

# THE ANALOGICAL PARALLAX

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## THE SCENT OF A WOMAN

Slavoj Žižek's stylistic reliance on analogy, tautology, and examples - and particularly on crude, humorous, or popular ones - is a frequently discussed and persistently controversial feature of his work. Although these tendencies have certainly helped to establish Žižek's 'character' as a philosopher, we can also identify a kind of structural, methodological line of reasoning in this authorial predilection: the attempt to create what I argue is a parallax effect that self-consciously interrogates the process of interpretation. Can the specificity of Žižek's approach to Lacanian psychoanalysis be applied to the way in which meaning is constructed/understood across Žižek's body of work? Concurrently, can this approach further illuminate the process by which we acquire knowledge of not only subjects and psychic processes, but also of the originary concepts and vocabularies which generate and organize a uniquely 'Žižekian' methodology? Through an examination of the strategic stylistic place of analogy in Žižek's work, this paper seeks to subject such methods to analysis in the context of broader philosophical concerns which appear across Žižek's *oeuvre* - namely universality, parallax, minimal difference, and the 'location' of the object cause of desire in this comprehension of difference.

In one sequence from the Marx Brothers film, *A Night at the Opera* (1935), opportunist Otis B. Driftwood (Groucho Marx) attempts to woo the hapless dowager Mrs. Claypool (Margaret Dumont) after she discovers that he has neglected their dinner engagement to dine with another woman - naturally, in the very restaurant where he was scheduled to meet Mrs. Claypool. Groucho attempts to

comfort the disheartened Mrs. Claypool, claiming that he was only attracted to the other woman because she reminded him of Mrs. Claypool herself. Mrs. Claypool finds this delightful, and Groucho continues: "In fact, Mrs. Claypool, *you* remind me of you! Your eyes, your throat, your lips - everything about you reminds me of you! Well, except for you." Two Lacanian interpretations of this comment are immediately apparent: firstly, Groucho's 'excuse' for avoiding Mrs. Claypool is here nothing less than a transparent declaration of genuine devotion. Despite appearances to the contrary, Mrs. Claypool is indeed the object of Groucho's affections, expressed perfectly by his admission that 'the other woman' was merely the necessary conduit for Mrs. Claypool's occupation of a place in his desire. As such, when Groucho embraces Mrs. Claypool and exclaims, "I love you! I was only dining with that other woman because she reminds me of you!", he has effectively understood that a woman only 'acquires' her value in his desire when she acts as a substitute for another woman; Margaret Dumont, ever the astute - albeit oblivious - Lacanian in the Marx Brothers' films, is therefore 'correct' to be flattered by Groucho's admission. Of course, such flattery does not excuse the fact that phantasmatic monogamy is an alien concept to the genuine Lacanian (in reality, claiming, 'I only slept with him/her so that you - my *true* love - would gain value as a desirous object!') is rarely a wise pretext for seduction), but we can also identify another possible reading of Groucho's affirmation of affection.

It seems certain that Mrs. Claypool's features - especially when witnessed 'assembled' on her person - would serve to 'remind' the onlooker of her qualities, given that they belong exclusively to her and are visibly present. Indeed, Groucho's 'compliment' would fail as a joke if he informed Mrs. Claypool of the bodily transcendence of her qualities, alleging that a certain beautiful peculiarity of her features (graceful neck, luscious lips, etc) heralded their appearance to him in metaphorically-loaded objects (swan's neck, rose petals) or even in other attractive women. Suffice it to say that, 'Your eyes are like starlight' is a higher-order compliment than one which compares the 'beautiful' object to nothing beyond its singular - that is, its adjectivally or metaphorically unqualified - character ('Your eyes are like your eyes'). And do we not see a similar logic at work in The Magnetic Fields' song "A Pretty Girl is Like...", where the singer/narrator's frustration over constructing an effective simile for a girl's beauty ("a pretty girl is like... a minstrel show... a violent crime... a melody") ends in his 'return' to the simultaneously insufficient/concrete and eloquent/elusive signifier: "A pretty girl is like a pretty girl." However, from the Lacanian perspective of the *objet petit a*, the crucial difference between the amorous musings of The Magnetic Fields and Groucho's admiration of Mrs. Claypool is the *exception* Groucho makes of 'her.' While all of her various features serve as reminders of her desirous/desiring value in fantasy, the whole or sum-total of Mrs. Claypool has no place in this fantasy. "Everything about you reminds me of you," Groucho states. "Well, except for you." How are we to interpret this exception?

Recalling that the *objet a* in Lacanian terminology simultaneously denotes the cause of desire (Lacan refers to it as "the object-cause of desire") (1981 179), as well as a "semblance of being" (1975

95), it becomes clear that the *objet a* is not a positive entity or accessible property of the subject. Rather, it is the object of desire which we seek in the Other (1991 177), that which is “in him more than him” (1981 268) and - given its status as the object-cause of desire - is therefore the evanescent, traumatic semblance of the Other which we are forever barred from attaining/experiencing. When Groucho exempts Mrs. Claypool from her own likeness, he is essentially directing his ‘love’ towards a semblance of her being, or at something which she, as a complete being, can never properly evoke or suggest. This love finds expression through various disjointed qualities which anticipate an essence, but which - when concentrated on the subject Mrs. Claypool - are somehow disappointing, incomplete, and fail to satisfy Groucho’s request for the *objet a*. That essential element (*a*) which is ‘in Mrs. Claypool more than her’ is certainly not (and can never be) Mrs. Claypool herself; as such, we are here in a position to recast Groucho’s expression of conditional love as, ‘Nothing conjures up your (lovable) essence less effectively than you yourself.’ Lacan paraphrases this necessary realization as the statement, “I ask you to refuse what I offer you because that’s not it” (1975 111), where ‘it’ is the *objet a*, something which has “no being... [but is rather] the void presupposed by a demand” (*Ibid* 126). Contrary to the idealized romantic scenario which celebrates the ‘total subject’s’ unknowable exception as alluring and remarkable (the attitude of ‘I don’t know what it is, but there’s something so wonderful/different/special about you’ which ends in a surrender to the signifier in *The Magnetic Fields*’ “A Pretty Girl is Like...”), Groucho’s admission to Mrs. Claypool reveals that the exception is not beautiful or reminiscent of beauty, but is rather the opposite - that is, perplexingly insufficient just where we expect its ‘essential character’ to shine through and justify our love. One could here say: ‘I love in you something more than you... that’s it, but it is not you.’

