

Slavoj Žižek
**Hegel versus
Heidegger**

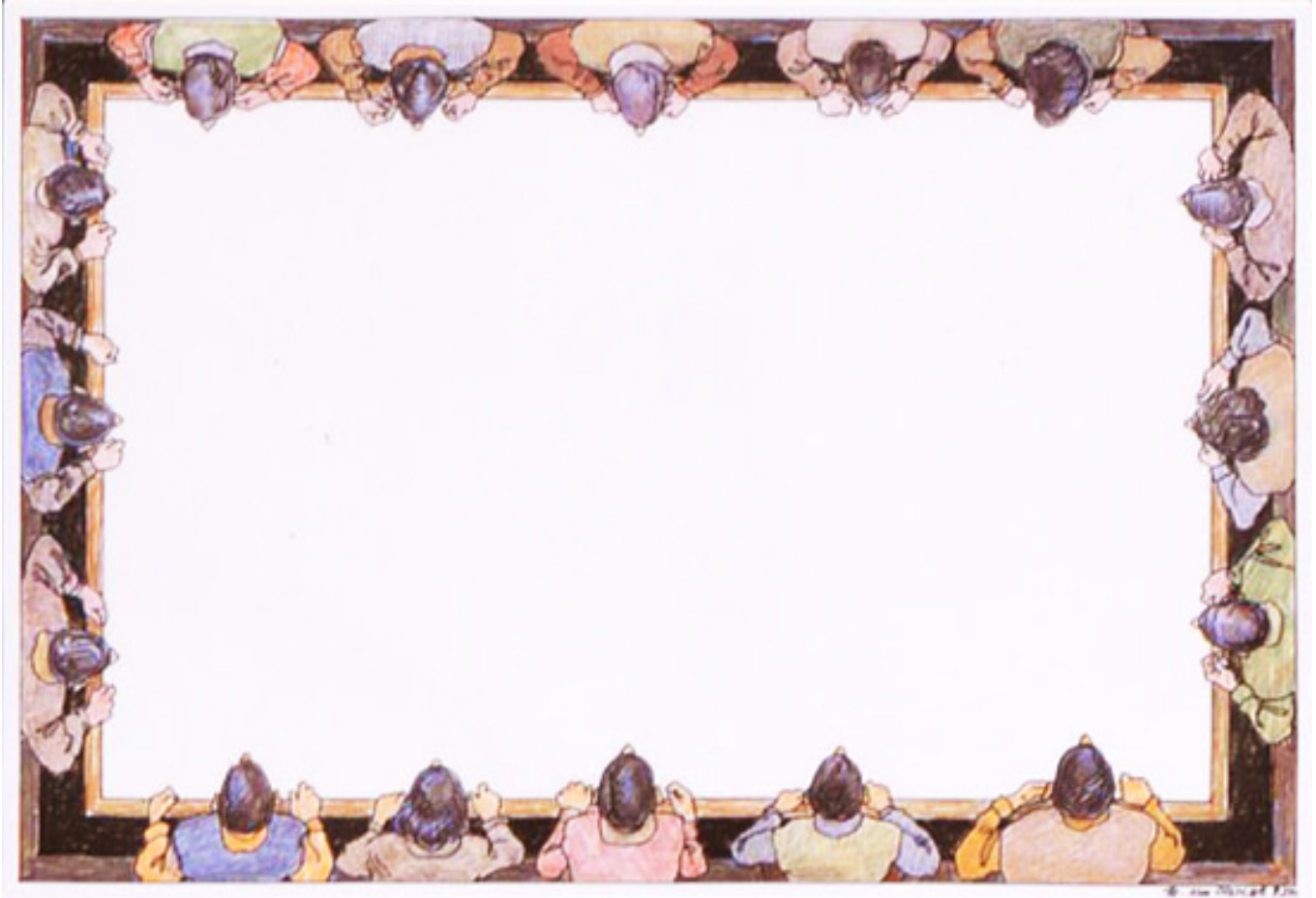
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Heidegger's Critique of Hegel

One of the standard critiques of Hegel, first formulated already by the “young Hegelians,” concerns the apparent contradiction between Hegel’s dialectical method and his system. While Hegel’s method approaches reality in its dynamic development, discerning in every determinate form the seeds of its own destruction and self-overcoming, his system endeavors to render the totality of being as an achieved order in which no further development is in view. With the twentieth century interpreters of Hegel who stand under Heidegger’s influence, this contradiction between the “logical” and the “historical” acquires a deeper radical underpinning: what they try to outline is a more fundamental ontological frame that is both the source of Hegel’s dialectical systematizing, and is, simultaneously, betrayed by this systematizing. The historical dimension is here not simply the unending evolution of all life forms. It is also not the life-philosophical opposition between the young Hegel trying to grasp the historical antagonisms of social life and the old Hegel compulsively steamrolling all content with his dialectical machine, but the inherent tension between Hegel’s systematic drive of notional self-mediation (or sublation) and a more original ontological project that, following Heidegger, Alexandre Koyre describes as the historicity of the human condition oriented towards future.¹ The root of what Hegel calls “negativity” is (our awareness of) future: future is what is not (yet), the power of negativity is ultimately identical to the power of time itself, this force that corrodes every firm identity. The proper temporality of a human being is thus not that of the linear time, but that of engaged existence: a man projects his future and then actualizes it by way of a detour through past resources. This “existential” root of negativity is obfuscated by Hegel’s system that abolishes this primacy of the future and presents its entire content as the past “sublated” in its logical form – the standpoint adopted here is not that of engaged subjectivity, but of Absolute Knowing. (A similar critique of Hegel was deployed by Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite.) What his critics all endeavor to formulate is a tension or antagonism in the very core of Hegel’s thought that remains unthought by Hegel – not for accidental reasons, but by necessity, which is why, precisely, *this antagonism cannot be dialecticized, resolved, or “sublated”* through dialectical mediation. What all these philosophers offer is thus a critical “schizology” of Hegel.²

