qua* production, and this is what cannot be affirmed within a Marxian conception of *social reality* out of the fear of appropriation, the “false activity” that manages to, in the end, reproduce the existing order. There is, of course, a kernel of truth in this—but then the question is, *what is the existing order?* The *goal* (telos) of Žižek’s is a theoretical transformation of it—a “negation” of it in and as theory. But I claim something before this, even: theory itself must be abandoned insofar as it still moves within the shadow of Hegel, and be reborn out of the spirit of a conception of *the one* who is capable of affirming *nature* as value. Thus, we are brought to a conception of *physis* as an affirmation of value, from which the question (the sophisticated question) of *which one* is capable of so making this affirmation arises for the first time. Finding this is finding a “joyful” science, from which a *political-economy* can be newly conceived, bringing to fruition Marx’s utopian dream—but what was this? Literally, we are in search of a place *with no foundation*, and, ironically, the place to which we must go is, as Marx saw (through a Hegelian glass, darkly), *man in himself*. The *one* who is capable of making nature—life—into an affirmation of Value. Man in himself is the foundationless foundation. And thus here we invert the Žižekian “Communism of the Holy Ghost”: “the community of man is within”—within man himself as value-creator...

*Post-script.* Before we truly end this essay, we must be lead back round to our ontology of reading—and its necessary corollary, not mentioned the first time: the ontology of writing. Reading Žižek *is* frustrating—but this is only because he is faithful to the very ground of his thinking in the Lacanian program. What is this, and where can we take this study, so that the appropriate ground for the sidestepping—indicated by our attempt to *transition*, non-dialectically, into Nietzsche and of course Deleuze? In other words, I have accomplished this only at the expense of a jump, and analytical discontinuity. What can close this gap, or fill it in?

If we turn the psychoanalytical gaze upon Žižek the person, and of course threaten our whole undertaking with the specter of the *ad hominem* fallacy, we can legitimately ask (but only in the psychoanalytical register that is relevant to the determining of Žižek the subject): *who* is Žižek—*who*, precisely, is this *one* who indefatigably insists, in many hundreds of pages, that, despite the many critiques of Hegel by many able-minded thinkers,—that Hegel has not (and *cannot*) be sidestepped, overcome, negated or critiqued in a way that provides a *refutation* of Hegel? This sheer insistence we must take to be a *symptom*. In other words, the question is, from which discourse does Žižek discourse—generate his own symbolic configuration? Žižek is his own split subject—but not in the parallaxic sense, which in any case constitutes an effective *ontological* ground or orientation. At this effective ontological ground-level, we find the (for Žižek himself) disavowed subject of the Master's discourse, but only because he, from the meta-psychoanalytic standpoint of Žižek the writer, plays the analyst to various (effective) analysands (the various critics of Hegel, Lacan, and so on—sometimes Marx himself makes an appearance as a young and enthusiastic Hegel-negatron, so to speak). This analysis is determined from the standpoint of the analyst and his discourse. And the function of this discourse, to be faithful to Lacan himself, is to get the analysand(s) to *speak* (“I keep the subject to get it speaking,” he once remarked when asked why he still, despite Heidegger's critiques of subjectivity, insisted on retaining the notion). Now, insofar as Žižek is successful in getting his own (self-generated) analysands to speak, from their point of view, their speech occurs from within the discourse of the hysteric. As Lacan points out in Seminar XVII, the function of the analyst and his discourse is to establish the conditions for the discourse of the



hysteric. How does this occur? By allowing the analysand to speak, and to articulate its own anguish (and so on), the function of the analyst in directing this speech is to allow himself to become the analysand's *objet petit a*—the *cause* of the hysteric's *desire*.

It should become clear, in other words, that we are not dealing with a notion of 'refutation' and analysis in any standard sense; the fidelity Žižek has to Lacan and Lacanianism, in addition to Hegelianism and Marxism, must, to be sure, permeate everything. But when it comes to 'analysis', there is an ambiguity which must be addressed: analysis as in, psychoanalysis vs. analysis meaning—what, exactly? Here one is *driven* by some desire, for example, the desire to refute Z (which I just slipped on the keyboard to write, intending first 'X'—my *Žižekian* slip?!). Yet, treating the indefatigability of his attempts to overturn all possible refutations of Hegel shows merely Žižek's symptom—his repetitive obsession. "How does one refute an eye disease?" as he himself quotes from Lebrun's (2004) critique of Hegel, which itself quotes Nietzsche. But it isn't that we have an "eye disease"; we simply have Žižek's refusal to be silent, his refusal to *yield*. And this "Versagung" is *not* a dialectics, in the end. The question, to stress over and over is, in the properly Nietzschean sphere of "inquiry": *who is Žižek?* In other words, Žižek's own indefatigability is a symptom, perhaps, of a sickly obsession with infinite negativity, one eventually that must opt for the action of no action—the (Divine) suspension. The Achilles heel here is simply the mountainous piles of verbiage in a Herculean endeavor to reestablish Hegel as the preeminent thinker of our times. The only proper 'refutation' possible here is the simple one: No! This is why, in the end, Deleuze always advocated the *forgetting* of Hegel. And this is his simplest of 'refutations' of him, one which, with aphoristic brilliance, in fact masks a deeper critique—one from the point of view of the Spinozan "affectus", which brings about the realization that, simply, there is a radical dimension of 'thinking' outside of thinking representationally, a thinking which is not in any way the generator of syntheses or itself caught up in the (totalizing) procedure of the *Aufhebung*, but a thinking which is the *consequence*, already, of an *affect*: thinking as a modality of the body-sensorium (and this is the pure immanence of thinking, that is, the "unthought" affective "cause" within thought itself—the true "aporia" of all representational thinking, which is the thinking caught up in structures of opposition, dualities, and so on).<sup>25</sup> But once one enters the

dialectics of *aufhebung*, there simply is no discernible end to it, no limit only because of its mechanical reproduction as method. All Hegelians necessarily fall into this trap—the Adornian trap we noted above. Or they are not Hegelians.