The incommensurable divide between what we perceive as indispensable to the Other’s being and our continued reiteration of ‘that’s not it’, is precisely the space of the *objet a*. Žižek describes the *objet a* as “a certain curvature of the space [of desire] which causes us to make a bend... when we want to get directly at the object.” In itself, the *objet a* is “nothing at all, a pure semblance which just materializes the curvature of the space of desire” (1992 48, 49). Simply stated, we are confident of *objet a*’s positive attributes in the Other and its appearance as an accessible or even tangible partial object (eyes, lips, throat), but the ultimate assemblage of these requisite ‘qualities of being’ never fails to disappoint. For although we may be convinced that *objet a* is ‘something’ in contingent reality, this object-cause “only dissolves (*se résout*), in the final analysis, owing to its failure, unable, as it is, to sustain itself in approaching the real” (Lacan 1975 95). The popular jazz standard “These Foolish Things” is also exemplary in this respect, given its poignant address to an absent lover through a series of personally-portentous signifiers (“a cigarette that bears lipstick traces... gardenia perfume lingering on a pillow... the smile of Garbo and the scent of roses” and so on) which nonetheless serve to *ensure* the lover’s absence, to keep him at a distance. It is significant that the lover is only addressed indirectly, or through the titular invocation of ‘foolish things.’ As the song discloses, the

beloved in his entirety can only be loved (or properly remembered) via the route of the *objet petit a*; it is in this sense that the *objet a* is fantasy's 'foolish thing' which is located at the centre of all remembrance - not as a fetish/partial object (although it may occasionally appear as such), but as the structuring semblance or "chimerical materialization of the curved structure of the space of desire" (Žižek 1992 65 n. 28) which allows us to create a total experience from a series of discontinuous fragments. The necessary impossibility of the *objet a*, of course, exists in the fact that this 'total experience' is both illusory and demarcates the moment of the subject's "refusal of the offer" (because that's not it) (Lacan 1975 126). As such, when I claim that 'I love in you something more than you', I may indeed be referring to those exceptional/inaccessible constituents or object-causes which make you worthy of remembrance, but which - absurdly - can never be empirically subsumed or integrated into your character or being. In other words, the inconsistency of *objet a* can be expressed as, 'I love in you something more than you, an essential quality and indeed your very essence: that is, precisely that which can never be loved because it lacks a referent. You enable a desire that is *not you*.' I will here take up the issue of the (missing) referent itself. Why does Groucho's statement strike us as somehow inaccessible despite its directness, and why does the *objet a* (the missing referent 'you') here ultimately serve to complicate and divide a subject (Mrs. Claypool) who, as was previously mentioned, should be 'fixed' in her meaning and reminiscent of the features which 'make her who she is?'

The interrogation of such ambiguous referentiality (i.e., the referent that, like Mrs. Claypool, is simultaneously present and purloined), its pedagogic aims in the work of Slavoj Žižek, and our 'contra-Grouchian' inability to delight in its play of presence/absence, is the project of this paper. If analogy - through its 'narrativization' of metaphor and simile - seeks to clarify an unknown variable or concept, is the 'baseness' of its clarifying example ever in danger of supplanting or substituting wholesale for the more complex, 'elevated' unknown concept? Similarly, how can tautology ever seek to clarify anything, since it only ever ends where it effectively began? Like Žižek's project of destabilizing traditional attitudes towards 'higher' and 'lower-order' culture and its analysis, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and theory are never stable in their application or identity. In Žižek's work, we encounter a form of critical engagement in which reversal and inversion constitute the subversive core of our cultural sphere, and this paper posits that analogy - when understood specifically vis-a-vis desire - is one means of accessing such reversals.

As a means of introducing the conceptual conditions into which Žižek's use of analogy intervenes, let us turn to the topic of the Tom Tykwer film *Perfume: the Story of a Murderer* (2006). The film, adapted from the bestselling novel by Patrick Süskind, concerns the misadventures of Jean-Baptiste Grenouille (Ben Wishaw) - an obsessive idiot-savant perfumer working in 19<sup>th</sup> century France. Gifted from birth with "the best nose in Paris", Grenouille's ceaseless encounters with abstract odours (warm rocks, wet grass, ripe fruit) and their offensive counterparts (rotting fish) dominates a

substantial portion of the film's diegesis - as do his later efforts at preserving the overwhelming beauty of certain scents that he finds painfully fleeting. Instructed in the science of perfumery by Giuseppe Baldini (Dustin Hoffman), a forgotten master of the craft, Grenouille becomes consumed by a quest to discover and bottle the elusive 'thirteenth note' which - Baldini teaches him - makes for a "truly original perfume." Although each perfume consists of twelve individual notes, "selected for their harmonic affinity" and interdependently comprising a three-chord structure, Grenouille is intrigued by the legendary addition of an 'extra note' which is said to "bring out and dominate the others." It is hardly the secret of the film's narrative that Grenouille eventually identifies this thirteenth note as the scent of beautiful women, which he procures by killing women and soaking their skin and hair in animal fat.

Grenouille's obsessional project of encountering and cataloguing odours is visually reflected by director Tykwer's attention to olfactory detail which is neither lyrical nor hermeneutic, despite its overwhelming stylistic hyperbole (smash cuts, zip pans, and accelerated zooms attempt to viscerally replicate the chaotic diffusion and accumulation of odours in the streets of Paris, the countryside, and so on). The camera 'chronicles' scents at a rapid rate by simply representing their source, but offers little interpretation of olfactory experience at either its most sublime or abject; save for a single fantasy sequence experienced by Baldini upon smelling one of Grenouille's perfumes (he is transported to a shimmering garden, children are giggling, a woman professes love for him), the spectator does not enjoy the privilege of any 'de-ontologizing' visual metaphors. As such, critics of the film have taken issue with the absence of any filmic articulation of 'the thirteenth note' which, in its perpetual (visual) deferral to more 'comprehensive' odours, remains an unfathomable X:

Although one cannot fault [Tykwer's] ability to conjure scents from his most arresting images [of nature and decay], the film's interest in scent all but disappears during Grenouille's killing spree... when it should matter most (Macalan 54).

Furthermore, Macalan continues, *Perfume* fails to accomplish what it sets out to do: "the viewer walks away having smelled... rotting fish guts and face powder, but the smell of a beautiful woman is elided... A beautiful woman in this film smells like... a beautiful woman" (*Ibid*). While this point is certainly well-taken, its expression of the general critical response to such elision as a failure of the film is perhaps premature; for even if one agrees that *Perfume* exploits fetishistic visual splendor at the expense of the more nascent qualities of scent, the distressing realization that 'a beautiful woman smells like a beautiful woman' (and nothing more) functions less as a empirical guarantee of meaning than a speculative emergence at the level of interpretation. In other words, although the statement appears wholly self-evident and 'in itself', it has not simply materialized as a given, and the 'nothing more' implied by the statement equally entails the central impossibility of some positive content ('something more') that has failed to materialize. Yet despite its apparent directness, we have not 'chosen' this reading first. Why is this the case?

Given the statement's ostensible simplicity, what is at stake here is the fact that tautology can introduce a universal. Like all tautologies, the statement perturbs precisely because it entails - in a most unexpected fashion - a 'particularization' of the universal at the very moment that the particular appears to be universalized (i.e., reduced to its most elementary/neutral/unqualified background: itself). Like the referential exception that is Mrs. Claypool herself (and not any of her various qualities) and the pretty girl who is eventually revealed to have no referential equal but herself, the scent of a beautiful woman in *Perfume* complicates the anticipated terrain of meaning. Where we expect a qualitative summary ('X is like Y'), we encounter a reformulation of the problem in the guise of itself - that is to say, the two sides of the equation ('X is like X') are identical but not equivalent. As such, what appears as homogenization or a conceptual flattening - which, in eschewing the possibility of some adjectival identity, 'prostrates' the beautiful woman on a plane of absolute equivalence - is actually a negation of that very particular content which comprises equivalence. In his analysis of Hegel's discussion of phrenology<sup>i</sup>, Žižek refers to such activity as the moment when universality "stop[s] being a neutral-abstract medium of its particular content, and... *include[s] itself among its particular subspecies*" (1999a 92). For our purposes, this is made possible by the presence of the preposition 'like' which, in casting the statement as referential (X refers to/resembles X), removes any claim to empirical identity by creating a noncoincident split in what would otherwise be a distinct or autonomous object. The conclusion that 'a beautiful woman smells like a beautiful woman' is therefore not a "vulgar-materialist 'reductionist' reading" (*Ibid*), but rather one which has somehow epistemologically divided the very notion of 'a beautiful woman' from within.

