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Slavoj Žižek
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia,

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WITH HEGEL BEYOND HEGEL

Slavoj Žižek

The Hegel Variations: "On the Phenomenology of the Spirit" by Fredric Jameson. London: Verso, 2010. pp. 144. $24.95 cloth.

The essayistic nature of Fredric Jameson's short new book on G. W. F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* should not blind us to the fact that the book offers a systematic interpretation of the entire inner structure of Hegel's first masterpiece. Although *The Hegel Variations* comes from someone for whom reading Hegel is like eating daily bread, the book is readable as an introduction to Hegel while simultaneously providing precise interpretive hints worthy of the greatest Hegel specialists. In this review, I limit myself to four variations of my own, to four interventions into the book's key topics: Hegel and the critique of capitalism, the circle of positing presuppositions, Understanding and Reason, and the eventual limits of Hegel. Of course, the critical nature of some of my remarks is based on my great admiration of Jameson's work and on a shared solidarity in our struggle for the Hegelian legacy in Marxism. One should remember here the proverb that says only the highest peaks are struck by lightning.

I

Jameson is right to draw attention to the fact that, "despite his familiarity with Adam Smith and emergent economic doctrine, Hegel's conception of work and labor—I have specifically characterized it as a handicraft ideology—betrays

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no anticipation of the originalities of industrial production or the factory system"—in short, Hegel's analyses of work and production cannot be "transferred to the new industrial situation" (68). There is a series of interconnected reasons for this limitation, all grounded in the constraints of historical experience at Hegel's disposal. First, Hegel's notion of *industrial revolution* was the Adam Smith–type manufacture where the work process is still that of combined individuals using tools, and not yet the factory in which the machinery sets the rhythm and individual workers are reduced de facto to organs serving the machinery, to its appendices.

Second, Hegel could not yet imagine the way abstraction rules in developed capitalism: when Karl Marx describes the mad self-enhancing circulation of capital, whose solipsistic path of self-fecundation reaches its apogee in today's metareflexive speculations on futures, it is far too simplistic to claim that the specter of this self-engendering monster that pursues its path disregarding any human or environmental concern is an ideological abstraction, and that one should never forget that, behind this abstraction, are real people and natural objects on whose productive capacities and resources capital's circulation is based and on which it feeds like a gigantic parasite. The problem is that this "abstraction" is not only in our (financial speculator's) misperception of social reality, but that it is "real" in the precise sense of determining the structure of the very material social processes: the fate of whole strata of population and sometimes of entire countries can be decided by the solipsistic speculative dance of capital, which pursues its goal of profitability in a blessed indifference with regard to how its movement will affect social reality. Therein resides the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, much more uncanny than the direct precapitalist socio-ideological violence: this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their "evil" intentions, but is purely "objective," systemic, anonymous. Here we encounter the Lacanian difference between reality and the Real: *reality* is the social reality of the actual people involved in interaction and in the productive processes, whereas the *Real* is the inexorable "abstract" spectral logic of capital that determines what occurs in social reality. This gap is palpable in the way the economic situation of a country is considered to be good and stable by the international financial experts even when the large majority of people are living worse than before. Reality doesn't matter; what matters is the situation of capital. . . . And, again, is this not more true today than ever? Do phenomena usually designated as those of *virtual capitalism* (future trades and similar abstract financial speculations) not point toward the reign

of *real abstraction* at its purest and much more radical than in Marx's time? In short, the highest form of ideology does not reside in getting caught up in ideological spectrality, ignoring its foundation in real people and their relations, but precisely in overlooking this Real of spectrality and in pretending to address directly real people with their real worries. Visitors to the London Stock Exchange receive a free leaflet explaining that the stock market is not about some mysterious fluctuations, but about real people and their products—*this* is ideology at its purest.

Here, in the analysis of the universe of capital, one should not only project Hegel toward Marx, but Marx himself should be radicalized: it is only today, in the postindustrial form of global capitalism, that, to put it in Hegelian terms, really existing capitalism reaches the level of its notion: perhaps, one should follow again Marx's old anti-evolutionist motto (incidentally, taken from Hegel) that the anatomy of man provides the key for the anatomy of a monkey; that is, to deploy the inherent notional structure of a social formation, one must start with its most developed form.

Capital is money that is no longer merely wealth, its universal embodiment, but value that, through its circulation, generates more value—value that mediates or posits itself, retroactively positing its own presuppositions. First, money appears as a mere means of exchanging commodities: instead of the endless bartering, one first exchanges one's product for the universal equivalent of all commodities, which can then be exchanged for any commodity that one may need. Then, once the circulation of capital is set in motion, the relationship is inverted, with the means turning into an end in itself; that is, the very passage through the "material" domain of *use values* (the production of commodities that satisfy individuals' particular needs) is posited as a moment of what is substantially the self-movement of capital itself. From that moment onward, the true aim is no longer the satisfaction of individuals' needs, but simply more money, the endless repeating of the circulation as such. . . . This arcane circular movement of self-positing is then equated with the central Christian tenet of the identity of God the Father and his Son, of the Immaculate Conception by means of which the single father directly (without a female spouse) begets his only son and thus forms what is arguably the ultimate single-parent family.