We might do well, in passing, to take a page from Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, where he is charting out the forms of logic (or method) that had preoccupied the Western philosophers. "Aristotle," he writes,

assigned the dialectic its real task, its only effective task: the art of problems and questions. Whereas Analytics gives us the means to solve a problem already given, or to respond to a question, Dialectics shows how to pose a question legitimately. Analytics studies the process by which the syllogism necessarily leads to a conclusion, while Dialectics invents the subjects of syllogisms (precisely what Aristotle calls 'problems') and engenders the elements of syllogisms concerning a given subject ('propositions').<sup>26</sup>

But Nietzsche is no dialectician—and neither too Deleuze (and we should also include Heidegger in order that we might complete the troika that constitutes the substance of Žižek's *return of the repressed*). His questions are never "what is ..." and so never does he work in the realm of "presuppositions" and "positing" and so on. Žižek almost bursts into the Nietzschean realm when he worries over Heidegger's "ontologization" of Will to Power. The will-to-power is not a first principle so much as it is the foundation for the value, the singular value above all other values, the value of the creation of values as such: *Wille zur Macht*—will-to-create/make. Thus, we may ask: from what *generative principle* does the indefatigability arise? And it is, of course, from the Lacanian production of the discourses that *drives* Žižek forward in his Herculean endeavors to rescue Hegel (from what, really?). Žižek is producing a discourse, but only insofar as the purpose is to produce another discourse—the discourse of the hysteric, at which point the (psychoanalytically determined) 'truth' might arise, that is, the 'truth' of the Dialectic, and of Hegel's *System*. Žižek is the *one who takes pity* upon Hegel, the underdog, the one (inadequately and ineffectively and badly for him) overcome by the Marxian inversion. No! Hegel is already his own inversion. The mistake in trying to overturn or respond to Žižek is to adopt his own playing-field. Rather, one should already adopt the non-dialectical implications of Lacan himself, and *establish*—found—a new Value, and from this point of view, *return* to ask: *who is Žižek himself?* Not *qua*

writer but *qua* psychological type. Only by attacking the *man himself* (ad hominem) can the ‘true’ critique be made. We must here transgress the limits Žižek always insists upon: the only adequate critique is the “immanent critique”. This is rather convenient, for it rules out in principle the Nietzschean genealogical-psychological analysis and refutation (by simple non-dialectical nay-saying).

In this way we come to see exactly in what sense “philosophy” and “theory” (and so on) have reached their *end*: turning them upon themselves, enacting an *involution*, what remains is the instinct to create anew when we see that the seemingly profound dialectics of Hegel really did work in “sham oppositions”. They are “sham oppositions” because their chthonic motor is obscured, levels confused—the person behind the curtain remaining and insisting on the curtain. In fact we really do find a “self” behind the veil of “appearances”—but only because the real *as opposed to* the apparent “at last becomes a myth” and loses all *force*. There really is only the man behind the curtain, and *this one*, naked and exposed, faces a choice, the fateful choice—the choice of the innocence of existence, or the labor of the negative, the discontinuous leap of difference (*either-or*); or the involution of return, to a prior Identity. The only proper negation of Hegel is not to negate him within his own System, but to negate him by forgetting him, by *laughing* in his face. Making the fateful choice to leap (or *dance*<sup>27</sup>) into the innocence of existence—to *throw the dice*—is simply to *play*, to laugh, to sing. It is the *joyful wisdom* that saves us from the already-alienated Beautiful Soul. What if, we must ask at the end of the day, the Beautiful Soul has no prior anguish, no anxiety, no “alienation”—nothing of the sort? Either this is possible or it is not. In Hegel, the alienation is at the same time its own overcoming—the problem is always going to turn out to be its own solution, i.e., “transcendence is absolutely immanent”.<sup>28</sup> But what if the Soul knows no such alienation, no anguish over existence, no despair over absolute *choice*? What if, rather, the Soul is the generator of choice, the institutor of values? Is this possible? Yes, we say. But only as play. Play—the innocence of existence, the naivety, the child growing, without memory, never tinged by the higher doubt and second-guessing of the reflexive monster of Platonic-Christian humanity. How is this possible? Only by the *one* who has *lost* fear, relinquished ‘reason’ and who has utterly *forgotten* to ask, or for whom it never occurs to ask “but *what* is...?”

Speaking of the “comic character or the Overman”—*reminding* us of this character—Deleuze writes:

For Nietzsche, it is a matter of filling the inner emptiness of the mask [speaking of the ancient Greek stage] within a theatrical space<sup>29</sup>: by multiplying the superimposed masks and inscribing the omnipresence of Dionysus in that superimposition, by inserting both the infinity of real movement and the form of the absolute difference given in the repetition of eternal return. When Nietzsche says that the Overman resembles Borgia rather than Parsifal, or when he suggests that the Overman belongs at once to the Jesuit Order and the Prussian officers’ corps, we can understand these texts only by taking them for what they are: the remarks of a director indicating how the Overman should be ‘played’.

Theater is real movement, and it extracts real movements from all the arts it employs. This is what we are told: this movement, the essence and the interiority of movement, is *not opposition, not mediation*, but the repetition. Hegel is denounced as the one who proposes an abstract movement of concepts instead of a movement of the *Physis* and the *Psyche*.

And in the end, Žižek tells us basically this: there is no “real” resolution; all Hegelian reconciliations are “really” nothing but “formal” ones. He writes: “there is no real reversal of defeat into triumph but only a purely formal shift, a change of perspective, which tries to present defeat itself as a triumph”<sup>30</sup>. Thus the formula for Žižek here is, again, “transcendence is absolutely immanent”.

So perhaps the very *last* thing, really, we should leave you with, dear reader, is simply this: can we not accept, in some very substantial sense, that the essence of philosophy is no longer possible, that it *has* truly come to an end in Nietzsche (insofar as we refuse to the ontological gesture of Heidegger’s Nietzsche)? That ‘philosophy’ itself, insofar as we make an attempt to return to the ‘what is’ of its founding modality of thinking—is finished? That having now found itself, and become itself, *the subject ‘philosophy’ is itself empty?*

At the risk of moving this essay into the terrain of *bad infinity*, let us now draw together the polemical and analytic elements and articulate a *theory*—a theory that already calls to us from beyond the horizon of the transcendental, that is, from Zarathustra’s mountaintops, where we are called to respond to the great *agon* of life in and for itself. We aim to sketch—merely to put forth, the essential *crux* (without which we shall always *crucify* difference), the theory that resolves (or even *dissolves*) the

seeming opposition between Hegel on the one hand, and Deleuze on the other. From out of this essential space of reconciliation, we may then articulate the basic *break* between Žižek's emancipatory revolutionary project, and that first put forward by Deleuze and Guattari. In this way we are to come to a proper critique of Žižek's philosophy itself. To spoil our ending: we shall have to come to terms with a realistic, *materialistic* pessimism which should be our founding gesture for the true form of revolutionary action: Luxemburg's announcement of *spontaneity*, the only true gesture of fidelity to the materialist legacy left to us by Deleuze and Guattari and their Herculean struggle with Marxism, their triumphant reconstitution of it out of its eschatological/teleological *failures*.