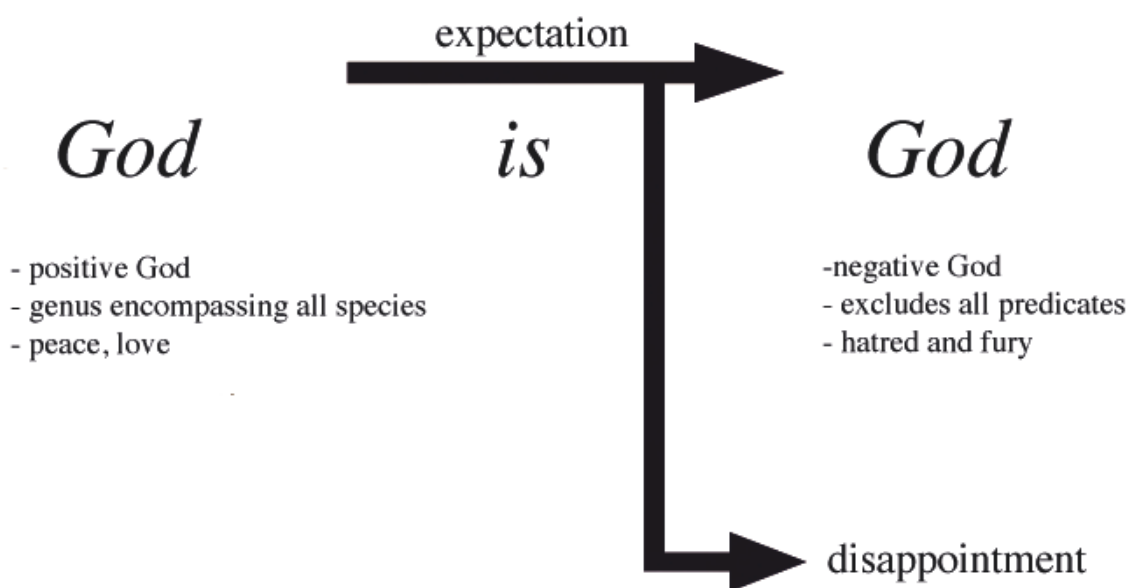
## VULGAR MATERIALISM & TAUTOLOGY

It is useful here to consider the philosophical value of tautology in Žižek's work and how this differs from its hermeneutic position in Žižek's explicit engagements with the topic. Discussions of tautology are often focussed on its use-value in communicating meaning since, superficially, its very existence seems to turn around a playful or even frivolous elision of the very meaning it seeks to convey. Yet many of Žižek's Lacanian-Hegelian 'inversions' take on the playful structure of tautology to revelatory effect, where what was assumed actually 'is', and where some apparently essential hidden content is eventually proven to be less valuable than the act of veiling itself (i.e., "only a woman can pretend to be what she is [a woman]") (2006c par. 38)<sup>ii</sup>. In this sense, tautology is featured in Žižek's work as much as analogy (albeit more obliquely), owing in part to Žižek's adoption of the linguistic permutations of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the reversals/inversions of Hegelian philosophy.

Here I want to turn to Hegel's reading of tautology, which is particularly instructive in understanding Žižek's project of employing tautology to destabilize binary logic. For Hegel, tautology is not a coalescence of truths ('X is X'), but rather a pure contradiction:

If anyone opens his mouth and promises to state what God is, namely God is - God, expectation is cheated, for what was expected was a *different determination*... Looking more closely at this tedious effect produced by such truth, we see that the beginning, 'The plant is -', sets out to say *something*, to bring forward a further determination. But since only the same thing is repeated, the opposite has happened, *nothing* has emerged. Such *identical* talk therefore *contradicts* itself. Identity, instead of being in its own self truth and absolute truth, is consequently the very opposite; instead of being the unmoved simple, it is the passage beyond itself into the dissolution of itself (415).

In his reading of this passage, Žižek points out that the true tension inherent in tautology is the way in which it tarries between form and content. At the level of content, it is indisputable that God is God, since surely He is Himself. Yet at the level of form, the issue is not the utterance and what it seeks to represent, but the means by which it creates a set of expectations which produce meaning. If, as Žižek states, the form "produces the 'expectation' of the specific determination of the initial neutral, abstract universality to be brought about by the second part of the proposition" (1989 35), then it stands to reason that the tautology is always assured success since it delivers precisely what it 'promises.' Yet, in aiming directly at its object, the tautology invariably misfires and expectation is disappointed: "instead of encountering itself, the initial moment comes across its *own absence*, the set comes across itself as *empty set*" (*Ibid*)<sup>iii</sup>. I have outlined the temporality of this process in the figure below:



However, in Žižek's account, this disappointment of expectation should not be regarded as a failure but rather as a point of analytical departure. What can be said about this disappointment and how does it reflect on the initial moment/term, or referent?

In appearing as one of many potential qualities that attempt to explicate 'itself', the referent here undergoes a process which may be mistaken for a kind of reverse sublation: that is, to gain the highest possible understanding of the unfathomable X, we must first pass through the lowest or basest

form of such understanding (*Ibid*). Conversely, in our case, any such 'higher reasoning' is eschewed in favour of an apparent tautology which 'goes nowhere' - ending precisely where it began. This attitude is symptomatic of the reading which regards *Perfume's* inability to represent the essential qualities of odour as a failure, an overlooking, or an impediment to understanding; crucially, it also introduces a problematic dimension of temporality to the 'space between' the two diffuse repetitions of a tautology. If 'nothing more' can be said of the smell of a beautiful woman, what is the 'something more' lurking behind this impossibility - the universal exception that has failed to materialize but has nonetheless 'proven the rule?' We again return to the question of why this immediately apparent reading did not present itself as a possibility until all (or at least several) other interpretive options had been exhausted.

As a means of addressing this question, it is worth returning to Žižek's analysis of Hegel on phrenology, and particularly to the invocation of the phallic metaphor to qualify the precarious opposition between 'higher' and 'lower'-order readings of this metaphor. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel distinguishes between what Žižek terms the "vulgar empiricist" (or materialist) and "speculative" readings (*Ibid* 93) of the phallus to illustrate "the... conjunction of the high and low which, in the living being, Nature naïvely expresses when it combines the organ of its highest fulfillment, the organ of generation, with the organ of urination" (Hegel 210). Žižek expresses the interpretive opposition between these two readings as follows:

The vulgar-materialist reading is... the approach which sees in the phallus only the organ of urination, while the speculative reading is also able to discern in it the much higher function of insemination (i.e., precisely 'conception' as the biological anticipation of *concept*) (1999a 92).