Is then capital the true Subject/Substance? Yes and no. For Marx, this self-engendering circular movement is—to put it in Freudian terms—precisely the capitalist unconscious fantasy that parasitizes the proletariat as pure substanceless subjectivity; for this reason, capital's

speculative self-generating dance has a limit and brings about the conditions of its own collapse. Our everyday experience tells us that the ultimate goal of capital's circulation is the satisfaction of human needs, that capital is just a means to attain this satisfaction more efficiently. Then there is the notion of capital as a self-engendering monster. In actuality, however, capital does not engender itself but exploits the worker's surplus value. There is thus a necessary third level to be added to the simple opposition of subjective experience (of capital as a simple means of efficiently satisfying people's needs) and objective social reality (of exploitation): the *objective deception,* the disavowed unconscious fantasy (of the mysterious self-generating circular movement of capital), which is the *truth* (although not the *reality*) of the capitalist process. Again, to quote Jacques Lacan, truth is structured like fiction: the only way to formulate the truth of capital is to present this fiction of its "immaculate" self-generating movement. And this insight also enables us to locate the weakness of Jacques Derrida's "deconstructionist" appropriation of Marx's analysis of capitalism: although it emphasizes the endless process of deferral that characterizes this movement, as well as its fundamental inconclusiveness, its self-blockade, the deconstructionist retelling still describes the *fantasy* of capital—it describes what individuals believe, although they don't know it.

What all this means is that the urgent task of the economic analysis today is, again, to *repeat* Marx's critique of political economy without succumbing to the temptation of the multitude of the ideologies of postindustrial societies. The key change concerns the status of *private property:* the ultimate element of power and control is no longer the last link in the chain of investments, the firm or individual who really owns the means of production. The ideal capitalist today functions in a wholly different way: investing borrowed money, "actually owning" nothing, even indebted, but nonetheless controlling things. A corporation is owned by another corporation, which is again borrowing money from banks, which may ultimately manipulate money owned by ordinary people like ourselves. With Microsoft's Bill Gates, the private property of the means of production becomes meaningless, at least in the standard meaning of the private property. The paradox of this virtualization of capitalism is ultimately the same as that of the electron in elementary particle physics. The mass of each element in our reality is composed of its mass at rest plus the surplus provided by the acceleration of its movement; however, an electron's mass at rest is zero; its mass consists only of the surplus generated

by the acceleration of its movement, as though we are dealing with a nothing that acquires some deceptive substance only by magically spinning itself into an excess of itself. Do today's virtual capitalists not function in a homologous way? Their net value is zero; they directly operate with just the surplus, borrowing from the future.

The irony is not difficult to miss here: the fact that Marx needed Hegel to formulate the logic of capital (the crucial breakthrough in Marx's work occurred in the mid-1850s, when, after the failure of the 1848 revolutions, he started to read Hegel's *Logic* again) means that what Hegel wasn't able to see was not some post-Hegelian or postidealist reality of the properly *Hegelian* aspect of capitalist economy. Here, paradoxically, Hegel was not *idealist* enough; that is, what he did not see was the properly speculative content of the capitalist speculative economy, the way the financial capital functions as a purely virtual notion processing "real people."

Last but not least, the third critical point concerns the properly modern capitalist class struggle in its difference from traditional caste and feudal hierarchies: since Hegel's notion of domination was limited to traditional struggle between master and servant, what he couldn't envisage was a relationship of domination that persists in a postrevolutionary situation (*revolution,* of course, refers here to the *bourgeois* revolution doing away with traditional privileges) where all individuals recognize one another as autonomous free subjects. This prodigious social leveling of a modern democracy

> certainly does not exclude the emergence of wealth and of profound distinctions between rich and poor, even in the socialist countries. Nor is it in any way to be understood as the end of classes in their economic sense: there are still workers and managers in these societies, there are still profit and exploitation, reserve armies of the unemployed, and so on and so forth. But the new cultural equality . . . is infused with a powerful hatred of hierarchy and special privileges and with a passionate resentment of caste distinctions and inherited cultural superiority. It is permitted to be wealthy, so long as the rich man is as vulgar as everyone else. (101)

This is a situation that, one might add, opens up the unexpected possibility of a genuinely proletarian reappropriation of the so-called high culture. All three of these cases seem to call for a Hegelian analysis: laborers reduced to an appendix of machinery; reality; and a hierarchy persisting in the very form of

"plebeianization"—paradoxical reversals that seem to give body to all the twists of the most sophisticated dialectic.