“What is there?”—This is the ontological question. But after Lacan, ontology as such is no longer possible. After Heidegger, onto-theology finds its place as the ultimate horizon beyond which only Nietzsche, it would seem, could go, through the mask of Zarathustra. So we do not begin our theory from the point of view of the question “what is?”. We begin before this question is articulated; we begin, perhaps, from the point of view Derrida struggled to articulate, which is the *topos before the question as such*. And this, I claim, is the place to which Deleuze returned, after having labored through Hume, Nietzsche, Spinoza, Leibniz and Kant. What is the generator of the “not” between Being and beings? This is not an ontological question. It is a place where, before we can ask “what is” already there is a fundamental topological shift or “subterranean” displacement. This is differentiation, tearing apart, coming undone, *splitting*. We begin where even modern physics has taken us: to the point where only radical contingency and openness is to be found—that process of unending differentiation which opens a world as such. This is what challenges forth a concept, a concept here (the elementary generative form of all theory) is precisely the *performance or play of difference in itself*. Thus we already resolve the so-called problem for Marxism that Žižek has posited: the problem of praxis—how can it exit the horizon of the transcendental? Our simple answer was precisely what Adorno—and even other dialectical thinker—could not accept: the *mitmachen* as the very generative form of theory itself. That is, the place before the question is the place of *methexis*, the participation-with differentiation, the play with difference and the creation of a concept to follow the potential lines of

divergence that all differentiation produces. Difference in itself is the first “side” of what I will call the “material form”—or what in the old “metaphysical” vocabulary would be designated the “substratum”. But it is fundamentally open and unpredictable exactly in the sense in which, from the point of view of Stuart Kauffman’s misunderstood concept of the indeterminacy of the state-space in biology, or the fundamental temporality/historicity of all physical laws, is open and indeterminate. From this elementary matrix of indeterminate differentiation arises the call for the concept—and this is the moment in which we are inscribed *as subjects* into reality as such, the point of our transition from pure open biogenic/thermodynamic systems to a subject caught in this process of differentiation. Yet, difference in itself is only one-half of this formative matrix. At the same time that a differentiation happens, there is also laid down a condition of return or *repetition*, and turning-back—and thus a “repetition for-itself”. Now, whereas difference-in-itself is the elementary generator of the *agon* or opposition (the condition where there is a horizontal field of one formation *against* another, such that both *play* upon the *same field*), we may say that repetition-for-itself is the elementary generator of *reflexivity* and eventually the condition for all *representation*.

At this point, then, we should introduce the second level—the level of the constitution of the subject as such. Of course, even subjectivity is an historically located phenomenon. Yet, the elementary form of subjectivity—the inner split out of which it forms, and its capacity of reflection and representation—is already “present” in at the material level, that is, at the level of the non-representational generative matrix defined by difference-in-itself and repetition-for-itself. We have, then, a Spinozean field—this immediately we should recognize. For every aspect of “extension” there is necessarily the very same doubled as “thought”. We should hasten to point out that this is *not* “correlationism” precisely because Spinoza had already taken ontology from the field of transcendence and had managed to liberate a field of *absolute immanence*. Hence Deleuze rightly designates (which is repeated by Deleuze and Guattari in *What Is Philosophy?*) Spinoza as the “prince of philosophers”. Therefore we do not have a designation of material as “matter”, from which everything else is to follow as a logical and/or physical *implication*; neither too do we have the material substratum as “ideal”, from which, as in Berkeley, everything follows as an implication of thought (the thought

of the Divine). Rather, we simply have a generative matrix of unending differentiation and repetition which we could designate as a *habitual field* (that is, Spinoza was absolutely right to designate this as “ethike”—an *ethics*, or a “habitus”).

Now of course we are not articulating Spinoza’s philosophy, we are attempting a reconciliation of Hegel and Deleuze. So, we should ask: what was the essential realization of Hegel’s philosophy? It was, to simplify, *the dialectic of representation*. Truncating Hegel we might simply consider the dialectical movement from what he called “subjective spirit” (the level of the individual subject), to what he called “objective spirit” (the level of socio-cultural formations). Now it has been the brilliance of Žižek to show the following: Hegel’s philosophy is not—as we have realized in general, that is, for those philosophers keen to see the true “end” of philosophy—an ontology per se. Rather, it was the precise articulation of the coordinates—the formative matrix—of subjectivity as such. That is, looking through Lacanian glasses, we understand there to have been very precise *psychoanalytical* experiences coordinatized within the Hegelian philosophy. Thus—and this is where Žižek will not agree—we see that Hegelian thought is essentially *limited* to the representational level at which we understand a crucial dialectic of representation within a subject that has already been determined as an assemblage (a result of differentiation, a process that will still go on when the “subject” as such emerges for the first time). With this well understood and accepted, now we see the true brilliance and importance of a nuanced Hegelianism. Indeed, we now can appreciate the true material significance of it.

Speaking beings such as ourselves come already into a world articulated linguistically, and at the same time aurally and, in general, organized around the various possibilities endemic to the human species as a species with various sensory capacities. That is, our human world is, at the very least, a determinate socio-historical *organization of aesthesis*—the senses. Now, what is this formation of the subject? The essential conditions are both difference-in-itself and repetition-for-itself, that is: inner differentiation (at every level of analysis the process of we understand differentiation) and repetition, or the formation of *habits*. The condition for the formation of a subject as such (“subjectivity”) is the *habitus*. Now, we see that there will always remain an essential break or rift—an *eternal crisis*: differentiation is the always-present gap or

differentiation-gap that must be eternally negotiated within the subject. Indeed, Žižek is right to designate, following Lacan, the subject as a kind of “constitutive negativity”, a void or, more precisely, the non-coincidence between two voids. Subjectivity *is*, precisely, the eternal (and largely futile) attempt to synthesize this fundamental rupture which in fact is the subject as such. But this rupture is dynamic—not in the speculative sense of this something (less than nothing) that “still moves”. Rather, in the material sense of an eternal inner differentiation. Now, of course, as the human being is born, and as it endures its first somatic differentiations (importantly, from its *mother*), it is born into—at least for most societies—into a preexisting determinate material reality, that is: already before there is a subject there is the level of the “objective spirit”. The mistake of Hegel was that here he slips into a bad form of idealism: the dialectical movement between subjective and objective spirit simply determines a relation that has both a diachronic and “historical” dimension, but which also has a “synchronic” or “simultaneous” (and in this limited sense “a-historic”) dimension. Lacan articulated the synchronic dimension: within an already existing field of Imaginary/Symbolic (i.e., a field of images—be they of myself or produced elsewhere, say, in film, and so on—and a field of *language*), the subject is “inserted” and becomes, thereby, subjectified (a traumatic experience, one that rearticulates this trauma of inner differentiation). Here is where the *psychoanalytical* subject is born (as it were). And here is where the subject enters into a system of *representations* (we could even call this the “representational” subject). But this preexisting Symbolic/Imaginary Order is crucial. How was it formed? It, too, has a history which, of course, it was not the project or aim of Lacan to theorize. Yet, it must be a determinate socio-historical formation itself. It is theorized perhaps better in Foucauldian terms as structures of *power* and *domination*, and of course in Lacanian terms as various “master” Discourses. Are we not here immediately talking about the level of Hegel’s “objective spirit”? Now, to show that there exists a systematic determination of the subjectivity of the subject from these determination locations of power and domination is to show that inscribed in the very subjectivity of the subject are these forms of power and domination. And to work out how this internalization itself plays out within an actual subjectivity it has been the great task of many a theorist to do. But to only operate at the level of representations, and not to be able to move or



theorize at the non-representational level is to begin to take Hegel and Lacan and treat them as if they have somehow determined reality itself. Thus, Žižek's *purely* speculative direction which I fully and unapologetically reject—as in fact *idealism pure and simple*.