However, contrary to the linear movement from 'low to high' (and their corresponding connotations of baseness and enlightenment) witnessed in elementary conceptions of sublation, Žižek's reading of Hegel decentres the concrete differentiation between the 'choice' of either urination or insemination - but it likewise does not posit the two choices as equivalent. Rather, Žižek imposes a temporal condition on the two choices, contending that one cannot opt for the choice of insemination directly or assume it as a 'given' - even and especially if one knows it to be the 'true meaning': "one has to begin by making the 'wrong' choice (of urination): the true speculative meaning emerges only through repeated reading, as the after-effect (or by-product) of the first, 'wrong' reading" (*Ibid* 93). To do otherwise (that is, to directly choose the speculative reading of insemination) is, according to Žižek, "the infallible way to miss it" (*Ibid*)<sup>iv</sup>. As was outlined earlier apropos of tautology and the disappointment of expectation which results from a thing's overproximity to itself, this 'miss' involves a preemptive elision of the referential qualities of meaning - the 'real thing' that lurks behind its many possible interpretations. And is this 'miss' not precisely what we see endlessly and brilliantly reiterated in the films of the Marx Brothers, whose dedication to aiming squarely at some precise desire or its



expression always comically 'oversteps' it, rendering it simultaneously excessive and deficient? This tendency is evinced in Groucho's profession of love for Mrs. Claypool, which - in its directness - manages to 'except her from herself' and, far from integrating her various qualities into a sense of meaningful selfhood, actually fragments her ontological consistency (the meaning of 'you' in "everything about you reminds me of you" and the referent 'you' in "except you" are not equivalent). A somewhat similar (albeit less complex) exchange occurs in a sequence from *Horse Feathers* (1932): a homeless man asks Harpo for some spare change for a cup of coffee, whereupon Harpo removes from his pocket a steaming mug of coffee and hands it to the man. The missing referent 'change' is here elided precisely because it is the very substance of the exchange, or the object-cause that presupposes a demand. As such, both sequences bear witness to the total evacuation of the 'space' in which Žižek's 'first, wrong' reading is subjected to contemplative review; the immediate encroachment of the 'true meaning' in both cases guarantees its own perfectly-timed circumvention.

Concurrently, Žižek's reading of Hegel further illuminates why we cannot assume that the logic at work in Tykwer's *Perfume* ('a beautiful woman smells like...') ends in tautological quietude, in passivity rather than dynamism. Not only does the statement/reading contain within it some missing or negated content which cannot be immediately apprehended (a beautiful woman can smell like nothing else - for whatever reason, all other avenues have been exhausted), but it is also purely a 'concrete' universal "because it is forever prevented from acquiring a figure that would be adequate to its notion" (*Ibid* 103). In this respect, it is less Tykwer's direction that is misguided than Grenouille's decision to identify the elusive 'thirteenth note' as the scent of a woman; if universality 'exists' only in so far as "there is a gap, a hole, in the midst of the particular content of the universality in question" (*Ibid*), then it would be appropriate to identify the thirteenth note as one such referent that can only be addressed in its own terms (i.e., 'the thirteenth note smells like the thirteenth note').

## THE TRUTH IS 'OUT THERE': ANALOGY AND THE UNIVERSAL EXCEPTION

If attempts at introducing a specifically Žižekian approach to meaning and universality have consistently demonstrated a single methodological characteristic of Žižek's, this can surely be identified as an emphasis on universality's constitutive struggle and ceaseless activity. For Žižek, universality cannot be conceived (or is at least improperly conceived) as "the neutral container of particular formations, their common measure, the passive (back)ground on which the particulars fight their battles" (2006a 30), given that such neutrality both reduces the particulars to compliant 'exemplifications' on a totalized landscape and disregards the necessity for dynamism between the elements. Indeed, it is Žižek's contention that, rather than conceiving of universality as a preordained interplay between the ground and 'its' particulars, we regard it as an ongoing conflict, "the struggle leading from one particular formation to another" (*Ibid*). However, apropos of the 'space between' or

'missing content' clarified by a Hegelian-Žižekian reading of *Perfume*, these particularities are always deficient - some essential positive content must be absented by necessity, given that universality can only be defined as such when its most 'essential' particular (that which would "adequately embody" it, rendering it complete and static) (1999a 193) is missing. In this respect, universality for Žižek "names the site of a Problem-Deadlock, of a burning Question, and the Particulars are the attempted but failed Answers to this Problem" (*Ibid* 35).

However, such cautioning against the reductive assumption of abstract universality does not even begin to address the multifaceted levels of Žižek's reading of universality, let alone the pedagogic methods of parallax he employs across his oeuvre to antagonize it. Yet how can we see such antagonism at work in such a way that highlights its constitutive relationship to universality? In his essay "Interpassivity and Misdemeanors: The Analysis of Ideology and the Žižekian Toolbox", Robert Pfaller performs an extraordinarily measured analysis of how Žižek's examples function, and how they build an interpretive 'toolbox' for the reader. Approaching the Žižekian example from a critical distance is no easy task; since Žižek himself can be rather excitable in his analyses, his tendency to interrupt one example with another often seems like a precariously-stacked tower that is climbing ever higher. As such, any critic who is able to dismantle this structure through close reading and with a focus on pedagogy, makes a valuable contribution to the emerging field of 'Žižek studies.' Beginning with the assertion that the example for Žižek is not merely a concrete illustration of an abstract idea, Pfaller interprets the quadruple example Žižek employs in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* to explain "the objectivity of belief" (1989 33-35) and Marxist commodity fetishism. Beginning with the Tibetan prayer wheel ("you write a prayer on a paper, put the rolled paper into a wheel, and turn it... without thinking"), Žižek moves to Lacan's interpretation of the role of the Chorus in Greek tragedy ("we feel the required emotions through the medium of the Chorus"), then to how the laugh-track functions in television comedies ("the Other - embodied in the television set... - is laughing instead of us"), and finally to the joke about the man who thinks that he is a grain of corn ("What are you afraid of? You know that you are not a grain but a man.' The fool answered, 'Yes, of course, I know that, but does the hen know that I am no longer a grain?"). For Pfaller, this series of examples is far from random, but rather evinces an analytical evolution through which Žižek gently guides the reader. The ritual of the Tibetan prayer wheel assigns new meaning to Marx's theory of commodity fetishism and enjoins the reader to consider that "things are able to believe instead of us" (Pfaller 36). Culturally, however, this ritual is likely far-removed from the experiences of the reader, and may mistakenly convince him or her that such belief is a stupid religious perversion to which he or she would never deign to stoop. The third example of the Chorus therefore engages the reader directly with Lacanian theory and is conceptually supported by it. Pfaller views this example as potentially too esoteric and arbitrary, which is why (he argues) the fourth step connects Lacan's interpretation with an example from contemporary culture. This historicization of the example allows Žižek to give "full credibility and concreteness to the

idea of Lacan which had until then remained a kind of theoretical ‘sleeper’” (37). Finally, the fool-hen joke coalesces the series into a narrative, and makes concrete the total argument surrounding the objectivity of belief - that “delegating one’s beliefs makes them even stronger than they were before” (*Ibid*). Pfaller not only systematizes Žižek’s evolution of the example but then analyzes it as characteristic of a specifically Žižekian project: many philosophers and theorists rely on examples, but Žižek does so uniquely. How does he achieve this?