It is not difficult to recognize in this vision of the future-oriented temporality of the engaged subject the traces of Heidegger’s radical



Ilya Kabakov, *They are looking downward*, 1998-1999. Postcard and edition of 300 ceramic tiles.

assertion of finitude as the unsurpassable predicament of being-human: it is our finitude that exposes us to the opening of the future, to the horizon of what is to come, i.e., transcendence and finitude are two sides of the same coin. No wonder then, that it was Heidegger himself who, in a series of seminars and written texts, proposed the most elaborate version of such a critical reading of Hegel. Since this is not the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*), but the later Heidegger, he tries to decipher the unthought dimension of Hegel through the close reading of Hegel's notion of the "experience" (*Erfahrung*) of consciousness from his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Heidegger reads Hegel's famous critique of Kantian skepticism – we can only get to know the Absolute if the Absolute already in advance wants to be *bei uns* (with us) – through his interpretation of *parousia* as the epochal disclosure of being: *parousia* names the mode by which the Absolute (Hegel's name for the Truth of Being) is already disclosed to us prior to any active effort on our part, i.e., the way this disclosure of the Absolute grounds and directs our very effort to grasp it – or, as mystics and theologians put it, you wouldn't have been searching for me if you had not already found me.

Why is Hegel unable to see the proper dimension of *parousia*? This brings us to Heidegger's next reproach: Hegel's notion of negativity lacks a phenomenal dimension (i.e., Hegel fails to describe the experience in which negativity would appear as such). Hegel never systematically exemplifies or makes appear the differences between the terms rejection, negation, nothing, "is not," and so forth.³ Hegelian dialectics just presupposes the occultation of its own phenomenologico-ontological foundation; the name of this occultation is, of course, subjectivity. Hegel always-already subordinates negativity to the subject's "work of the negative," to the work of the subject's conceptual mediation/sublation of all phenomenal content. In this way, negativity is reduced to a secondary moment in the subject's work of self-mediation. This blindness for its own foundation is not a secondary feature, but the very enabling feature of Hegel's metaphysics of subjectivity: the dialectical *logos* can only function against the background of a pre-subjective *Absage*, renunciation or saying-no.

There nonetheless is a privileged phenomenal mode in which negativity can be experienced, although a negative one: pain. The path of experience is the path of painful



faca

Jonathas de Andrade, *Education for Adults*, 2010. Installation, 60 posters. Image courtesy of the artist. Using the concepts and procedures of Paulo Freire's alphabetization method, from which the poster layout was appropriated, the posters were the basis for a series of meetings with a group of illiterate women, determining the final relations between words-images presented in the artist's version. Faca, in portuguese means knife.

realization that there is a gap between “natural” and transcendental consciousness, between “for the consciousness itself” and “for us”: the subject is violently deprived of the “natural” foundation of its being, its entire world collapses, and this process is repeated until it reaches Absolute Knowing. When he speaks about “transcendental pain” as the fundamental *Stimmung* of Hegel’s thought, Heidegger is following a line that begins in Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*.⁴ There Kant determines pain as the only “a priori” emotion, the emotion of my pathological ego being humiliated by the injunction of the moral law. (Lacan sees in this transcendental privilege of pain the link between Kant and Sade.)

What Heidegger misses in his description of the Hegelian “experience” as the path of despair (*Verzweiflung*) is the proper abyss of this process: it is not only the natural consciousness that is shattered, but also the transcendental standard, measure, or framing ground against which natural consciousness experiences its inadequacy and failure – as Hegel put it, if what we thought to be true fails the measure of truth, this measure itself has to be abandoned. This is why Heidegger misses the vertiginous abyss of the dialectical process: there is no standard of truth gradually approached through painful experiences; this standard itself is caught in the process, undermined again and again.

This is also why Heidegger’s reproach of Hegel’s “machination” misses the point. According to Heidegger, the Hegelian process of experience moves at two levels, that of lived-experience (*Erlebnis*) and that of conceptual machination (*Machenschaft*): at the level of lived-experience, consciousness sees its world collapse and a new figure of the world appear, and it experiences this passage as a pure jump, a leap with no logical bridge uniting the two positions. “For us,” however, the dialectical analysis renders visible how the new world emerged as the “determinate negation” of the old one, as the necessary outcome of its crisis. The authentic lived-experience, the opening to the New, is thus revealed as something that is underpinned by notional work: what the subject experiences as the unexplainable rise of a new world is actually, behind its back, the result of its own conceptual work, and can thus ultimately be read as produced by subject’s own machination. There is no experience of genuine otherness, the subject only encounters the results of its own (conceptual) work. This reproach only holds if one ignores how both sides, the phenomenal “for itself” of the natural consciousness and the “for us” of the subterranean conceptual work, are caught in the groundless abyss of repeated vertiginous loss. The “transcendental pain” is not

only the pain that natural consciousness experiences, the pain of being separated from its truth; it is the painful awareness that this truth itself is non-all, cracking, inconsistent.