Let us return to the individual, and let us turn our attention exclusively to the individual as an assemblage in the process of (unending) differentiation. There is of course a vast memory-system that operates simultaneously at the level of the soma itself (the “body”) and the representational system that has been called in philosophy “the mind”—but which perhaps we should simply designate the *psyche*. Now, once a habit has been formed in the individual, there is developed what Wilhelm Reich once called the “character armor”. All of reality has a very familiar sense. The correlative to this, perhaps, is that love of English philosophy—their “common sense” (the realm of Merleau-Ponty’s “Ur-doxa”). However, all individuals experience now and then a moment of utter rupture, where, as if purely adventitiously, we are thrown into a radically unfamiliar (and perhaps utterly terrifying) situation. Deleuze considered the case of a swimmer swimming. In this situation (which would be terrifying if you cannot actually swim without drowning), the individual is put into a profoundly *affective* relation with its overall environment (or “context”). It is certainly possible to draw from the memory-system *already-formed* concepts (which, from what we’ve said above, will always be tinged by the ideology that is the product of the subject’s determination in relation to structures of power, etc.—the dialectic of subjective and objective spirit). But always, and especially in this situations of profound *strangeness*<sup>31</sup>—the individual (*qua* concept-forming subject) will create a concept *in order to deal (involve itself effectively) with the situation*. Indeed, we should now designate art as the simultaneous *opening* of the new and the formation of new concepts to organize the affective relation between the individual and the field of *aesthesis*. Art is formed at the moment of the challenging forth of the new from the radical contingency of pure difference-in-itself, and is perfected at the level of representation, where *aesthesis* becomes ordered and organized along well-worn channels of conceptualization, formalization and, in general, *technique* (and nonetheless, the dialectic of subjective and objective spirit, on the one hand—the diachrony of dialectics—and the affective relation between the self and itself (reflexivity) or in relation to its context (affection/reflection), on the other, *will always be present*).

In this way we come to see that, within Deleuzian thought, there is a dual framework of reconciliation with Hegelian thought. The level of representation and the level of the non-representational are related by *affectio*. Indeed, considered together, we may say that they constitute the *form* of the *affectus*. And we see the play of immanence as the absolute equi-potential field of “thought” and “extension” (or the “inner” and “outer”) that is the essence of Spinoza’s “Deus sive Natura”—God or Nature. From this we find an emergent Leibnizian parallelism: the plane of representation and the plane of differentiation (the non-representational “generative matrix”) operate in tandem.

If Žižek’s turn to Hegel and Marx was really motivated by the profound political “impasse” Žižek finds (with many others) in Lacan, and with his commitments to the necessity to have to “go through Lacan” if any true philosophic-theoretic progress is to be made, then we should derive the political (and economic) consequences from the system of reconciliation that I have here sketch out. That is, what is revolution? Before we answer this, we must first realize this: *a revolution cannot be designed*. But why do we want a revolution? In other words, before we talk in abstract terms, and before we “do theory” we theorists must first perform a self-analysis—so we must ask: *who are we*, we theoretical-revolutionary ones, *and what is our desire*? It is the *desire* for change, a *change in a determinate sense*. But *we* are the ones who are already in the midst of change—we are the changing ones. Ah! So therefore we must move the *locus* of our revolutionary- theoretical analysis from the level of *subjective* spirit to the level of *objective* spirit.

And this is where the Marxist revolutionary theorist will always attempt to locate revolutionary change and before that, revolutionary *intervention*: at the level of determinate historical-material structures of power, which is to say, at the level of *objective spirit*. But we have already determined that this is the level of the dialectics of representation. Thus the Marxist attempts to locate revolutionary change at the level of mere representation, without at the same time accounting for the generative matrix of difference-in-itself and repetition-for-itself reverts to an idealistic utopianism in a bad sense: an emancipatory vision with no sound theoretical basis—in material reality. The Marxist works in pure representations, and in those “objective” features of the world

(which are always caught, of course, in the dialectics of subjective and objective spirit), where power and domination are concentrated, and where the Symbolic-Imaginary is itself established for large geographic/political-economic regions (whether through the institutions of government, or through the machinations of corporations, and so on). But this is precisely only “one-sided” in a new sense: in the sense in which the non-representational level of the formation of the individual, and the generative matrix out of which the very conditions of its subjectivity are established (the true “material form” that corresponds to the representational constitution of the subjectivity of the individual out of the Symbolic-Imaginary), are not adequately accounted for. Indeed, this is what led Deleuze and Guattari to first critique psychoanalysis and supplant it with the much more general psychical dynamics of the “schizo” (the differentiating subject—the “body without organs”, etc. in its purely somatic articulation), and then move to articulate the determinate material form(ation) of the political-economy of the rhizome, that is, a “Nomadology”. And this was what led them to study closely the work of the radical anthropologist Pierre Clastres.

The argument of Clastres’ *Society Against The State* was, in brief, that there are certain determinate social/material conditions under which there arises a stable and persistent *vertical, hierarchical social arrangement*, but that these do not necessarily persist in time, nor do they lead to the formation, therefore, of a “state” apparatus with all of its classical ornamentation. For example, when looking at certain tribal arrangements in Africa (the !Kung were one tribe he looked at), you find that vertical/hierarchical arrangements are demanded when the tribe must accomplish a certain *common task*—a hunt, for example. But interestingly enough, when the hunt ends, so do the hierarchical/vertical arrangements. There is “spontaneous” verticality out of a fundamentally *rhizomatic* plane of social relations. Now, of course, this tribe, and all such tribes studied anthropologically, have only existed in a kind of dialectical relation with agricultural and industrial, permanently settled peoples (and so there is an added dialectical/psychoanalytical complexity between anthropological theorist and tribal members). But this is not, we should add, a pure Hegelian dialectic. Indeed, when one social formation comes up against another, different, formation, (or when one member comes up against another member from an entirely different socio-cultural field