In Žižek’s work, the example functions precisely as the particular content that disrupts a neutral abstract universality - a particular which itself is universalized, and then again undergoes particularization. Pfaller states that the example in Žižek’s texts “is in itself already another example, another concrete element”, such that the example does not illustrate its ‘counterpart’ (the example which follows it), but rather “displace[s] it... drag[s] it away from its initial position... estrange[s] it” (*Ibid* 38). In short, while the example functions pedagogically to guide the reader through an interpretation, in undergoing this process the example becomes split from within and no longer coincides with itself. Suffice it to recall the experience of reading Žižek and falling prey to what Frances L. Restuccia calls his “little trick of trying to lure the reader into a perspective that he eventually exposes as wrong” (par. 37). This experience of being de-centred from the idea that one has assumed is extremely disruptive, but its function far exceeds discursive mischief: what truly ‘counts’ in this process is not only how one example/position can work with or against the other, but the passage between them. Consider, as one case of many, Žižek’s interpretation of the differences between the traditional *femme fatale* of the 1940s/50s *noir* and the neo-*noir femme fatale* of the 1990s. Žižek claims that the ‘classic’ *femme fatale*’s self-destruction and ability to elude her partner’s obsessive grasp allows her to sustain herself phantasmatically, as a spectral entity. Conversely, the neo-*noir femme fatale* sacrifices this very phantasmatic support:

In contrast to the classic *femme fatale* who is destroyed in reality in order to survive and triumph as the fantasmatic spectral entity, [the neo-*noir femme fatale*] survives in reality by sacrificing/destroying her fantasmatic support (2000a 11).

This certainly seems reasonable, albeit somewhat speculative, but then Žižek plays his ‘little trick’: “or does she?” (*Ibid*). Now the reader must pause and evaluate the situation. Why was one compelled to follow this analysis and accept it as true in the first place when clearly it is not? Žižek goes on to explain that it is the very transparency of the neo-*noir femme fatale* which paradoxically renders her enigmatic but, crucially, this does not invalidate the previous reading. It is not that the ‘first’ reading was incorrect (as Restuccia claims), but that it instigated a circuit of interpretation; the transparent-yet-enigmatic *femme fatale* is not to be opposed to the *femme fatale* who destroys her phantasmatic support. Rather, we are incapable of comprehending one without the other, and it is the movement between the two positions which clarifies this need.

What we encounter here is the refusal to yoke a concrete example to an abstract, philosophically elevated idea. This is achieved by de-centering that very idea, by revealing the idea to be merely another example - in short by a kind of self-destructing analogy. It is at this point that I should like to focus closely on Žižek's stylistic penchant for analogy (a more direct expression of the example) as a philosophically viable component function of this project of antagonism.

Anyone familiar with the experience of reading Žižek's work is aware of the prominent place of analogy in his philosophical and pedagogical project. Analogies - most often heralded by their designation as "examples *par excellence*" - materialize at a near-constant rate across Žižek's texts, and the rapidity and occasionally irresponsible abandon with which they appear are a central characteristic of Žižek's (in)famous reputation as a gleeful "one-person culture mulcher [who]... plays the philosopher as stand-up comic" (Ball 1991). Žižek's penchant for analogy is also at the root of much criticism of his work, and opens the philosophical terrain under discussion to vehement attack; given that Žižek's 'wild' analogies (belief and chocolate laxatives (2004 par. 9), empty ritual and Tamagachi (in Wright 1999b 108), ideology and the curvature of toilet bowls (1997 5), to name a few) are both specific and culturally accessible, they often appear to overshadow and subsume their respective objects. As such, the topic of inquiry shifts from the concept itself to the purported efficacy of the analogy used to illustrate it and - more problematically - allows the analogy to assume full referential signification at the expense of its object. The extreme outcome of this attitude towards analogy is expressed in a passage from Robert Sheckley's 1968 science fiction novel, *Mindswap*. The protagonist, Marvin Flynn, who is about to become a 'tourist' and embark on a futuristic vacation by exchanging his body with an alien's, is warned by MindSwap (also the name of the company which offers these vacations) of the dangers inherent in 'swapping' one's subjectivity and experiencing another's body and life as one's own:

Analogy assures us that this is like that; it forms a bridge between the accepted known and the unacceptable unknown... However, under the continued and unremitting impact of the unknown, even the analogizing faculty can become distorted. Unable to handle the flood of data by the normal process of conceptual analogizing, the subject becomes victim to 'perceptual' analogizing. This state is what we call 'metaphoric deformation' (Sheckley 282).

The 'danger' which analogy has come to pose to Sheckley's body-tourists is an intersubjective defense against excessive bombardment by meaning; at its zero-point (metaphoric deformation), analogy is here conceived as a kind of short-circuit which allows the tourist to substitute what he sees with some reifying fiction. Ultimately, analogy pacifies the referential impact of the 'unknown' object and distorts the form of the thing by making it comprehensible/recognizable, but nonetheless 'wrong.'

Apropos of Žižek's reading of Hegel on phrenology and universality, a crucial point is the cautioning against such an experience as 'wrong.' The truly dystopian ideology of MindSwap (the

company) is therefore its tacit advocacy of some apparent truth-approximation that the object possesses independent of the subject's analogizing; if the truth is really 'out there', then the casualty of this assumption is the transitional necessity of the 'wrong' reading - of the tourist's subjective tendency to grasp at something 'beyond' the referential object in order to paradoxically return to it, thereby imbuing it with some semblance of meaning.

To extend this understanding of analogy further, I have classified the particular variety of analogy briefly outlined above as one which engages with and upholds symbolic fictions. In their tendency to assert, or '(re)assure' us (in Sheckley's terms), that "this is like that" (*Ibid*), such analogies are familiar agents which operate in the service of meaning by grounding the unknown in explanation rather than exploring it through argument. And although this paper does not seek to demote this particular variety of analogy or expose it as somehow deficient, its function in Žižek's pedagogic project far exceeds pragmatic use-value as an illustrative exemplar; as was mentioned previously, I seek to problematize our understanding of analogy and the example in Žižek's work, such that analogy may be understood as a multifaceted function of Žižek's project of antagonizing universality - and not merely as the descriptor of this undoing. It would perhaps be useful in this respect for the reader to conceive of analogy and its appearances in Žižek's work in terms of degree rather than kind, thereby lessening the likelihood of confusing discussions of the specific, 'empiricist' analogy at hand with its higher-order methodological functions. Yet how are we to conceive of analogy as a 'symbolic fiction', and where do we see evidence of its appearances?