The Torture House of Language

And this brings us back to Heidegger’s reproach that Hegel doesn’t provide the phenomenal experience of negativity: What if negativity precisely names the gap of phenomenality, something that does NOT (and cannot ever) appear? Not because it is a transcendental gesture that by definition eludes the phenomenal level, but because it is the paradoxical, difficult-to-think negativity that cannot be subsumed under any agent (experiential or not), what Hegel calls “self-relating negativity,” negativity that precedes all positive grounding and whose negative gesture of withdrawal opens up the space for all positivity. And from this point, one can even reverse Heidegger’s reproach to Hegel and claim that it is Heidegger who is not able to think this “transcendental pain” – and that he misses the path to think it precisely by dropping all too early the term “subject” needed to think the (inhuman) core of being-human.

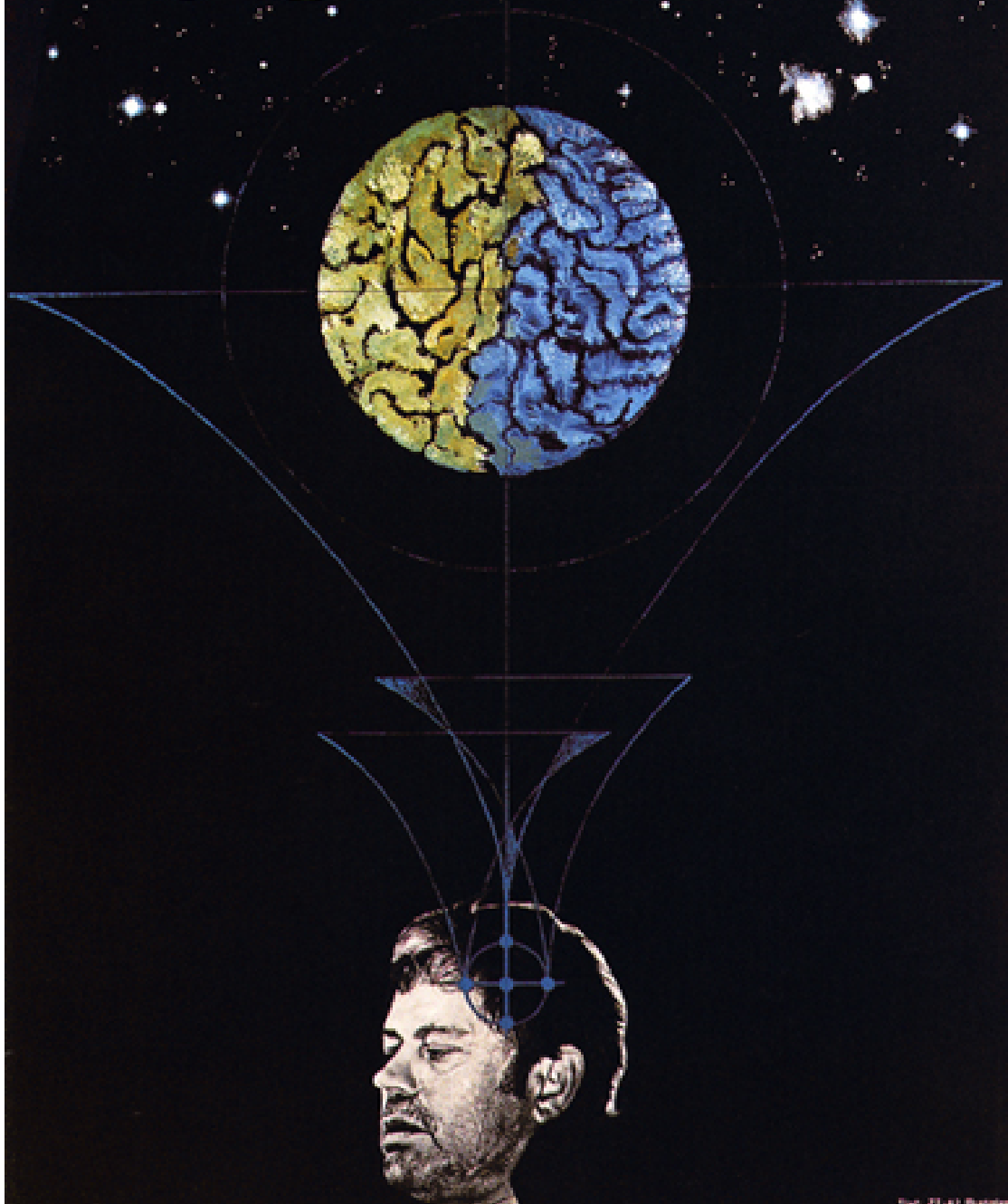
Throughout his own work, Lacan, in turn, modifies Heidegger’s motif of language as the house of being. Language is not man’s creation and instrument, it is man who “dwells” in language: “psychoanalysis should be the science of language inhabited by the subject.”⁵ Lacan’s “paranoiac” twist, his additional Freudian turn of the screw, comes from his characterization of this house as a *torture-house*: “in the light of the Freudian experience, man is a subject caught in and tortured by language.”⁶ Not only does man dwell in the “prison-house of language,” (the title of Fredric Jameson’s early book on structuralism), he dwells in a torture-house of language. The entire psychopathology deployed by Freud, from conversion-symptoms inscribed into the body, up to total psychotic breakdowns, are scars of this permanent torture, so many signs of an original and irremediable gap between subject and language, so many signs that man cannot ever be at home in his own home. This is what Heidegger ignores: this dark, torturing other side of our dwelling in language – and this is why there is also no place for the Real of *jouissance* in Heidegger’s edifice, since the torturing aspect of language concerns primarily the vicissitudes of libido. This is also why, in order to get the truth to speak, it is not enough to suspend the subject’s active intervention and let language itself speak – as Elfriede Jelinek put it with extraordinary clarity: “language should be tortured to tell the truth.” It should be twisted, denaturalized, extended, condensed, cut and reunited, made to work against itself. Language