of meaning) each much conceptualize or represent the other, and this in turn changes each society or individual (often in indeterminate ways). The point is simply that it would indeed be wrong to envision these non-industrial and non-agricultural “nomadic” tribes as posing for “Western” (etc.) culture a solution. (And so we must resist idealization, nostalgia, romantization, and so on.) Rather, the lesson to derive from these anthropological cases for our highly schematic, reconciliatory theory (cases which can be proliferated) is that for purely *contingent* external reasons certain societies developed into large-scale, permanently-settled, sedentary societies, and this, for reasons internal to each, created the conditions for persistent verticality and hierarchy, which in turn created the conditions for the formation of a subject within a persistent and continuous Imaginary-Symbolic Order (one articulated through language, images, institutions and rituals, and so on). More precisely, each society, insofar as it enters into a sedentary habit, is called to *respond* to this stationary existence. And thus we have repetitive patterns of speech, images, and so on, until we have structures and social institutions to purpose them. Difference and repetition are now caught in a condition of stasis and insularity, and from this a hierarchy is born. But of course, remove the conditions of a sedentary life, and all of the structures that have come along with the so-called Neolithic Revolution (agriculture, stone-working, etc.), and everything since, and you thereby remove the *sustaining force* behind all hierarchical arrangements. But let us be clear: it isn’t as if hierarchy vanishes. Rather, you have hierarchy or verticality as two possibilities that could, under certain conditions, arise and will quickly be broken back down. Only with large collections of people, over longer time periods, with the transmission of ideas through writing and so on (the transition from an oral society to a literate one being another ordering parameter here, of course), do we find the rise of vertically and hierarchically articulated societies. And with these different assemblages comes different distributions of social and psychical-somatic energy (speaking very generally). *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* was a magisterial undertaking in this connection, precisely because its very form of articulation was such as to follow various lines of *convergence*—the formation of various “plateaus”—to understand the degree to which the human has *wandered* in its long historical trajectory, to understand, that is, *the political economy of difference and repetition*.

“Revolution” is a consequence of the *force* of change in history itself. It is a point at which an assemblage is compressed, and which manages to “explode” outward, seeking to raze the existing order. It can only be an *affective* response, and only when the outer material conditions no longer allow for permanent, large-scale settlement, large populations to assemble into determinate social/cultural formations, (and so on) will there be an effective *change* in the existing social arrangements (social *relations*) in *our* late capitalist world. But we simply *cannot* have the revolution that we have dreamed for through Marxism. Realistic pessimism is called for—but *only here*. What makes for realistic pessimism in the *imaginarium* that revolutionary Marxist politics and theory has become makes for profound realistic optimism from the point of view of our affirmation of difference and repetition...

We know that as a species we are headed into an unfortunate time: ecological catastrophe seems inevitable in the geologic short-term, but both from the point of view of the geological *and* the anthropological-evolutionary long-terms, we know that humanity *will cease to be*. The species will likely speciate into another species, leaving *homo sapiens* as, perhaps, a blind alley—an experiment. From the cosmological long-term, we also know that the sun will swell and swallow whole the earth and all the inner planets, after burning off the atmospheres from each. Yet—what should we grasp in our new revolutionary politics?

Rosa Luxemburg has given us the only formula for a properly materialistic revolutionary politics which is also our only antidote to the profound *pessimism* of fact: a revolution of *spontaneity*. Let us read this as an articulation of exactly to what we should remain faithful in our present and future *dark times*: experimental struggle, the play at social possibilities following along *spontaneous* arrangements, momentary configurations. Perhaps this would also be the place (and time) to implement various strategies of erosion and differentiation (like Harvey’s attempt to institute a commodity form that is not subject to speculation because of its inherent expiration, either oxidizing into oblivion, or stamped with an expiry date), to experiment with different relations of exchange in the old Marxian sense, and so on. So, continue the struggle—but do not expect (and do not *hope* for) a universal, complete reconfiguration. Yet—and this is our

particular conflictual universal—*act from the point of view of universal change*. Put forth your ideals, and *fight*.

Now we return to the theory we have created as such. How are we to understand it? Our theory already encodes for us a *performance*—or at least the *stage* upon which we take up our concepts as *conceptual personae*, elements of an agonism of our own creation. Our theory is a *score*, and thus we conflate the various categories of Western thought. In this way we liberate *art* from its place of suspicion in the philosophical orthodoxy to a place of utter centrality. We elevate concepts themselves to the dignity of art as performance.

From the point of view of the non-representational level, the question is: what is it ‘to think’? Heidegger’s question was exactly right, was it not? Thinking can be caught in representation—and this is the Hegelian tradition as a whole. But in order to, as Žižek has put it, escape the horizon of the transcendental, we must think upon a plane of immanence, or rather (to be more precisely connected to Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of the point) we must allow a plane of immanence to intersect the place of representation, to allow the “unthought” to pierce through thought itself. This is what it means to think between Being and beings—to think the “not” between them: it is to think *as performance*—concept as dramatic enacting. Following difference as it differentiates is simply to engage in the art of concept creation. And this is what philosophy itself is (to answer the title of Deleuze and Guattari’s final book together, *What Is Philosophy?*): philosophy is the *creation of concepts* (a formula Deleuze repeated over and over). But it is not enough to say so...

One final note. Have we not completely exhausted the matter here by undertaking to *schematically* present a (merely) reconciliatory theory, a theory that brings Hegel and Deleuze into proper alignment, and which also addresses Žižek’s concerns (and serves to even put Žižek within the proper *limits* of the frightful Hegelian penumbra which he wants all of us to realize our thinking within)? No, we have not. What we have done is merely silence that part of critical theory that has lost its true critical depth. Has it not always complained of the problem of repeating colonial forms when it tries to deal with those for whom colonial ways of thought are simply irrelevant? If we understand, now, that representational thought is rooted in a non-representational

generative matrix of difference and repetition, we can see now that the very Oedipal framework is in fact profoundly contingent—arbitrary even—and attains to its hegemony only under certain determinate historical conditions. We are free to search for the many alternative ways that the differentiating individual gets solidified into a robust subject in the different societies that we know of. Thus, there are a variety of non-oedipal arrangements. Now, already Lacan perhaps gave us some ability to escape the particularity of the Oedipal (and this is perhaps why Deleuze and Guattari sometimes seem to celebrate, and at other times seem to denigrate or deplore, Lacanianism): his great struggle was to schematize the structures of the psyche in algebraic-mathematical terms such that sexuality and the Oedipal could be (conceptually) separated from sexualization and the formation of (master/ordering) signification, for example. This is Lacan at his “synchronic” best. But still, it remains possible that there are some societies that never quite manage to solidify into a representational order that is describable adequately in terms of the Symbolic-Imaginary (or in general, in terms of Lacan’s Borromean Knot).

So, now we come to the point—the reflexive point—that ‘representation’ itself becomes a term that designates something for which there are determinate historical/material conditions, a “location” in a certain sense. But have we not lost the essential insight of Žižek’s own theory with this grotesquely reflexive move? Before our consideration quickly breaks down into a ridiculous self-parody we must face a very elementary question. It is the *kind* of question that we ended up with when we were forced to drive the form of the “immanent critique” to a place of absolute immanence—i.e., within the theorizer himself. This, I claim, was the very gesture of Nietzsche, the positing of a new form of critique as *genealogy*, that is, the investigation into the psychological type that in himself determines a position form which a form of *value* (a *valuation*) is begun. Now we are in a position to perform the same move but not for the theorizer but for the theory. Can we not ask a simply question here: *what does the theory (as such) want?* Or, to combine the two moves into one: *what does the theorizer want from the theory*—that is, what is the *desire* that the theory is trying to articulate? Is this not the true form of all “immanent” critiques? That they work within the standpoint of the theory, and seek to discover its aims, intentions and the flow of its own *internal*

logic? We simply add the Nietzschean gloss: but who is the one who is attempting to determine the theory as such in a particular direction—and can this aim be justified on the basis of the theory as *means*?