A recent resurgence of television dramas centred around the medical profession (*House M.D.* [2004-2012], *Grey's Anatomy* [2005]) and scientific/forensic technologies (the *CSI* franchise [2000, 2002, 2004], *Numb3rs* [2005-2010], *Without a Trace* [2002-2009]) is testament to the popularity of scenarios which are predicated on the spectator's ignorance of 'what really goes on' in the elusive and abject spaces of the operating room, the coroner's table, and so on. These programmes, which purport to showcase the meticulously procedural underside of spectacular criminal violence and baffling medical afflictions, are rife with the kind of impenetrable professional jargon which is surely alien to the typical spectator. The continued fascination with such jargon, however, is largely sustained by the programmes' skillfully tacit ability to incorporate clarifying analogies into their discussions of 'expert' terminology. The logic of privileged, 'behind the scenes' access to elusive professional aptitude is therefore regulated and generated less by a fascination with the unknown than by the analogies which make inaccessible procedures and technologies 'available' to us. An exchange in an episode of the medical drama *House M.D.* calls attention to this tendency: a committee of doctors are discussing the means by which they can identify a patient's illness. One doctor makes a suggestion in rather dense medical jargon ("what if we take the heart cells with the bad DNA and we tag them?"), whereupon House (Hugh Laurie), the lead physician, asks, "Can you rephrase that in the form of a metaphor?" When the doctor adapts her suggestion by explaining that 'tagging' would involve flushing

the patient's body with an antibody that would recognize the affected cells and cause them to "light up like lightbulbs", the committee is satisfied.

Beyond the self-referential humour of this exchange (the doctors do not 'need' the analogy, and the spectator realizes that the reference is self-consciously staged for his benefit alone), two interpretations of such an analogy are apparent: firstly, the referent (the affected cells), while remaining stable, permits any number of analogical transformations in the service of meaning, and arrives at some intelligible truth by incorporating the referent into the known. In this respect, such an analogy is infinitely interchangeable (the doctor in this sequence could have easily described the affected cells as 'glowing like fireflies.' Similarly, if one were to make the claim that an aneurism is like a balloon attached to an artery, this would not preclude the possibility of also contending that it is like the bulge in a garden hose, and so on). However, this potential for transposition likewise discloses a second interpretation which identifies *difference* as the root cause of the analogy's intelligibility - that is to say, the more charged the difference between the referent and its explication, the more precise and coherent the analogy. As a means of contradistinction, recall here the (apparently) paradoxical difficulty incurred by Groucho's simultaneously excessive and deficient profession of love to Mrs. Claypool ("everything about you reminds me of you - except you"), the problematic 'tautology' of The Magnetic Fields' song "A Pretty Girl is Like...", and my reading of the critical response to Tykwer's *Perfume*; while these analogies initially appeared to devalue the referent by reiterating it verbatim (X is like X) and thus vitiating any potential for new content and meaning, their linguistic 'twinning' nonetheless compounded their ambiguity. Conversely, when analogy works to uphold a symbolic fiction by oscillating between the imaginable and the familiar (as it does in the exchange from *House M.D.*), the potential trauma or evanescence of the unknown thing is 'kept alive' as a symbolic fiction, thereby creating a short circuit between (material) difference and (speculative) meaning; in causing the referent to stray ever further from itself, such an analogy essentially 'authenticates' the referent by emphasizing the difference between two positively existing objects as the difference which means everything.

It is at this point necessary to make an intervention on behalf of analogy's materialist and speculative meanings. Although the analogies discussed above certainly appear across Žižek's body of work, the issue lies in whether we can justify their contribution to some positive pedagogical project and not merely dismiss them as neutral exemplars which are "indifferent to [their] particular content" (Žižek 1999a 100). In the case of conceiving of analogy as a kind of symbolic fiction, the very 'visibility' of the difference which equates the referent with its explication ('X is like Y', or 'if X therefore Y') initially appears to oppose such neutrality. However, the temptation to be avoided here is to assume that the two incongruous halves of the analogy are, in their disparity, a 'mapping' of the means by which one progresses from Žižek's "first, wrong... vulgar-materialist reading" (*Ibid* 92, 93) to the "true speculative meaning" (*Ibid* 93). Indeed, difference here does not lend itself to antagonism, but rather

to a problematic overvaluation of the referent; in excess of Žižek's Hegelian warning to 'not miss the real, stupid thing' within the speculative meaning, such a conception of analogy stubbornly 'sticks' to the referent at the expense of any potential dynamism. In other words, we come to understand the procedure of 'tagging' bad DNA via the route of lightbulbs (or some equally valid substitute), an aneurism via the route of a balloon, and so on - but we must always return to the thing itself in some originary context, thereby testifying to the referent's status as the universal 'background' of the analogy or the truth of the matter. Žižek seeks to undermine such conceptions of 'metaphoric deformation' on the grounds that they totalize the object: as with MindSwap's specious warning to its body-tourism clientele, what results is the wholesale substitution of speculation with causally-determinant 'truths' that are impervious to the subject's intervention - the truth is 'out there', in the object, which is only hospitable to substitutions and comparisons but which, in itself, remains absolute and undivided.

#### THE ANALOGICAL PARALLAX: MINIMAL DIFFERENCE

Given that, in its standard denotation, analogy sets out to clarify or illuminate an unknown variable, it appears entirely natural that attention should perpetually (re)turn to the referent and even retain a fetishistic investment in its status as the 'ground' of the equation. After all, to do otherwise (that is, to call the referent itself into question by 'particularizing' it) might complicate the analogy to the point of incomprehensibility, or at least unnecessarily prolong the interval between perception and cognition. From this utilitarian perspective, what good does it do to demand any more of analogy than its standard function? Furthermore, since Žižek himself is addressing neither linguistics nor semiotics, why would one assume that analogy bears any significant weight on his methodology beyond this standard function of clarification? Primarily, it is essential to bear in mind that my aim throughout this paper has involved the interrogation of certain philosophical concerns - and namely universality - in Žižek's work; analogy offers us a rhetorical means of exploring these concerns, and, insofar as we accept analogy as a strategic/pedagogic device, is therefore subject to investigations that exceed its immediately apparent use-value. It is at this point that I should like to suggest that, while difference (i.e., the difference between two positively existing objects) does indeed influence our comprehension of meaning in analogy, it is the *substance* of this difference which Žižek radicalizes in his approach to universality. That is, the remainder of this paper will involve a discussion of Žižek's methodological shift, apropos of universality, from the substantial properties which constitute analogical meaning-through-difference, to the insubstantial (or minimal) difference which establishes a thing's constitutive noncoincidence with itself.

Originating in Hegel's work, this Žižekian enterprise of supplanting (or at least antagonizing) oppositional structures/the struggle of opposites with "the concept of the inherent 'tension', gap,

noncoincidence, of the One itself” (2006a 7) has been a running theme throughout much of Žižek’s philosophy. Indeed, *The Parallax View* assigns the term ‘parallax’ to this very process, and specifically to the “gap which separates the One from itself” (*Ibid*). However, despite the spirit of ‘antagonism’ which motivates Žižek’s writing on universality, one should not make the assumption that this is a cynical undertaking which seeks, in some way, to reveal the abyssal futility of the universal or expose it as irreparably dysfunctional; rather, as is the case with much of Žižek’s work on the ‘inherent’ qualities of any given phenomenon, the implicit aim is to address the paradoxical *potentiality* of a concept which a minimal/insubstantial shift in perspective facilitates. As Žižek, paraphrasing Kierkegaard, states in his introduction to *The Parallax View*, the point of approaching a given concept via the route of parallax is not “to overcome the gap... but to conceive it in its ‘becoming”” (*Ibid* 6). It is through this process of becoming, potentiality, or parallax that we begin to see Žižek’s use of analogy as assuming the minimal place of a particular that struggles with ‘its own’ universality.