II

Jameson characterizes *Understanding* (*Verstand*), the "common-sense empirical thinking of externality, formed in the experience of solid objects and obedient to the law of non-contradiction" (119), as a kind of spontaneous ideology of our daily lives, of our immediate experience of reality. As such, it is not merely a historical phenomenon to be dissolved through dialectical critique and the practical change of relations that engender it, but a permanent, transhistorical, fixture of our everyday reality. True, *Reason* (*Vernunft*) "has the task of transforming the necessary errors of Verstand into new and dialectical kinds of truths" (119), but this transformation leaves intact the everyday efficiency of Understanding, its formative role in our ordinary experience. All Reason can do is a kind of Kantian critical delimitation of the proper sphere of Understanding; that is, it only can makes us aware of how, in our daily lives, we are victims of necessary (transcendental) illusions. Underlying this reading of the opposition of Reason and Understanding is a profoundly non-Marxian notion of ideology (or, rather, a profoundly non-Marxian split of this notion) probably taken from Louis Althusser (and, maybe, Lacan). In a Kantian mode, Jameson seems to imply two modes of ideology: a *historical* one (forms linked to specific historical conditions that disappear when these conditions are abolished, like traditional patriarchy) and an a priori *transcendental* one (a kind of spontaneous tendency to identitarian thinking, to reification, etc., that is cosubstantial with language as such, and that, for this reason, can be assimilated to the illusion of the big Other as the "subject supposed to know").

Closely linked to this notion of ideology is Jameson's (rarely noticed, but all the more persistent) motif of the *unsayable,* of things better left unsaid. For example, in his review of my *Parallax View* (2006) in the *London Review of Books,* his argument against the notion of parallax is that, as the name for the most elementary split/diffraction, it endeavors to name something that is better left unnamed. In a similar way, Jameson subscribes to the Kantian tendency of (some of) today's brain scientists about the a priori structural unknowability of consciousness:

> [W]hat Hegel's contemporaries called the not-I is that which consciousness is conscious as its other, and not any absence of consciousness itself, something inconceivable

> except as a kind of science-fictional picture-thinking, a kind of thought of otherness. But it is hard to understand how we could know something without knowing what its absence entails: and it may well be, as Colin McGinn argues, that consciousness is one of those philosophical problems which human beings are structurally unfit to solve; and that in that sense Kant's was the right position to take: that, although its existence is as certain as the Cartesian cogito, consciousness must also remain perpetually unknowable as a thing-in-itself. (32)

The least one can say about these lines is that they are profoundly non-Hegelian, even taking into account Jameson's unexpected dialectical point: since an element can be properly grasped only through its difference to its opposite, and since the I's opposite—the not-I—is as inaccessible to the I as it is in-itself, the consequence of the unknowability of the not-I as it is in-itself, independently of the I, is the unknowability of consciousness (the I) itself as it is in-itself. The standard solipsist-empiricist point that the subject can only know itself, its sensations, is thus proven wrong: if the not-I is unknowable, the I itself suffers the same lot. The question to be raised here is this: Is this circle inescapable? Are we caught in it to the end, so that every speculation about the outside is always already a retroactive fantasy from the standpoint inside, or, as Hegel would have put it, is every presupposition already posited?

Jameson develops this impossibility to break out in his perspicuous reading of the concept of positing as the key to what Hegel means by *idealism*. His first move is to dialectically mediate the very opposition of positing and presupposing: The core of *positing* is not the direct production of objects, since such a production remains abstractly opposed to what is simply given. (I as a finite subject finds in front of me material objects and then proceeds to positing by working on them.) The core of positing concerns these presuppositions themselves—that is, what is primordially posited are presuppositions themselves. Recall Martin Heidegger's notion of the essence of modern technology as *Gestell:* in order for the subject to manipulate/exploit reality technologically, this reality has to be posited/presupposed (or, as Heidegger puts it, disclosed) in advance as an object of possible technological exploitation, as a reserve of raw materials and energies, etc. It is in this sense that one should conceive what is posited "in terms of presuppositions: for positing somehow always takes place 'in advance' of other kinds of thinking and other kinds of acts and events" (27) or,

even more pointedly, "in terms of theatrical settings or pro-filmic arrangements, in which, ahead of time, a certain number of things are placed on stage, certain depths are calculated, and an optical center also carefully provided, the laws of perspective invoked in order to strengthen the illusion to be achieved" (28):