Clearly at the same time a theory is put forth it also at the same time articulates the standpoint of the *desire* that will compel the theory to reach some determinate goal, and the ‘logic’ (the inner logic) of it is to be judged by trying to determine whether or not the theory ‘does’ (i.e., accomplishes) what it was built to do. Desire is the *motive force* that the theorizer (*qua* subject) brings to the theory in order that it might *move* in the direction intended. Thus, we might begin with a brief analysis of the very concept of ‘theory’ in order to determine at least the space within which, conceptually, the theorist tries to work in order to accomplish their goals. Of course, we know it already to be a rather problematic place: is it not another site of the articulation of a conflictual universal? If we say that ‘theory’ shows or reveals *to us*, or locates *for us*, the (the determinate conceptual or material) *place* from which something else can be achieved, accomplished or understood (accounted for) then in order to know whether the theory itself fits with this aim we must know the aims. What is it in the case of Žižek himself? Clearly there are two rather explicit aims: the one *ethical* (the theory should clarify the sense in which some notion of *responsibility* is *connected* to that which the theory aims to describe); the other *political* (the theory should show to us that there is a determinate form of political action that is substantial enough to survive today, etc.—we may want to radically contextualize the aims). In both cases, already to understand the theory and its aims is to push us into the problematical terrain of the exact relation between theory (on the one hand) and ... what else on the other? How are we to even pose a dichotomy here? The standard way to think about this is that you have theory as a conceptual determination (theory as *contemplation*), and then you have *praxis* or “action”. But what is ‘praxis’? Pure doing—but of course, there will always be a dimension of thought involved in the doing. Thus, we come to a simple (perhaps naïve) view that there is a dialectical relation between ‘theory’ *qua* contemplation and ‘praxis’ *qua* doing or acting (“practice”). But here we must return to Adorno’s problem: theory is a form of withdrawal—a form of *nicht-mitmachen* (non-participation—but non-participation only specifically with respect to that which the theory as such aims to clarify, problematize,



contemplate and so on, which is a highly *restricted* or conditional form of non-participation). But with the theory in operation (perhaps it is not “fully developed”, and requires the constant dialectics of theory/practice or whatever), the theorist either engages within that space first clarified by theory, or makes a proposal for some form (concrete or otherwise) of action or practice—i.e., some form of (relatively limited) *realization* or implementation of the theory, which is to say *participation*, *mitmachen*. Here is where the theory itself becomes a regulative (and indeed, *constitutive*) moment of the praxis.

So, with Žižek, we have the *desire* for revolutionary action in a certain sense, and for a notion of ethical responsibility. But the question is: what is the *connection* between the theory and the level at which the desired notions are supposed to operate, be realized, etc.? How is the theory itself supposed to work—for us, for someone, or even, *just in the realm of pure theory itself*? Let us simply propose an answer based on the *sort* of theorist Žižek is (or at least can plausibly be taken to be): as a *critical theorist* the aim is, as with Horkheimer’s original view of “critical theory”, to open up a revolutionary space of action, to enable a critical participation within the sphere of action (that is, to use our terms, within the spheres of ethics and politics). Now, what then is the problem Žižek aims to resolve with the theory? It is the problem of *ideology*. Thus, his theory ought not to reproduce the predominate ideology of the times, and should even be constructed as an alternative that does not in turn allow for the ideological confusions to arise at the level of ethical responsibility and political action. And further, it cannot simply be a repetition of the standard landscape of possibilities already charted out in the *history* of the conceptions of ethical responsibility or political action. So, we come now to see that the standard by which we should judge the truth (or viability, etc.) of Žižek’s theory is the extent to which it *produces* authentic (i.e., non-ideological) forms of these things. More than this, it must also clearly be connected to the theoretical system itself: that is, the order and connections within the theory must determinately yield and sustain the *conceptions* he desires to have produced at the ethical and political levels of the theoretical system itself.

Hence, what Žižek is actually answering for us is a question that has been suppressed, that is, the question: “what is theory”—and the answer to it is that it is a

kind of *tool*, an instrument of both ideological critique *and* non-ideological determination (or recovery?) of fundamental aspects of human social existence that are threatened with a profound loss. After all, why—or better, from what *standpoint*—are we to be motivated to *care* about such notions of ethical responsibility and political/revolutionary action (a form that avoids passivity, etc.), if not from some standpoint (is it just “common sense” or the infamous “Ur-doxa” of Merleau-Ponty?) where these notions have some *prior force* (and of course we do...). We do not *have* to care, (do we?) *for we always-already care about them*—one can say here that the “care” will simply be a retroactive determination of the theory’s implications.

Once again, we seem to have drifted back into the realm of Adorno’s final problem, his final struggle with “negative dialectics”. Classically, as Gadamer points out, ‘theory’ was a gesture of withdrawal that retained a *sense* of being in the midst of something, taking view of a whole through eyes which are simultaneously outside *and* inside. And with this we can find some space of dialectical relatedness that perhaps allows a measure of participation by the multiplicity of critical interventions supplied by theory. But still, there is an artificiality to this move—an attempt to save the pure theorist by theorizing the way into “the world out there”. Of course, we cannot rest with such problematic notions. Still, we can ask—what does the theorist want from their theories? What is Žižek’s demand *from theory itself*?

I prefer to end this winding analysis with another proposal that would seem to follow from Deleuze’s work. What is ‘theory’? If it involves ‘thinking’ then, with Heidegger, we must ask, honestly, “What is thinking?” Deleuze answers: to think is to *create* a concept as affective response, a creation which at the same time brings forth the subject as such, an attempt to follow through along a line of divergence *generated* by a (prior) differentiation. But we should not dismiss this as too woolly: there is something much more profound being articulated. To think is to create, to *perform*. Can we not understand this to mean that to think is also to already *participate*, that is, to be already in the process of experimentation? Thinking, then, is “relationalized”, so to speak. One performs in order to “think” and so theory is a set of (relatively closed) experiments or improvisations.

In this way, coming back to the circle within which this essay began (the circle described by text-reading-reader), we see that for Deleuze, “theory” itself becomes a “tool-kit” as Deleuze once quipped to Foucault in an interview conducted on 4 March 1972, given the title “Intellectuals and Power”. Foucault at one point says “A ‘theory’ is a regional system of this struggle”, “not a struggle for some ‘insight’ or ‘realization’...—but a struggle to undermine and take power side by side with those who are fighting...” to which Deleuze interjects: “Yes, that’s what a theory is, exactly like a tool box. It has nothing to do with the signifier... A ‘theory’ has to be used, it has to work”<sup>32</sup>. Yes, “live theory”; “theoretical praxis”. A theory that is life, self-positing *beyond the regime of representation*, overtaken by the forces of life, and affirmation...