The earlier portion of this paper presented some ideal examples of such minimal differences which - although not articulated at the time - can now assume full presence within the larger context of this parallax tendency. Recalling that, for Žižek, a ‘pure’ difference only emerges when it is least discernible - that is, when it transcends its identity as “a difference between two positively existing objects” and becomes “a minimal difference which divides one and the same object from itself” - we are now in a position to apply this to the paradoxically<sup>v</sup> analogical tendency of the formula ‘X is like X’ (*Ibid* 18). This internal division of the referent is evident in both Groucho’s profession of love for Mrs. Claypool (which, in the caveat ‘except you’, divides Mrs. Claypool within herself) and in *Perfume’s* (failed) attempts at articulating the elusive thirteenth note - the ‘extra’ note which “brings out and dominates the others.” The crucial issue here, however, is the similarly ‘extra’ condition which minimal difference imposes on all of its objects - namely, that “in contrast to a mere difference between objects, the pure difference is itself an object” (*Ibid*). In this respect, it is the insubstantial difference which ‘revivifies’ the object and grants it a ‘new’, internally-divided identity as something none other than itself: in the case of Mrs. Claypool, the ‘exceptional’ difference (“everything about you reminds me of you... except you”) is the ‘new’ object, while in *Perfume*, it is the extraordinary addition of an unfathomable X that necessarily disrupts the tonal harmony of the perfume and thereby ‘creates’ it. In both examples, the objects would have persisted independent of the intervention of pure difference, but the very ephemerality of this intervention ‘re-marks’<sup>vi</sup> them from within, reinscribes their ontological consistency, and elevates this imperceptible twist in difference itself to the ‘dignity of the object.’

What is at stake, then, in minimal difference as the discursive kernel of a distinctly Žižekian universality, is the means by which its self-involution problematizes the easy distinction between a ground and ‘its’ particulars. If we accept Žižek’s assertion that, in minimal difference, the difference is itself an object (or, more precisely, that an imperceptible twist in reading or expression - a parallax view - will re-cast the object in the guise of itself, ‘make it what it is’ through a noncoincident split which



'is it'), then it is possible to discern how the very notion of ground - the accepted 'given' of universality - is always-already interrogated from within. Yet, if our aim is to identify, define, or clarify (object X, subject Y, or concept Z), then how does pure difference mobilize this investigation rather than further mystifying it through the introduction of compound variables (object X/Y, subject Y/Z, concept Z/X/Y, and so on)?

Initially, it appears that the 'kind' of difference required in order to make its discussion comprehensible, is a difference which is somehow fixed - 'pure' in the sense that it exposes some opposing feature that is antagonistic to the referent and, as such, clarifies or defines the referent's function or consistency. We saw how this form of analogical reasoning operates in my previous discussion of 'professional jargon' in programs such as *House M.D.* It is the very 'charge' or dynamism of the difference between the referent (an aneurism) and its metaphorically qualified explanation (a bulge in a garden hose) which produces intelligibility. A scenario which would subject the referent to an explanation that resembled its own character (i.e., an aneurism is like a stroke) would likely lead to further confusion, or at least wed the referent to a singular position whose comprehension demanded a certain level of expertise. The issue not to be missed when engaging in analogical reasoning, however, is that it operates by means of an incongruous differential (that is, the further the ontological 'distance' between a referent and its explanation, the more intelligible the analogy), but not by pure difference as such. What initially appears to be difference at its very purest (for what could be more different than an aneurism and a garden hose?) is not 'pure' or 'minimal' so much as it is pragmatic - a necessary conceptual detour through two disparate halves which combine to create a comprehensible whole.

What inhibits such explanations in terms of universality, however, is the position of ineffable stability afforded to the referent. Although a mere difference exists in the interplay between two opposing objects (referent X by way of explanation Y), such an exchange ultimately results in a harmonious union - an 'over reification' of the referent which, in itself, should be capable of an ongoing antagonism. This prematurely closed circuit of analogical reasoning assumes that the object of inquiry is clear because its identity is presupposed: within or beneath it lurks 'its truth' which is problematic only insofar as it is unknown to us. In this respect, the very consistency of the referent - the illusion that its essence is ontologically predetermined and only temporarily inaccessible to us - causes the referent to relinquish its potential for any internal division that would 'particularize' and hence undo it. Barring particularization, the referent becomes the 'ground' of the equation which is merely illustrated by its pairing with an explanatory particular. This process relies on the assumption that the content is already 'given' and that an understanding of the referent's true identity will emerge with a little explanation and, in doing so, categorically close the circuit of signification. An overvaluation of the referent as the incontrovertible truth of cognition therefore unexpectedly debases its own rhetorical (and existential) potentiality: it becomes, apropos of Hegel's discussion of identity, an "unmoved

simple” rather than “the passage beyond itself into the dissolution of itself” (1969 415). This, of course, is not to claim that such exercises in (re)affirming identity are unnecessary (one should caution against identifying them as the ‘first, wrong’ reading which should be discarded to make room for a higher-order speculative analysis), but rather that they are merely the beginning of analogical inquiry.

In contrast to analogical reasoning which relies on stable, highly differentiated referents, analogical reasoning which accounts for minimal difference does not appear to engage difference at all. Yet, as I have addressed in my discussion of Sheckley’s *Mindswap*, forms of reasoning which are not contingent on the inherent, temporarily ‘hidden’ truth of the elusive referent, are always necessarily tautological in their acknowledgement of an apparently *imperceptible* difference between the referent and itself; to regard a statement or line of reasoning as tautologically quietous simply because it effectively ‘ends where it began’ is to miss the point entirely. Such a position neglects the possibility that this seemingly self-evident assertion is bound up with the *work* of reasoning - with attempted or exhausted avenues which, for whatever basis, have failed to satisfy the subject’s demand for the elusive *objet a*. It is only by means of a reading which regards the eventual ‘arrival’ at such tautology not as an imposition to meaning but rather as the inception of a potentially new form of inquiry, that we are able to acknowledge the curvature of desire as such: it is, by way of Lacan’s discussion of the *agalma*, a radical interiority which is somehow outside itself - a “precious object hidden inside a relatively worthless box” (Evans 125). In this sense, when a referent refers to itself (“a pretty girl is like... a pretty girl”), the distinction between vulgar materialist and speculative readings is exposed as neither opposing nor equivalent but, apropos of Žižek’s discussion of Hegel and phrenology, properly temporal. In other words, the referent ‘pretty girl’ which precedes the preposition ‘like’ is not conceptually the same as the explanation ‘pretty girl’ which follows - but she may be, nonetheless, ontologically ‘the same’ or similar. This entails not only a process, but a *choice*: implied in the simile are an endless number of formulations which, through testing, have failed to materialize or have proven inadequate. Despite the fact that the physical substance of the object may remain unchanged, its ‘difference from itself’ exposes the choice that, in considering the object, we must make between “the organic Whole and the ‘madness’ of the unilateral feature which throws the Whole out of joint and into damaging imbalance” (Žižek 1999a 94). What emerges in this trajectory is the object less as itself, but as pure difference, “a residue, a remnant, a leftover of every signifying operation” (*Ibid* 1989 180), re-constituted vis-a-vis the framework of its interrogation or discovery.