> Kant's theory—phenomenon and noumenon—looks somewhat different if it is grasped as a specific way of positing the world. . . . [I]t is no longer a question of belief: of taking the existence of objective reality, of the noumenon, of a world independent of human perceptions, on faith. But it is also not a question of following in Fichte's footsteps and affirming that objective reality—the noumenon, which has now become the not-I—is summoned into being by the primal act of the I, which "posits" it (now using the term in a metaphysical sense).
>
> Rather, that beyond as which the noumenon is characterized now becomes something like a category of thinking. . . . It is the mind that posits noumena in the sense in which its experience of each phenomenon includes a beyond along with it. . . . The noumenon is not something separate from the phenomenon, but part and parcel of its essence; and it is within the mind that realities outside or beyond the mind are "posited." (29)

We should introduce here a precise distinction between the presupposed/shadowy part of what appear as ontic objects and the ontological horizon of their appearing. On the one hand, as it was brilliantly developed by Edmund Husserl in his phenomenological analysis of perceptions, every perception even of an ordinary object, involves a series of assumptions about its unseen flip side, as well as of its background; on the other hand, an object always appears within a certain horizon of hermeneutic prejudices that provide an a priori frame within which we locate this object and which thus make the object intelligible—to observe reality without prejudices means to understand nothing. This same dialectic of positing the presuppositions plays a crucial role in our understanding of history:

> [J]ust as we always posit the anteriority of a nameless object along with the name or idea we have just articulated, so also in the matter of historical temporality we always posit the preexistence of a formless object which is the raw material of our emergent social or historical articulation. (85–86)

This formlessness should also be understood as a violent erasure of (previous) forms: whenever a certain act is posited as a founding one, as a *historical* cut, the beginning of a new era, the previous social reality is as a rule reduced to a chaotic *ahistorical* conundrum—say, when the Western colonialists "discovered" Black Africa, this discovery was read as the contact of "prehistorical" primitives with civilized history proper, and their previous history basically blurred into formless matter. It is in this sense that the notion of positing the presuppositions is "not only a solution to the problems posed by critical resistance to mythic narratives of origin . . . ; it is also one in which the emergence of a specific historical form retroactively calls into existence the hitherto formless matter from which it has been fashioned" (87). This last claim should be qualified or, rather, corrected: what is retroactively called into existence is not the hitherto formless matter but, precisely, a matter that was well articulated before the rise of the new, and whose contours were blurred, became invisible, from the horizon of the new historical form—with the rise of the new form, the previous one is (mis)perceived as "hitherto formless matter"; that is, the formlessness itself is a retroactive effect, a violent erasure of the previous form. (So what about the obvious counterargument: the abundance of ethnological studies of these prehistorical societies, with detailed descriptions of their rituals, systems of kinship, myths, etc.? The classic ethnology and anthropology were precisely studies of "prehistoric" societies, studies that systematically overlooked the specificity of these societies, interpreting them as a contrast to "civilized" societies. Recall how, in their description of the primitive myths of origin, the early anthropologists read, say, the statement that a tribe originates from the owl, as a literal belief ["They really believe their predecessors were owls"], totally missing the way such statements effectively functioned.) If one misses the retroactivity of such positing of presuppositions, one finds oneself in the ideological universe of evolutionary teleology: an ideological narrative thus emerges in which previous epochs are conceived as progressive stages/steps toward the present "civilized" epoch. This is why the retroactive positing of presuppositions is the materialist "substitute for that 'teleology' for which [Hegel] is ordinarily indicted" (87). (Marx's aforementioned statement about the anatomy of man offering the key to the anatomy of ape should be read in the same way: as the materialist reversal of teleological evolutionary progress.)

This Jamesonian account nonetheless raises a number of critical points. Yes, presuppositions are (retroactively) posited, but the conclusion to be drawn from this is not

that we are forever caught into this circle of retroactivity so that every attempt to reconstruct the rise of the New out of the Old is nothing but an ideological narrative. Hegel's dialectic itself is not yet another grand teleological narrative, but precisely the effort to avoid the narrative illusion of a continuous process of the organic growth of the New out of the Old. The historical forms that follow one another are not successive figures within the same teleological frame, but successive retotalizations, each creating (positing) its own past (as well as projecting its own future). In other words, Hegel's dialectic is the science of the gap between the Old and the New, of accounting for this gap. More precisely, its true topic is not directly the gap between the Old and the New, but its self-reflective redoubling—when it describes the cut between the Old and the New, it simultaneously describes the gap, within the Old itself, between the Old-in-itself (as it was before the New) and the Old retroactively posited by the New. It is because of this redoubled gap that every new form arises as a creation ex nihilo: the Nothingness out of which the New arises is the very gap between the Old-in-itself and the Old-for-the-New, the gap that makes impossible the account of the rise of the New in the terms of a continuous narrative. (Marx himself was aware of this gap when, in the last chapter of volume 1 of *Das Kapital,* he used the narrative of "so-called primordial accumulation" to confront the chaotic brutality of the actual rise of capitalism.)