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<sup>1</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, trans. by Ray Brassier, London: Bloomsbury 2009/2012.

<sup>2</sup> Lacan, *My Teaching*, trans. by David Macey, London: Verso 2008.

<sup>3</sup> If ‘take’ is the right word: Žižek really colors himself with the essence of those thinkers who occupy him, and they are given his own breath—they are very much his own creations as thinkers animated by his own spirit; is this not also both a *methodological* and a substantial *philosophical* axiom of Žižek: how, what, why and whom Žižek *reads*? Is his not “ontological reading” *par excellence*?

<sup>4</sup> I emphasize this dimension of purification to stress the *spiritual* orientation of Plato’s philosophy: there is an aspect of *salvation* of the *immortal soul* in what Socrates is doing with *dialectic*—salvation *through knowledge* (gnosis). See, for example, *Phaedo* 63b—69e, esp. at 67a and 67c; though at 69c Socrates seems to distance himself from those “who have established religious initiations” (Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. by H. Tredennick and H. Tarrant, London: Penguin, 2003). Žižek would perhaps term this the “pagan” dimension in Plato that is overcome in the Hegelian sense with Christianity. For philosophy “in the shadow of Hegel”, we are asked to comprehend the historical unfolding, of course, of the concept ‘soul’ into the more fully articulated conception of ‘subject’, in relation to ‘object’, as moments in the dialectic of *Geist*—the absolute Spirit, which is, at the end of the day, nothing but Freedom, that is, pure self-determination. But Žižek would add an extra, Lacanian, *twist*, to this story of *Geist*, as we’ll see: *Geist* is itself nothing but the *twist* of signification: ‘subject’ and ‘object’, ‘self’ and ‘other’, ‘mind’ and ‘matter’—whatever else we may say, the totality is nothing but the non-coincidence of *two Voids*. The abyss of self, the abyss of matter—pure *abyssal freedom*. Perhaps Žižek will in future be accounted more of a *Schellingian* than a Hegelian? (See note below.)

<sup>5</sup> Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 58 (trans. by T.M. Knox, revised by S. Houlgate, Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Though in truth this is an inaccurate depiction of Plato’s deeper metaphysic—as thinkers from Plotinus to Gadamer realized. For example, does Plato advocate for a “two-world” theory: the world of time and change *on the one hand*, as *over and against*, on the other, the world of Being pure and plain—the eternal and changeless perfection of Being? Working this out would entail a much more subtle exposition of Plato than attempted here. See, for example, Gadamer’s remarkable collection *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato* (trans. with an intro. By P. Christopher Smith, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); and in particular “Idea and Reality in Plato’s *Timaeus*”.

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<sup>7</sup> Thus does Žižek aim to *infuse* Hegel with Schelling’s “abyss of freedom” (something he had been concerned with—Schelling’s “system of freedom”—since at least 1997), in order to complete, as it were, the German Idealist possibility which found so full and rich an attempt (at least, it would seem, for Žižek) in Hegel’s powerful System. In this connection, we should take note of how Žižek understands Schelling’s basic problem as the struggle “to resolve ... the enigma of freedom, of the sudden suspension of the ‘principle of sufficient reason,’ discernible from God’s radically contingent act of creation up to the ‘irrational’ insistence of a stubborn child on a seemingly trifling point, on which, however, he is ready to stake everything. Schelling’s solution,” Žižek continues, “involves an unheard-of reversal of the very terms of this enigma: what if the thing to be explained is not freedom but the emergence of the chains of reason, of the causal network—or, to quote Schelling himself: ‘The whole world is thoroughly caught in reason, but the question is: how did it get caught in the network in the first place?’” (Žižek, “The Abyss of Freedom” in *The Abyss of Freedom/Ages of the World* (an essay by Slavoj Žižek with the text of Schelling’s *Die Weltalter* [second draft, 1813], in English translation by Judith Norman), Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 3). Of course, to burst the bubble of German Idealism, and to therefore take the “abyss” out of Schelling’s (or even Hegel’s) “freedom”, we would merely need to understand exactly the sense in which reality is not “rational”, which means to subordinate Reason (once again) to—what? Well, we must wait for Deleuze, ultimately, but we can get a sense of what is to come (a “logic of sense”: the logics of *aesthesis*) if we think of reason as essentially “representation” (nothing more, nothing less), and that there is always a motivating *desire* that *produces* thinking as an *affect* (pointing towards Deleuze’s embrace of Spinoza’s *affectus*) in relation to what is absolutely other-than thought itself (that which is “external” to it, in Hegel’s language). But we have already gone, here, too far...

<sup>8</sup> A critique that is well enough as far as it goes, which is to dismantle a kind of mirror-ideology that had taken hold of classical Marxism, as a result of its increasingly *dogmatic* adherence to the axiom of *dialectical historical materialism*. It is important to mitigate the critique that classical Marxism is too deterministic with the observation that Marxism only becomes *dogmatic* and ideological because of the paucity of its own theoretical apparatus in respect to the nature of *subjectivity*, substituting for true (that is, *dialectical*) human agency a dogmatic and idealistic (which is to say an inadequately *materialist*) conception—the “universelles Wesen”, for example, that Marx spoke of early on, in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*). Was this not the basic insight of the Frankfurt School—at least that of Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm et al.: that Marxism *lacked a true subject*, true dialectical subjectivity?

<sup>9</sup> *Slavoj Žižek: Demanding the Impossible*, ed. by Young-june Park, Cambridge: Polity 2013, p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> And it is Žižek’s great blunder, in his *Less Than Nothing*, to insist, obsessively, on Deleuze’s closet Hegelianism. Žižek, precisely for the reasons that become apparent only by thinking through the challenge and enigma Antigone poses, misses the two forms of negation which occupy Deleuze. We should really study Deleuze in relation to Hegel, but on analogy with Nietzsche’s relation to Schopenhauer, for there is in fact more than an analogy, there is a very precise homology: Deleuze is to Hegel what Nietzsche is to Schopenhauer. I cite as circumstantial evidence the well-known intellectual apprenticeship with Hyppolite, the great French interpreter of Hegel—but the one *not* usually acknowledged as the one largely responsible for the revival of interest in Hegel in the twentieth century. That honor, of course, is given to Kojève—and it is his interpretation that marked Lacan’s thinking, as it did many others, especially Sartre and other (“existential”) phenomenologists. See Shadia Drury’s fascinating account (1994). But Deleuze’s thinking is “marked” by Hegel only (but perhaps without the same youthful *enthusiasm*) as Nietzsche’s is marked by Schopenhauer. Indeed, on almost every point of Nietzsche’s mature thinking, we can see that it is in fact a negation of a parallel thought in