To conclude, the ‘problem’ that analogy and tautology address is a fundamentally philosophical one, given that we remain ensconced in an ontological debate over what differentiates an example from an idea. Yet there are clearly a variety of thinkers and philosophers (including Žižek’s critics) who are attempting to loosen the constraining oppositions of concrete example vs. abstract idea, referent vs. analogy, which create this deadlock in the first place. As anyone who has re-read a Žižek text will know, what we, in a first reading, assume as ‘the’ idea Žižek addresses, is often not the case. These

instances are not limited to the 'little tricks' Žižek plays to pedagogically introduce other interpretations, but also appear in the strange sensation of "infinite regress" (O'Neill par. 28) one experiences when reading Žižek. Re-reading can clarify these sensations but, in doing so, justify one's original confusion. In his review of Žižek's edited volume *Cogito and the Unconscious*, Edward R. O'Neill lucidly explains this sensation as follows:

Sometimes the very process of giving examples is itself interrupted by a strange process of substitution in which what's going to be explained gets switched with something else... Thus, in order to explain the way Lacan conceives the relation between the subject and the 'Other', Žižek instead explains Lacan's scheme of the 'four discourses', structures which relate the subject to yet other terms - a master signifier, knowledge, and surplus enjoyment. Then, instead of defining each of these terms and drawing the implication for their possible relations, Žižek explains the whole thing at once... At each turn, as the Lacanian insignia are being explained, yet other terms pop-up which are not themselves explained. The reader finds herself caught in an infinite regress of things which need to be explained being explained by things which themselves need to be explained: hence the Alice-in-Wonderland feeling one gets from reading Žižek - a feeling not entirely unenjoyable but not entirely profitable either (*Ibid* par. 27-28).

In this respect, can we ever be absolutely sure of Žižek's topic, or is his analytical practice so elusive that the most we can hope for is a clarification of a few impenetrable Lacanian, Hegelian, Schellingian (etc) terms and an entertainingly perverse reading of some cultural objects? Or is the fact that we get lost in the process a crucial component of Žižekian methodology?

In his essay "Examples in Theory: Interpassive Illustrations and Celluloid Fetishism", Boaz Hagin argues that Žižek's use of examples is problematic because it is formally dependent on interpassivity, such that "believing a theory to be true is more complex than maintaining that an agreement exists between a proposition and reality" (7). Since, for Žižek, belief is often objectified or externalized, this frees him from the burden of presenting anything to be 'really' believed; by extension, it frees Žižek's readers from the obligation to assume this belief. The example comes to believe on the reader's behalf, and "we might therefore very well come to believe as true a theory that we know is false when another person or thing is also involved" (*Ibid*). This is an interesting argument and one which eventually leads Hagin to propose that such examples are a unique means of accessing creativity and change, but I nonetheless remain caught in his point of departure: what would make us 'really' believe? What theory or example is worth our true belief, such that we are prepared to assume it directly? This is the space in philosophy that Žižek's work opens.

As I have explored throughout this paper, three key kernels of Žižek's work are the persistent troubling of abstract universality, its consequent instability in parallax, and its (desirous) articulation vis-a-vis analogy and tautology. This is achieved not through the elevation of the example but the degradation of the idea, a tarrying which eventually renders the two elements not only problematically equivalent, but simultaneous, parallaxed: they are thought at one and the same time, but also enjoined

to be undone again in their rearticulation. Should this result in an antagonism for the reader, it is all the more useful because it both imbricates her in and frees her from the discourse Žižek has set out.

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## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Although universality seems to have little in common with phrenology (the study of the shape of the cranium as indicative of certain personality traits), phrenology acts as a metaphor in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977: 185-210) to illustrate the speculative link between spirit and its limitation. Although I will explore this link in regards to analogy later, Todd McGowan provides a useful summary of Hegel's use of phrenology itself as analogy: "Phrenology's insipid claim that we can understand the nature of someone's subjectivity by examining the shape of their skull bone harbors a genuine recognition of the dependence of spirit on stupid inert materiality. The incredible speculative power of spirit transcends this materiality but ultimately cannot avoid remaining tied to it, and this is what phrenology implicitly understands. As Hegel famously puts it, 'the being of Spirit is a bone'" ("Serious Theory." *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 1:1 : 62).

<sup>ii</sup> For further evidence of this tendency in Žižek's work, see his discussions of the phantasmatic screen and trauma in *The Plague of Fantasies* (184-186) and the Public-Symbolic Law and prohibition in *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway* (4-12).

<sup>iii</sup> Perhaps this temporal play and its repercussions for identity are more clearly explained by a less abstract tautology. We are all familiar with the tautology 'boys will be boys', which is frequently employed as a dotting explication of male behaviour ranging from mischievous to illegal. In the first set, the listener is provided with a concrete universal (boys) which requires definition but which also depends on her symbolic associations with the term (boys are young, immature, innocent, children, etc). However, the second set fails to provide a definition or reification of these qualities and reproduces the initial term without constituting a simple affirmation of identity. This is because, as Žižek notes, the specifically temporal properties of the tautology - the minimal delay of the second part - create a contradiction. As such, this pause opens the space for different 'boy qualities' to emerge: mischievous, disobedient, obsessive, violent. Yet neither the first nor the second set account specifically for the real 'boys' about which the listener is discoursing, or the particular masculine misdeed to which the tautology is being applied. It offers no insight on their characters or the situation, but rather absents them from the equation.

<sup>iv</sup> Žižek's argument for this 'wrong' reading is also a methodological response to the 'properly' psychoanalytic critical tendency to disclose a text's hidden secrets by revealing its ultimate meaning. Surely the true aim of psychoanalysis is to detect, in the 'wrong' but significant observation (which - to use Hegel's analogy - sees only urination), the speculative, subconscious knowledge of the higher truth (of insemination). Given that the first, 'wrong' reading is so readily perceived as the foundation from which increasingly abstract secondary accretions emerge, it therefore becomes difficult to conceive of the 'vulgar materialist' reading as anything more (or less) meaningful than a site which engenders signification, or a surface upon which some analytical or ideological project is mapped.

Yet this ordered diagnostic continuum which progresses neatly from lower to higher-order readings and abandons the vulgar materialist observation is, Žižek contends, absolutely contrary to the psychoanalytic project. This calls into question precisely what the Žižekian methodology attempts to recuperate: "the key ontological problem is not that of reality, but that of appearance: not 'Are we condemned to the interminable play of appearances, or can we penetrate their veil to the underlying true reality?', but 'How could - in the middle of the flat, stupid reality which just is there - something like appearance emerge?" (2006a 29).

<sup>v</sup> 'Paradoxical' in the sense that it is non-tautological precisely when we expect it to be.

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<sup>vi</sup> A term (borrowed from Derrida's analysis of Mallarmé) which Žižek introduces in his discussion of "differential character." He asserts, apropos of Derrida, that a mark "is nothing but a trace, a sheaf of features that differentiate it from other marks... In any series of marks there is always at least one which functions as 'empty', 'asemic' - that is to say, which re-marks the differential space of the inscription of the marks. It is only through the gesture of re-marking that a mark becomes a mark, since it is only the re-mark which opens and sustains the place of its inscription" (*For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. London: Verso, 1989. pp. 75).