One should add a further qualification here: what escapes our grasp is not the way things were before the arrival of the New, but the very birth of the New, the New as it was "in itself," from the perspective of the Old, before the New managed to posit its presuppositions. This is why fantasy, the phantasmatic narrative, always involves an impossible gaze, the gaze by means of which the subject is already present at the scene of its own absence—the illusion is here the same as that of alternate reality whose otherness is also posited by the actual totality, which is why it remains within the coordinates of the actual totality. The way to avoid this utopian reduction of the subject to the impossible gaze witnessing an alternate reality, from which he is absent, is not to abandon the topos of alternate reality as such. Recall Walter Benjamin's notion of revolution as redemption through repetition of the past: apropos the French Revolution, the task of a true Marxist historiography is not to describe the events the way they really were (and to explain how these events generated the ideological illusions that accompanied them); the task is rather to unearth the hidden potentiality (the utopian emancipatory potentials) that were betrayed in

the actuality of revolution and in its final outcome (the rise of utilitarian market capitalism). The point of Marx is not primarily to make fun of the wild hopes of the Jacobins' revolutionary enthusiasm, to point out how their high emancipatory rhetoric was just a means used by the historical cunning of reason to establish the vulgar commercial capitalist reality; it is to explain how these betrayed radical-emancipatory potentials continue to insist as kinds of historical specters that haunt the revolutionary memory, demanding their enactment, so that the later proletarian revolution should also redeem (put to rest) all of these past ghosts. These alternate versions of the past that persist in a spectral form constitute the ontological openness of the historical process, as was clear to G. K. Chesterton:

> The things that might have been are not even present to the imagination. If somebody says that the world would now be better if Napoleon had never fallen, but had established his Imperial dynasty, people have to adjust their minds with a jerk. The very notion is new to them. Yet it would have prevented the Prussian reaction; saved equality and enlightenment without a mortal quarrel with religion; unified Europeans and perhaps avoided the Parliamentary corruption and the Fascist and Bolshevist revenges. But in this age of free-thinkers, men's minds are not really free to think such a thought.
>
> What I complain of is that those who accept the verdict of fate in this way accept it without knowing why. By a quaint paradox, those who thus assume that history always took the right turning are generally the very people who do not believe there was any special providence to guide it. The very rationalists who jeer at the trial by combat, in the old feudal ordeal, do in fact accept a trial by combat as deciding all human history.[1]

In his less-known *Everlasting Man* (1926), Chesterton conducts a wonderful mental experiment along these lines, in imagining the monster that man might have seemed at first to the merely natural animals around him:

> The simplest truth about man is that he is a very strange being; almost in the sense of being a stranger on the earth. In all sobriety, he has much more of the external appearance of one bringing alien habits from another land than of a mere growth of this one. He has an unfair

> advantage and an unfair disadvantage. He cannot sleep in his own skin; he cannot trust his own instincts. He is at once a creator moving miraculous hands and fingers and a kind of cripple. He is wrapped in artificial bandages called clothes; he is propped on artificial crutches called furniture. His mind has the same doubtful liberties and the same wild limitations. Alone among the animals, he is shaken with the beautiful madness called laughter; as if he had caught sight of some secret in the very shape of the universe hidden from the universe itself. Alone among the animals he feels the need of averting his thought from the root realities of his own bodily being; of hiding them as in the presence of some higher possibility which creates the mystery of shame. Whether we praise these things as natural to man or abuse them as artificial in nature, they remain in the same sense unique.[2]

This is what Chesterton called *thinking backwards:* we have to put ourselves back in time, before the fateful decisions were made or before the accidents occurred that generated the state that now seems normal to us, and the royal way to do it, to render palpable this open moment of decision, is to imagine how, at that point, history may have taken a different turn. (This, however, does not mean that, in a historical repetition in the radical Benjaminian sense, we simply return in time to the open moment of decision and, this time, make the right choice. The lesson of repetition is rather that our first choice was necessarily the wrong one, and for a very precise reason: the right choice is only possible the second time, after the wrong one; that is, it is only the first wrong choice that creates the conditions for the right choice. The notion that we might have made the right choice already the first time, and that we just accidentally blew the chance, is a retroactive illusion.)

III

It is against this background that one can raise two further critical points about Jameson's notion of Understanding as an eternal and unsurpassable form of ideology. The first thing to note is that this unsurpassable character is in itself redoubled: first, there is Understanding as the a priori tendency of human thinking toward identitarian reification; then, there is the unsurpassability of the circle of positing the presuppositions, which prevents us from stepping outside ourselves to grasp the not-I in all its

forms, spatial and temporal (from outside reality as our own historical past is independent of us). The first critical point to be made here is that the features Jameson attributes to Understanding ("common-sense empirical thinking of externality, formed in the experience of solid objects and obedient to the law of non-contradiction") clearly are historically limited: they designate the modern/secular empiricist common sense very different from, say, a primitive holistic notion of reality permeated by spiritual forces.