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SOVĚTSKÝ FILM VYZNAMENANÝ ZVLÁŠTNÍ CENOU POHODY XXVI. MFF V CANNES.
FILMOVÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ UTOPICKÉHO ROMÁNU STANISLAVA LEMIA. REŽIE: ANDREI TARKOVSKIJ

SOLARIS



Poster for Andrei Tarkovsky's movie *Solaris*.

as the “big Other” is not an agent of wisdom to whose message we should attune ourselves, but a place of cruel indifference and stupidity. The most elementary form of torturing one’s language is called poetry – imagine what a complex form like the sonnet does to language: it forces the free flow of speech into a Procrustean bed of a fixed shape of rhythm and rhyme. So what about Heidegger’s procedure of listening to the soundless word of language itself, of bringing out the truth that already dwells in it? No wonder late Heidegger’s thinking is poetic. Recall the means he uses to do this: can one imagine a torture more violent than what he does in, say, his famous reading of Parmenides’s proposition “thinking-speaking and being are the same”? To extract the intended truth from it, he has to refer to the literal meaning of words (*legein* as gathering), to counter-intuitively displace the accent and scansion of the sentence, to translate single terms in an idiosyncratic, descriptive way, and so on. It is from this perspective that late Wittgensteinian “ordinary language philosophy,” which perceives itself as a medical cure meant to correct the usages of ordinary language that give rise to “philosophical problems,” wants to eliminate precisely the “torturing” of language that forces it to deliver truth. (Remember Rudolph Carnap’s famous critique of Heidegger from the late 1920s, which claims that Heidegger’s ratiocinations are based on the wrong use of “nothing” as a substantive).

And does the same not go for cinema? Does cinema also not force its visual material to tell the truth through torture? First, there was Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions,” the mother of all torturers: a violent cutting of continuous shots into fragments that are then re-united in a thoroughly artificial way, the no less violent reduction of the whole body or scene to close-ups of “partial objects” floating around in cinematic space, cut off from the organic Whole to which they belong. Then there is Tarkovsky, Eisenstein’s great enemy, who replaced the frantic Eisensteinian montage with its opposite: a stretching-out of time, the cinematic equivalent of the “rack,” a classic torturing machine made to stretch the victim’s limbs. Suffice it to recall Tarkovsky’s formal procedure, which, given his Soviet origins, cannot but ironically evoke the (in)famous dialectical “law” of the inversion of quantity in quality, and supplement it with a kind of negation of negation (which was excluded by Stalin from the list of these “laws” as too Hegelian, not properly “materialist”):

Tarkovsky proposed that if a take is lengthened, boredom naturally sets in for the audience. But if the take is extended even further, something else arises: curiosity.

Tarkovsky is essentially proposing giving the audience time to inhabit the world that the take is showing us, not to *watch* it, but to *look* at it, to explore it.⁷

Perhaps the ultimate example of this procedure is the famous scene in Tarkovsky’s *Mirror*, in which the heroine, who works as a proof-reader for a daily newspaper in the Soviet Union of the mid-1930s, runs in rain from her home to the printing office because there is a suspicion that she missed an obscene misprint of Stalin’s name. Sean Martin is right to emphasize the unexpected feature of its immediate physical beauty:

It is as if Tarkovsky were content just to watch Margarita Terekhova running through the rain, down steps, across yards, into corridors. Here, Tarkovsky reveals the presence of beauty in something that is apparently mundane and, paradoxically (given the period), also potentially fatal for Maria if the mistake she thinks she’s made has gone to press.⁸

This effect of beauty is generated precisely by the excessive length of the scene: instead of just watching Maria running and, immersed in the narrative, worrying if she will arrive on time to prevent the catastrophe, we are seduced into looking at the scene, taking note of its phenomenal features, the intensity of movements, and so forth. One can thus well characterize Tarkovsky’s polemics against Eisenstein as a polemic of one torturer with his professional colleague about the use of different devices.