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Schopenhauer's philosophy. "Pessimism," he writes in *Twilight of the Idols*, "[pure, raw pessimism], proves itself only by the self-negation of *messieurs* the pessimists: one must take their logic a step further, and not deny life merely in 'will and idea', as Schopenhauer did—one must *first of all deny Schopenhauer....*". He continues: "Pessimism ... however contagious it may be, nevertheless does not add to the morbidity of an age ... it is the expression of this morbidity. One succumbs to it as one succumbs to cholera: one's constitution must already be sufficiently morbid" (aphorism 36, p. 100). Let us recall, however that it was Hegel, ironically, who (as one story about his death goes) succumbed to the cholera epidemic (1831) which Schopenhauer, for all his "pessimism", managed to escape. But it is the *morbidity* of the Hegelian dialectic which Žižek cannot escape (as we are about to see), which blinds him to precisely this morbidity that *is* overcome in the figure of Antigone (in Lacan's Antigone—which is to say, *in Lacan himself*). Perhaps we should now state where our essay will end, with the claim: Lacan is not a Hegelian; he is what Hegel looks like when Hegel is *overcome*. But Deleuze is that very overcoming in itself, and *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the anti-oedipal triumph of Deleuze and Guattari, is what society and history look like *after* Hegel.

<sup>11</sup> More than this, she is its presupposition: she is what this order requires if it is to constitute itself dialectically, she is its *drive*, its chthonic, repressed core. In this sense we have a *pure* "dividual"—an absolute "this" in medieval terms, a solitary figure beyond the sexual, beyond even sexualization (and so "frigid" as Lacan notes), or, what perhaps amounts to the same, *the involution of sexualization*. The dividual is *incestuous*.

<sup>12</sup> Yet another "reversal" for which Žižek is (in)famous.

<sup>13</sup> *The Faith of the Faithless*, London: Verso 2014, p 212.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> There is much more to this predicament. Given his Lacanianism, Žižek will analyze global capitalism in terms of its incorporation into the structures of the psyche itself, or rather, he will analyze their co-dependency. The basic framework for this analysis is going to be Lacan's triplex of the Symbolic, Imaginary and the Real (the well-known "Borromean knot"). But in our contemporary situation, for very specific technological reasons, it is the *Imaginary* that is ubiquitous, and so therefore the objective-historical *form* of global capitalism achieves a very close bond within the psyche at the very moment of its individuation during the mirror-stage. Because of its ubiquity, the Imaginary itself can be ignored in favor of the dialectic of Symbolic-Real, in which the identity of self, and its identification with the Other, is articulated. A theoretic intervention is possible, then, at the level of the Symbolic in the form of *critique*, and this destabilizes the Borromean flows between the Imaginary-Symbolic-Real that are determined by the *praxic* sphere established by the objective historical *form* of global capitalism itself. *Only* until this outer, objective-historical form itself is ended, every practical act will itself be nothing but another appropriated gesture of orthodox conformity to the existing constraints of the system. But since global capitalism is about *production*, only the theoretic act of *pure suspension of activity* (i.e., speculation), which is the essential form of "hope", is the only possible objective form of "resistance"—indeed, this theoretic act (the only action to take is more theory, Lenin's "study, study, study" enthusiastically endorsed by Žižek) is the production of unproductiveness, and therefore, in fact, a kind of "violence" (the violence of critical speculation) to the system—a moment of its own destruction.

<sup>16</sup> Critchley (2014), *op. cit.*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>17</sup> *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, New York: The Free Press 1977, p. 189

<sup>18</sup> A quotation of a 1942 essay by Adorno, to which Buck-Morss had access during her archival studies of Adorno's papers in the late 1970s. The essay is entitled "Notizen zur neuen Anthropologie". See fn. 31 and fn. 33, p. 306 of *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Adorno (1942) as quoted in Buck-Morss (1977).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>21</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, aphorism 37, p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 157.

<sup>23</sup> See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 17—24, where the relationship between tragedy, existence and innocence are related. Between existence and innocence, we find the *being of becoming*. “Innocence is the game of existence, of force and will. Existence is affirmed and appreciated, force not separated, the will not divided in two—this is the first approximation of innocence” (p. 23). As a ‘game’ innocence is the ‘dicethrow’ of *fate*, which recurs over and over, and so innocence is the game of existence as eternal return—and this precisely is the *being of becoming*. “[B]eing is affirmed in becoming” (p. 23)—being is played or thrown (“affirmed”) as a game. In this precise sense we should link Nietzsche’s “being of becoming” (the eternal recurrence of the *dicethrow* of the will-to-power) to ἀγών—agon. The “being of becoming” is nothing but *agon*—play, forces “not separated” and the will “not divided into two”. One whole affirmation *alongside* another whole affirmation: two wills = one will but *from different perspectives*. Thus, there is no *dialectic* (of master/slave or recognition, and so on)—no dialectic at all.

<sup>24</sup> But it still seemed to carry always the *burden* and the weight of its joyless *anxiety* over death, rather than already presupposing the joy of life in and of itself.

<sup>25</sup> “Every mode of thought insofar as it is non-representational will be termed affect” Deleuze announces in a seminar, as quoted by Gregory Seigworth (2005). Seigworth continues:

An affective path cannot be threaded through those places where representations or images of thought are predominant or hold sway. For affect is something more or other than a mode of thought: an affect, first as Spinoza’s *affection*, is the transitive effect undergone by a body (human or otherwise) in a system—a mobile and open system—composed of the various, innumerable forces of existing and the relations between these forces ... [it is] the state of a body in as much as it affects or is affected by another body. Affect, then, cannot be converted into or delimited by the discursive, by images or representations, by consciousness or thought

—but we should not let this elaboration contradict the deeper realization announced in the above quotation, which, perhaps, Seigworth has here momentarily forgotten: that *every non-representational mode of thought is ‘affect’*. Affect is a mode of thought—but only insofar as it is determined in relation to another body, that is, only insofar as thought follows a difference or differentiating process. What Deleuze and Guattari elsewhere term the “unthought within thought” (*What Is Philosophy?*) is, then, this affective differentiation which is, precisely, the *non-representational mode of thought*. The “unthought” is what elude the representational mode of thought as *it represents*. For Seigworth’s discussion of this concept of affect, see his “From Affection to Soul” in *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2005), p. 161.

<sup>26</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, New York: Columbia University Press 1994, p. 160.

<sup>27</sup> As Deleuze points out, Nietzsche insists on distinguishing the leap from the dance; see p. 11 of *Difference and Repetition*.

<sup>28</sup> Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 197.

<sup>29</sup> And let us in this connection recall the concept of Plato: the “methexis” or “participation” and hear the *Nietzschean* critique and recovery of it...do we not finally come upon the proper response to Adorno’s—and Žižek’s—worry and suspicion of *mitmachen*? The performance...

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> We may simply *define* “strangeness” or even estrangement as radical differentiation which manages to remain for a time outside the dialectics of representation.

<sup>32</sup> “Intellectuals and Power” in Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953—1974*, ed. by David Lapoujade & trans. by Michael Taormina, New York: Semiotext(e), 2004.