However, a much more important critical point concerns the way Jameson formulates the dichotomy between Understanding and Reason: *Understanding* is understood as the elementary form of analyzing, of drawing the lines of fixed differences and identities; that is, of reducing the wealth of reality to an abstract set of features. This spontaneous tendency toward identitarian reification has to be then corrected by dialectical Reason, which faithfully reproduces the dynamic complexity of reality by way of outlining the fluid network of relations within which every identity is located. This network generates each identity and, simultaneously, causes its ultimate downfall. . . . This, however, is emphatically *not* the way Hegel conceives the difference between Understanding and Reason—let us read carefully a well-known passage from the foreword to *Phenomenology:*

> To break up an idea into its ultimate elements means returning upon its moments, which at least do not have the form of the given idea when found, but are the immediate property of the self. Doubtless this analysis only arrives at thoughts which are themselves familiar elements, fixed inert determinations. But what is thus separated, and in a sense is unreal, is itself an essential moment; for just because the concrete fact is self-divided, and turns into unreality, it is something self-moving, self-active. The action of separating the elements is the exercise of the force of Understanding, the most astonishing and greatest of all powers, or rather the absolute power. The circle, which is self-enclosed and at rest, and, qua substance, holds its own moments, is an immediate relation, the immediate, continuous relation of elements with their unity, and hence arouses no sense of wonderment. But that an accident as such, when out loose from its containing circumference,—that what is bound and held by something else and actual only by being connected with it,—should obtain an existence all its own, gain freedom and independence on its own

> account—this is the portentous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of pure ego. Death, as we may call that unreality, is the most terrible thing, and to keep and hold fast what is dead demands the greatest force of all.[3]

Understanding, precisely in its aspect of analyzing, tearing the unity of a thing or process apart, is here celebrated as "the most astonishing and greatest of all powers, or rather the absolute power"—as such, it is, surprisingly (for those who stick to the common view of dialectics), characterized in exactly the same terms as Spirit which is, with regard to the opposition between Understanding and Reason, clearly on the side of Reason: "Spirit is, in its simple truth, consciousness, and forces its moments apart." Everything turns on how we are to understand this identity and difference between Understanding and Reason: it is not that reason adds something to the separating power of Understanding, reestablishing (at some higher level) the organic unity of what Understanding has torn apart, supplementing analysis with synthesis; Reason is, in a way, not more but *less* than Understanding. It is—to put it in Hegel's well-known terms of the dichotomy between what one wants to say and what one actually says—what Understanding, in its activity, *really does,* in contrast to what it wants/means to do. Reason is therefore not another facility supplementing Understanding's one-sidedness: the very idea that there is something (the core of the substantial content of the analyzed thing) that eludes Understanding, a transrational Beyond out of its reach, is the fundamental illusion of Understanding. In other words, all we have to do to get from Understanding to Reason is to subtract from Understanding its constitutive illusion—Understanding is not too abstract/violent; it is, on the contrary, as Hegel put it a propos Kant, too soft toward things, afraid to locate its violent movement of tearing things apart into things themselves.[4] In a way, it is epistemology versus ontology: the illusion of Understanding is that its own analytic power—the power to make "an accident as such, when out loose from its containing circumference,—that what is bound and held by something else and actual only by being connected with it,—. . . obtain an existence all its own, gain freedom and independence on its own account"—is only an abstraction, something external to true reality that persists out there intact in its inaccessible fullness. In other words, it is the standard critical view of Understanding and its power of abstraction (that it is just an impotent intellectual exercise missing the wealth of reality) that contains the core illusion

of Understanding. To put it in yet another way, the mistake of Understanding is to perceive its own negative activity (of separating, tearing things apart) only in its negative aspect, ignoring its positive (productive) aspect—Reason is Understanding itself in its productive aspect.[5]

IV

Even Jameson succumbs to this classical anti-Hegelian topic when he identifies *narcissism* as that which "may sometimes be felt to be repulsive in the Hegelian system as such" (130) or, in short, as the central weakness of Hegel's thought expressed in his claim that reason should find itself in the actual world:

> We thereby search the whole world, and outer space, and end up only touching ourselves, only seeing our own face persist through multitudinous differences and forms of otherness. Never truly to encounter the not-I, to come face to face with radical otherness (or, even worse, to find ourselves in an historical dynamic in which it is precisely difference and otherness which is relentlessly being stamped out): such is the dilemma of the Hegelian dialectic, which contemporary philosophies of difference and otherness seem only able to confront with mystical evocations and imperatives. (131)