This is also the ultimate reason why, against Heidegger’s historicization of the subject as modernity’s agent of technological mastery, against his substitution of *Dasein* for “subject” as the name for the essence of being-human, Lacan stuck to the problematic term “subject.” When Lacan implies that Heidegger misses a crucial dimension of subjectivity, his point is not a silly-humanist argument that Heidegger “passivizes” man too much into an instrument for the revelation of Being and thus ignores human creativity. Lacan’s point is, on the contrary, that Heidegger misses the properly traumatic impact of the very “passivity” of being caught in language, the tension between human animal and language: there is “subject” because the human animal doesn’t “fit” language, the Lacanian “subject” is the tortured, mutilated, subject. Insofar as the status of the Lacanian subject is real, i.e., insofar as the real Thing is ultimately (the impossible core of) the subject itself, one should apply to the subject Lacan’s definition of the Thing as that part or aspect “of the real which suffers from the signifier.” The most elementary dimension of the subject is not activity, but passivity, enduring. This is how

Lacan locates rituals of initiation that perform a violent cut onto the body, mutilating it:

The rituals of initiation assume the form of the changing of form of these desires, of conferring on them in this way a function through which the subject's being identifies itself or announces itself as such, through which the subject, if one can put it this way, fully becomes a man, but also a woman. The *mutilation* serves here to orientate desire, enabling it to assume precisely this function of index, of something which is realized and which can only articulate itself, express itself, in a *symbolic beyond*, a beyond which is the one we today call being, a realization of being in the subject.⁹

The gap that separates Lacan from Heidegger is here clearly discernible precisely on account of their proximity; by the fact that, in order to designate the symbolic function at its most elementary, Lacan still uses Heidegger's term "being." In a human being, desires lose their mooring in biology, they are operative only insofar as they are inscribed within the horizon of Being sustained by language; however, in order for this transposition from the immediate biological reality of the body to the symbolic space to take place, it has to leave a mark of torture in the body in the guise of its mutilation.

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It is thus not enough to say that "the Word became flesh": what one should add is that, in order for the Word to inscribe itself into flesh, a part of the flesh – the proverbial Shylockian pound of flesh – has to be sacrificed. Since there is no pre-established harmony between Word and flesh, it is only through such a sacrifice that the flesh becomes receptive for the Word.

This brings us, finally, to the topic of *jouissance*. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe located very precisely the gap that separates Lacan's interpretation of *Antigone* from Heidegger's (to which Lacan otherwise abundantly refers): what is totally missing in Heidegger is not only the dimension of the real, of *jouissance*, but, above all, the dimension of the "between-two-deaths" (the symbolic and the real), which designates Antigone's subjective position after she is excommunicated from the polis by Creon. In exact symmetry with her brother Polynices who is dead in reality, but denied the symbolic death, the rituals of burial, Antigone finds herself dead symbolically, excluded from the symbolic community, while biologically and subjectively still alive. In Agamben's terms, Antigone finds herself reduced to "bare life," to a position of *homo sacer*, whose exemplary case in the twentieth century is that of the inmates of the



Lee Miller, *Bürgermeisters daughter*, Town Hall, Leipzig Germany, 1945.

concentration camps.¹⁰ The stakes of Heidegger's omission are thus very high, they concern the ethico-political crux of the twentieth century, the "totalitarian" catastrophe in its extreme deployment – so this omission is quite consistent with Heidegger's inability to resist the Nazi temptation:

But the "between-two-deaths" is the hell which our century realized or still promises to realize, and it is to this that Lacan replies and to what he wants to make psychoanalysis responsible. Did he not say that politics is the "hole" of metaphysics? The scene with Heidegger – and there is one – is in its entirety located here.¹¹

This also accounts for the disturbing ambiguity of Heidegger's description of the death in extermination camps: this death is no longer authentic death – the individual's assuming of one's death as the possibility of his highest impossibility – but just another anonymous industrial-technological process. People do not really "die" in the camps, they are just industrially exterminated. Heidegger not only obscenely suggests that the victims burned in the camps somehow did not die "authentically," thereby translating their utter suffering into subjective "non-authenticity." The question he fails to raise is precisely: how did THEY subjectivize (relate to) their predicament? Their death was an industrial process of extermination for their executioners, *not for themselves*.

Francois Balmès makes here a perspicuous remark that it is as if Lacan's implicit clinical reproach to Heidegger's existential analytic of *Dasein* as "being-towards-death" is that it is appropriate only for neurotics and fails to account for psychotics.¹² A psychotic subject occupies an existential position for which there is no place in Heidegger's mapping, the position of someone who in a way "survives his own death." Psychotics no longer fit Heidegger's description of *Dasein*'s engaged existence, their life no longer moves in the coordinates of a futural project freely engaged against the background of one's assumed past: their life is outside "care" (*Sorge*), their being is no longer directed "towards death."