Instead of trying to undermine or overcome this narcissism from the outside, emphasizing the preponderance of the objective (or that the Whole is the non-true and all other similar motifs of Theodore Adorno's rejection of identitarian idealism), one should rather problematize the figure of Hegel criticized here by way of asking a simple question: which Hegel is our point of reference here? Do not Georg Lukács and Adorno both refer to the idealist-subjectivist (mis)reading of Hegel, to the standard image of Hegel as the absolute idealist who asserted Spirit as the true agent of history, its Subject-Substance? Within this framework, capital can effectively appear as a new embodiment of the Hegelian Spirit, an abstract monster that moves and mediates itself, parasitizing upon the activity of actually existing individuals. This is why Lukács also remains all too idealist when he proposes to simply replace the Hegelian Spirit with the proletariat as the Subject-Object of History: Lukács here is not really Hegelian, but a pre-Hegelian idealist.

If, however, one problematizes this presupposition shared by Lukács and Adorno, another

Hegel appears, a more materialist Hegel for whom reconciliation between Subject and Substance does not mean that the subject swallows its substance, internalizing it into its own subordinate moment. Reconciliation rather amounts to a much more modest overlapping or redoubling of the two separations: the subject has to recognize in its alienation from the Substance the separation of the Substance from itself. This overlapping is what is missed in the Feuerbach-Marxian logic of de-alienation in which the subject overcomes its alienation by recognizing itself as the active agent who itself posited what appears to it as its substantial presupposition. In the Hegelian reconciliation between Subject and Substance, there is no absolute Subject that, in total self-transparency, appropriates or internalizes all objective substantial content. But "reconciliation" also doesn't mean (as it does in the line of German idealism from Hölderlin to Schelling) that the subject should renounce its hubris of perceiving itself as the axis of the world and accept its constitutive *decentering,* its dependency on some primordial abyssal Absolute that is beyond/beneath the subject/object divide and, as such, also beyond subjective conceptual grasp. The subject is not its own origin: Hegel firmly rejects Fichte's notion of the absolute I that posits itself and is nothing but the pure activity of this self-positing. But the subject is also not just a secondary accidental appendix/outgrowth of some presubjective substantial reality: there is no substantial Being to which the subject can return, no encompassing organic Order of Being in which the subject has to find its proper place. *Reconciliation* between subject and substance means the acceptance of this radical lack of any firm foundational point: the subject is not its own origin, it comes second, it is dependent upon its substantial presuppositions; but these presuppositions also do not have a substantial consistency of their own but are always retroactively posited.

What this also means is that Communism should no longer be conceived as the subjective (re)appropriation of the alienated substantial content—all versions of reconciliation as "subject swallows the substance" should be rejected. So, again, reconciliation is the full acceptance of the abyss of the desubstantialized process as the only actuality there is: the subject has no substantial actuality, it comes second, it only emerges through the process of separation, of overcoming of its presuppositions, and these presuppositions are also just a retroactive effect of the same process of their overcoming. The result is thus that there is, at both extremes of the process, a failure/negativity inscribed into the very heart of the entity we are dealing with. If the status of the subject is thoroughly processual, then it emerges through

the very failure to fully actualize itself. This brings us again to one of the possible formal definitions of *subject:* a subject tries to articulate (express) itself in a signifying chain, this articulation fails, and by means and through this failure, the subject emerges; the subject is the failure of its signifying representation—this is why Lacan writes the subject of the signifier as $, as "barred." In a love letter, the very failure of the writer to formulate his declaration clearly and efficiently, his oscillations, the letter's fragmentation, etc., can in themselves be the proof (perhaps the necessary and the only reliable proof) that the professed love is authentic—here, the very failure to deliver the message properly is the sign of its authenticity. If the message is delivered smoothly, it arouses suspicions that it is part of a well-planned approach, or that the writer loves himself, the beauty of his writing, more than his love object; that is, that the object is effectively reduced to a pretext for engaging in the narcissistically satisfying activity of writing.

And the same goes for substance: substance is not only always already lost but comes to be only through its loss, as a secondary return-to-itself—which means that substance is always already subjectivized. In reconciliation between subject and substance, both poles thus lose their firm identity. Let us take the case of ecology: radical emancipatory politics should aim neither at the complete mastery over nature nor at the humanity's humble acceptance of the predominance of Mother Earth. Rather, nature should be exposed in all its catastrophic contingency and indeterminacy, and human agency assumed in the whole unpredictability of its consequences—viewed from this perspective of the "other Hegel," the revolutionary act no longer involves as its agent the Lukácsian substance-subject, the agent who knows what it does while doing it.