This excess of *jouissance* that resists symbolization (logos) is the reason why, in the last two decades of his teaching, Lacan (sometimes almost pathetically) insists that he considers himself an anti-philosopher, someone who rebels against philosophy: philosophy is onto-logy, its basic premise is, as Parmenides, the first philosopher, put it, "thinking and being are the same," the mutual accord between thinking (logos as reason/speech) and being. Up

to Heidegger, the Being that philosophy has in mind is always the being whose house is language, the being sustained by language, the being whose horizon is opened by language, or, as Wittgenstein put it, the limits of my language are the limits of my world. Against this ontological premise of philosophy, Lacan focuses on the real of *jouissance* as something that, although it is far from being simply external to language (it is rather "ex-timate" with regard to it), resists symbolization, remains a foreign kernel within it, appears within it as a rupture, cut, gap, inconsistency or impossibility:

I challenge whichever philosopher to account now for the relation that is between the emergence of the signifier and the way *jouissance* relates to being....No philosophy, I say, meets us here today. The wretched aborted freaks of philosophy which we drag behind us from the beginning of the last nineteenth century as the habits that are falling apart, are nothing but a way to frisk rather than to confront this question which is the only question about truth and which is called, and named by Freud, the death drive, the primordial masochism of *jouissance*....All philosophical speech escapes and withdraws here.¹³

It is in this sense that Lacan designates his position as the one of the "realism of *jouissance*." A realism whose "natural" enemy cannot but appear Hegel's "panlogism" as the climactic point of ontology, of logic (self-deployment of logos) as the total explanation for being, through which being loses its opacity and becomes totally transparent. But does Lacan not proceed all too fast here? Are things with Hegel really so simple? Is the obverse of Hegel's basic thesis "there is nothing which is not logos" not, following Lacan's "formulas of sexuation," the assertion of a non-All? That is to say, "not-all is logos," i.e., logos is not-all, rather isn't it corroded and truncated from within by antagonisms and ruptures, and thereby never fully itself?

Maybe, Lacan was obscurely aware of all this, as indicated above by the curious limitation of his brutal dismissal of philosophy to the "wretched aborted freaks of philosophy which we drag behind us from the beginning of the nineteenth century." A dismissal that begins with *post-Hegelian* thought. The obvious thing would have been to say that it is precisely *post-Hegelian* thought that breaks with onto-logy, asserting the primacy of a trans-logical Will or Life – the anti-logos (anti-philosophy) that runs from late Schelling through Schopenhauer to

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Nietzsche. It is as if Lacan here learned Heidegger's lesson: Marx's formula "being determines consciousness" is not radical enough – all the talk about the actual life of engaged subjectivity as opposed to a "mere speculative thought" remains within the confines of ontology, because (as Heidegger demonstrated) being can only arise through logos. The difference from Heidegger is that Lacan, instead of accepting this accord (sameness) between Being and logos, tries to move outside of it, to a dimension of the real indicated by the impossible joint between subject and *jouissance*. No wonder, then, that, with regard to anxiety, Lacan prefers Kierkegaard to Heidegger: he perceives Kierkegaard as the anti-Hegel for whom the paradox of Christian faith signals a radical break with ancient Greek ontology (in contrast to Heidegger's reduction of Christianity to a moment in the decline of Greek ontology within medieval metaphysics). Faith is an existential jump into what (from the ontological view) cannot but appear as madness, it is a crazy decision unwarranted by any reason – Kierkegaard's God is effectively "beyond Being," a God of the Real, not the God of philosophers. Which is why, again, Lacan would accept Heidegger's famous statement, from the 1920s, when he abandoned Catholic Church, that religion is a mortal enemy of philosophy – but he would see this as the reason to stick to the core of the Real in the religious experience.

It is against this background of the radical asymmetry or non-correlation between subject and object (or thinking and reality) that one can clearly see where Meillassoux's critique of correlationism falls short: in his rejection of

transcendental correlationism (the claim that in order to think reality, there must already be a subject to whom this reality appears), he himself remains too much within the confines of the Kantian-transcendental opposition between reality the way it appears to us and the transcendent beyond of reality in itself, independently of us. In a Leninist way (the Leninism of *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*), he then asserts that we can access and think reality in itself. But something is lost in this very field of the transcendental dilemma, something that concerns the very core of the Freudian discovery (as formulated by Lacan): the inherent twisting figuration that is constitutive of the subject itself. That is to say, what Lacan asserts is precisely the irreducible (constitutive) discord and non-correlation, between subject and reality: in order for the subject to emerge, the impossible object-that-is-subject must be excluded from reality, since it is its very exclusion that opens up the space for the subject. The problem is not to think the real outside transcendental correlation, independently of subject; the problem is to think real INSIDE the subject, the hard core of the real in the very heart of the subject, its ex-timate center.

Simultaneously, the exclusion of this object is constitutive of the appearance of reality: since reality (not the real) is correlative to the subject, it can only constitute itself through the withdrawal from it of the object, of that which "is" the subject, or, in other words, through the withdrawal of the subject's objectal correlate. To put it in the old jargon of the logic of the signifier,



Francis Bacon, *Triptych*, 1973. Oil on canvas.

the subject is only possible out of its own impossibility, the impossibility to become an object. What breaks up the self-closure of the transcendental correlation is thus not the transcendent reality that eludes the subject's grasp, but the inaccessibility of the object that "is" the subject itself.¹⁴ This is the true "fossil," the bone that is the spirit, to paraphrase Hegel, and this object is not simply the full objective reality of the subject (the successful scientific reduction of the subjective experience to objective processes as in biogenetics), but the non-corporeal, fantasmatic, *lamella*. In some of Francis Bacon's drawings, we find a (naked, usually) body accompanied by a weird dark stain-like, circular, formless form that seems to grow out of it, barely attached to it, as a kind of uncanny protuberance that the body cannot ever fully recuperate or reintegrate, and that thereby destabilizes beyond repair the organic Whole of the body – this is what Lacan aimed at with his notion of "lamella" (or "hommelette").

Why this primordial loss, why this constitutive withdrawal from reality of a part of the real? Precisely because the subject is a part of reality. Because it emerges out of it. This is why, if the subject is to emerge as the non-substantial *cogito*, his being should be elevated

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into a spectral impossible object that forever haunts him (and that can assume many fantasmatic forms, from *lamella* to the double). The "official" transcendental correlation subject-object is thus redoubled by a kind of negative correlation of the subject and the impossible-real object: before relating to objects, which are part of external reality, the subject is haunted by its own objectal shadow. In the guise of this additional virtual object, the subject is ex-posed to the real, constitutively "de-centered," much more radically even than in the symbolic order. This is how one can read one of Lacan's re-statements of Descartes's *cogito ergo sum*: "I am at that impossible piece of the real where I cannot think." We can also see in what way, two lacks overlap in this impossible object: the constitutive lack of the subject (what the subject has to lose in order to emerge as the subject of the signifier) and the lack in the Other itself (what has to be excluded from reality so that reality can appear). Again, the object is not simply there at the crosscut of the two lacks: it literally, and much more radically, emerges through the overlapping of the two lacks. (Once Lacan got this point, he changed the status of *objet a* from imaginary to real.) So the real is not some kind of primordial Being lost with the



Eisenstein greeting Mickey Mouse, 1930.

opposition of subject and object (as Hölderlin put it in his famous *Ur-Fragment* of German Idealism); the real is, on the contrary, a product (of the overlapping of the two lacks). *The real is not lost, it is what we cannot get rid of*, what always sticks on as the remainder of the symbolic operation.

In the opposition between the symbolic order and reality, the real is on the side of the symbolic – it is the part of reality that clings to the symbolic (in the guise of its inconsistency/gap/impossibility). The real is the point at which the external opposition between the symbolic order and reality is immanent to the symbolic itself, mutilating it from within: it is the non-all of the symbolic. There is a real not because the symbolic cannot grasp its external real, but because the symbolic cannot fully become ITSELF. There is being (reality) because the symbolic system is inconsistent, flawed. The real is thus an impasse of formalization. One should give to this thesis all its “idealist” weight: it is not only that reality is too rich, so that every formalization fails to grasp it, stumbles upon it; the real IS nothing but the impasse of formalization – there is dense reality “out there” BECAUSE of the inconsistencies and gaps in the symbolic order. The real is nothing but the non-all of formalization, not its external exception.

Since reality is in itself fragile and inconsistent, it needs the intervention of a Master-Signifier to stabilize itself into a consistent field; this Master-Signifier marks the point at which a signifier falls into the real. The Master-Signifier is a signifier that not only designates features of reality, but also performatively intervenes into reality. As such, the Master-Signifier is the counterpart of the *objet a*: if *objet a* is the real on the side of the symbolic, the Master-Signifier is the signifier that falls into the real. Its role is exactly homologous to that of transcendental synthesis of apperception in Kant: its intervention transforms the inconsistent multiplicity of fragments of the real into the consistent field of “objective reality.” In the same way that, for Kant, it is the addition of the subjective synthesis that transforms the multiplicity of subjective impressions into objective reality, for Lacan, it is the intervention of the Master-Signifier, which transforms the confused field of impressions into “extra-linguistic reality.” This, then, would be the Lacanian answer to correlationism: while transcendental correlationism can think the intervention of the Master-Signifier as constitutive of reality, it misses this other inverted correlation between the Master-Signifier and *objet a*, i.e., it cannot think the stain of the real that de-centers from within the subject.

Subject and Cogito

The Lacanian “subject” names a gap in the symbolic, and its status is real. As Balmès pointed out, this is why in his crucial seminar on the logic of the fantasy (1966-67), after more than a decade of struggling with Heidegger, Lacan accomplishes his paradoxical and (for someone who adheres to Heidegger’s notion of modern philosophy) totally unexpected move from Heidegger back to Descartes, to Cartesian *cogito*. There really is a paradox here: Lacan first accepts Heidegger’s point that the Cartesian *cogito*, which grounds modern science and its mathematicized universe, announces the highest forgetting of Being; but for Lacan, the Real of *jouissance* is precisely external to Being, so that what is for Heidegger the argument AGAINST *cogito* is for Lacan the argument FOR *cogito* – the real of *jouissance* can only be approached when we exit the domain of being. This is why, for Lacan, not only is *cogito* not to be reduced to the self-transparency of pure thought, but, paradoxically, *cogito* IS the subject of the unconscious – the gap/cut in the order of Being in which the real of *jouissance* breaks in.