Apropos Hegel's reconciliation in a modern postrevolutionary state, Jameson proposes the outlines of a higher-enlarged version of the Hegelian reconciliation, a version appropriate for our global capitalist epoch: the project of a human age characterized by production-for-us (the end of classes) and ecology (113–15). Jameson's view is that, far from standing for the ultimate end of history, the reconciliation proposed at the end of the chapter on Spirit in *Phenomenology* is a temporary fragile synthesis—Hegel himself was aware that this reconciliation is threatened, as is clear from his panicky reaction to the revolution of 1830 and the first signs of universal democracy. (Recall his furious rejection of the British electoral Reform Bill, the first step toward universal elections.) Is it then not consequent that, in view of the new contradictions of the nineteenth-century capitalist

system that exploded the fragile Hegelian synthesis, a renewed Hegelian approach that remains faithful to the idea of concrete universality, of universal rights for all, "calls in its very structure for the subsequent enlargements of later history" (115) and for a new project of reconciliation? Such a move is nonetheless illegitimate: it doesn't take into account radically enough that the same paradox as that of the retroactive positing of presuppositions holds also for the future. Let us take the case of a nation: to paraphrase an old critic of Ernest Renan, a *nation* is a group of people united by a mistaken view about the past, a hatred of their present neighbors, and dangerous illusions about their future. (Say, today's Slovenes are united by the myths about a Slovene kingdom in the eighth century, their hatred of [at this moment] Croats, and the illusion that the Slovenes are on their way to become the next Switzerland.) Each historical form is a totality that encompasses not only its retroactively posited past but also its own future, a future that is by definition never realized: it is the immanent future of this present, so that, when the present form disintegrates, it undermines also its past and its future.

This is why Hegel was right to insist that the owl of Minerva takes off only at dusk; and this is why the standard Communist project was utopian precisely insofar as it was not radical enough; that is, insofar as, in it, the fundamental capitalist thrust of unleashed productivity survived, deprived of its concrete contradictory conditions of existence. The insufficiency of Heidegger, Adorno, and Horkheimer, etc., resides in their abandonment of the concrete social analysis of capitalism: in their very critique or overcoming of Marx, they in a way repeat Marx's mistake—like Marx, they perceive the unleashed productivity as something ultimately independent of the concrete capitalist social formation. Capitalism and Communism are not two different historical realizations, two species, of instrumental reason—instrumental reason as such is capitalist, grounded in capitalist relations, and "really existing Socialism" failed because it was ultimately a subspecies of capitalism, an ideological attempt to have a cake and eat it, to break from capitalism while retaining its key ingredient. In other words. Marx's notion of the Communist society is itself the inherent capitalist fantasy; that is, a phantasmatic scenario for resolving the capitalist antagonism he so aptly described. In other words, our wager is that, even if we remove the teleological notion of Communism (the society of the fully unleashed productivity) as the implicit standard by which Marx, as it were, measures the alienation of the existing society, the bulk of his critique of political economy, the

insight into the self-propelling vicious cycle of capitalist (re)production, survives.

The task of today's thought is thus double: on the one hand, how to repeat the Marxist critique of political economy without the utopian/ideological notion of Communism as its inherent standard; on the other hand, how to imagine effectively breaking out of the capitalist horizon without falling into the trap of returning to the eminently premodern notion of a balanced, (self-)restrained society (the pre-Cartesian temptation to which most of today's ecology succumbs).

Slavoj Žižek is Senior Researcher at the Department of Philosophy, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. His latest publications are Living in the End Times *(Verso, 2010) and* First as Tragedy, Then as Farce *(Verso, 2010).*

NOTES

1. G. K. Chesterton, "The Slavery of the Mind" (1929), www.basilica.org/pages/ebooks/G.K.Chesterton-The Thing.pdf (accessed 8 July 2011).
2. G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1926), www.worldinvisible.com/library/chesterton/everlasting/content.htm (accessed 8 July 2011).
3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 18–19.
4. There is a wonderfully vulgar Jewish joke about a Polish-Jewish wife, tired after a hard day's work, when her husband comes home, also tired but horny, telling her, "I cannot make love to you now, but I need a release—can you suck me and swallow my sperm, this would help me a lot!" The wife replies, "I am too tired to do that now, darling—why don't you just masturbate and finish in a glass, and I will drink it in the morning!" Does not this wife—contrary to the cliché about the holistic-intuitive reasoning of women as opposed to the masculine rational analysis—provide an example of the ruthless feminine use of Understanding, of its power to separate what naturally belongs together?
5. In a strict homology to this Hegelian logic, it is meaningless to demand that psychoanalysis be supplemented by psychosynthesis, reestablishing the organic unity of the person shattered by psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis already *is* this synthesis.