Of course, this *cogito* is the *cogito* “in becoming,” not yet the *res cogitans*, the thinking substance that fully participates in Being and in logos. In the seminar on the logic of fantasy, Lacan reads the truth of Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum* more radically than in his earlier seminars, where he played endlessly on the variations of “subverting” the subject. He started with decentering being with regard to thought: “I am not where I think,” the core of our being (*Kern unseres Wesens*) is not in my (self)consciousness; however, he quickly became aware that such a reading leaves the path all too open to the irrationalist *Lebensphilosophie* thematic of a life deeper than mere thinking or language, something that runs counter to Lacan’s unconscious “structured like a language,” which is thoroughly “rational” or discursive. So he passed to the much more refined “I think where I am not,” which decenters thinking with regard to my Being. As the awareness of my full presence: the Unconscious is a purely virtual (in-existing, insisting) Other Place of a thought, which escapes my being. Then comes a different punctuation: “I think: “therefore I am” – my Being is devalued to an illusion generated by my thought. What all these versions share, however, is the accent on the gap that separates *cogito* from *sum*, thought from being – Lacan’s aim was to undermine the illusion of their overlap by pointing out a fissure in the apparent homogeneity of thinking-being. It was only toward the end of his teaching that he asserted their overlapping – and only a negative one, for

sure. That is to say, Lacan finally grasps the most radical zero-point of the Cartesian *cogito* as the point of the negative intersection between being and thinking: the vanishing point at which *I don't think* AND *I am not*. I AM NOT: I am not a substance, a thing, an entity; I am reduced to a void in the order of being, to a gap, a *béance*. (Recall how, for Lacan, the discourse of science presupposes the foreclosure of the subject – to put it in naïve terms, the subject of science is reduced to zero: a scientific proposition should be valid for anyone who repeats the same experiment. The moment we have to include the subject's position of enunciation, we are no longer in science, but in a discourse of wisdom or initiation.) I DON'T THINK: here, again, Lacan paradoxically accepts Heidegger's thesis that (modern mathematized) science "doesn't think" – but for him, this precisely means that it breaks out of the frame of onto-logy, of thinking as logos correlative to Being. As pure *cogito*, I don't think, I am reduced to "pure (form of) thought" which coincides with its opposite, i.e., which has no content and is as such non-thinking. The tautology of thinking is self-canceling in the same way as the tautology of being, which is why, for Lacan, the "I am that which I am" announced by the burning bush to Moses on the Mount Sinai indicates a God beyond Being, God as Real.¹⁵

The importance of Lacan's assertion of *cogito* is that, with regard to the couple language-world, it assures a point external to it, a minimal point of singular universality, which is literally world-less, trans-historical. This means we are condemned to our world, to the hermeneutic horizon of our finitude, or, as Gadamer put it, to the impenetrable background of historical "prejudices" that predetermine the field of what we can see and understand. Every world is sustained by language, and every "spoken" language sustains a world – this is what Heidegger aimed at in his thesis on language as a "house of being." Is this effectively not our spontaneous ideology? There is an endlessly differentiated, complex, reality, which we, individuals and communities embedded in it, always experience from a particular, finite perspective of our historical world. What democratic materialism furiously rejects is the notion that there can be an infinite universal Truth, which cuts across this multitude of worlds – in politics, this means a "totalitarianism" that imposes its truth as universal. This is why one should reject, say, Jacobins, who imposed onto the plurality of the French society their universal notions of equality and other truths, and thus necessarily ended in terror. So there is another version of the democratic-materialist axiom: "all that takes place in today's society is the dynamics of post-modern globalization, and the

(conservative-nostalgic, fundamentalist, Old Leftist, nationalist, religious...) reactions and resistances to it." To which, of course, materialist dialectics adds its proviso: "... with the exception of the radical-emancipatory (Communist) politics of truth."

Of course, the only way for us to articulate this truth is within language – by way of torturing language. As Hegel already knew, when we think, we think in language against language. This brings us to Benjamin: Could we not apply his distinction of mythic violence and divine violence to the two modes of violence we were dealing with? The violence of language to which Heidegger refers is "mythic violence": it is a *sprach-bildende Gewalt*, a language-forming violence, to paraphrase Benjamin's definition of mythic violence as *staats-bildend* – the force of *mythos* as the primordial act of narrativization or symbolization. In Badiou's terms, the violent imposition of the transcendental coordinates of a World onto the multiplicity of Being. The violence of thinking (and of poetry, if we understand it differently from Heidegger) is, on the contrary, the case of what Benjamin calls "divine violence," it is a language-destroying (*sprach-zerstoerend*) twisting of language in order to enable a trans-symbolic real of a Truth to transpire in it.

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Hegel versus Heidegger

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1

See Alexandre Koyre, "Hegel a l'ena," *Etudes d'histoire de la pensee philosophique*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

2

I rely here on Catherine Malabou, *La Chambre du milieu, de Hegel aux neurosciences*, (Paris: Hermann, 2009).

3

Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol 68, "Hegel," (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann 1993), 37.

4

Ibid, 103. See generally Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

5

Jacques Lacan, *Seminar III: The Psychoses*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller (New York: W. Norton, 1997), 222.

6

Ibid.

7

Sean Martin, *Andrei Tarkovsky*, (Harpden: Pocket Essentials, 2005), 49.

8

Ibid, 135.

9

Jacques Lacan, *Le desir et son interpretation* (unpublished seminar), 20 May 1959.

10

See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

11

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "De l'ethique: a propos d'Antigone," in Lacan avec les philosophes, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991), 28.

12

See Francois Balme, *Ce que Lacan dit de l'etre*, (Paris: PUF, 1999), 73

13

Jacques Lacan, *L'objet de la psychanalyse* (unpublished seminar), 8 June 1966.

14

See Alenka Zupančič, *Realno in njegovo nemozno (The Real and its Impossible)*, unpublished manuscript.

15

Here we can also establish the link with Meillassoux's design of speculative materialism: the scientific mathematized Real is outside the transcendental correlation of logos and being. See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, London: Continuum Books 2008.