

SHAPE JOURNAL

THE LIMITS OF ŽIŽEK

A CRITIQUE OF "THE LIMITS OF HEGEL"
THE BASIS OF A HOLIST SCIENCE / WHY DO DIALECTICS EMERGE?

Faint handwritten notes in the bottom left corner, including the name 'Jim Schofield' and some illegible scribbles.

Handwritten signature 'G. Lewis' in the bottom right corner.

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The Limits of Žižek

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Preface

A Shadow Over Dialectical Materialism



Welcome to the 48th Special Issue of the SHAPE Journal, a collection of papers on Slavoj Žižek's *The Limits of Hegel* from his book *Less Than Nothing*.

The introductory papers are important here, because without them the different stances of both Žižek and this critic would not be understood.

Jim Schofield, the author, feels that the various philosophic stances of both Holism and Plurality, and Hegelian Dialectics versus Marx's Dialectical Materialism, would simply be confused by Žižek's *Limits of Hegel* piece, either taken alone, or with a comprehensive criticism by Schofield.

The deterioration of Marxism has proceeded long-and-variously over the last century, to have left literally no-one with the wherewithal to "do a Marx" upon this "professed" Marxist, who casts a long Hegelian shadow over Dialectical Materialism.

A reasonable amount of ground must be attempted to be established, and a "quote-all-with-commentary" method of dealing with Žižek's offering, along with three preparatory papers, constitute his attempt to deliver as much as possible.

"Why", you may justifiably ask, "is this amount of effort necessary?"

It is because the World Working Class are entering the most dangerous period in almost a century, and are doing so without the real Marxist leadership it needs.

Jim Schofield
January 2017





Introduction

A Critique of Žižek's *The Limits of Hegel*

This was (and still is) a major undertaking for this writer. For, as a Marxist myself and a serious and regularly contributing philosopher, fully aware of the repeated failures of “professed Marxists” to do anything about Capitalism over the last century, it is surely the time to deal with these charlatans in our movement. And, of course, the most difficult to deal with are the clever Dialecticians, such as Žižek.

Let me stress, it would not be difficult for a Marx or a Lenin to carry out such a task: they would deal in one-fowl-swoop as Marx did with Feuerbach and Lenin did with Lunacharsky et al flirting with Empirio Criticism.

But, let's be clear, that magnificent tradition is by now long dead. The Revolutionary Movement, worldwide, has no-one of their status, and even worse, no real working Marxist philosophers in that tradition.

So, Žižek, with his admittedly sophisticated Dialectics, has had no trouble establishing himself as a Dialectician in the Marx mould! He undoubtedly understands Hegel's Dialectics, and can compete with anyone in making dialectical Abstractions, and even probing for deeper “truths”. But, though he claims to be a follower of Marx, and knows all the arguments, he isn't telling the truth.

He is an Hegelian Idealist, wearing the clever disguise of a Marxist!

As a Dialectical Marxist myself, I am aware of the indicators of such means. The powerful method of making Abstractions, which Marx excelled at, most particularly in *Das Kapital*, Žižek does very differently, and the give-away is his “language” and his wide knowledge and truly massive use of relevant Literature.

Let us see why this is so revealing!

Being an active philosopher myself, I am both aware of the necessary references which MUST be, somehow included, but I also am cognoscente of the lack of such book-learning and vocabulary, in those I must connect with. So, the very last thing that I would do, would be to use multiple words (sometimes even in a foreign language) that my readers are not familiar with. And, being from the Working Class myself, though finally ending my own academic career in a professorial level post in a world class University, I know that though the Abstractions are vital, they can be explained in a language accessible to all: we don't need the unexplained, esoteric language so beloved of academia.

Indeed, when such is not only used in every sentence, but is also, clearly, a veritable barrier to understanding, then you know that the perpetrator has a great deal to hide.

And, it makes things even more difficult, if some of that writer's offerings have real merit. For, you are likely to imbibe the lies along with the good stuff! I think you may see where I am going with this critique?

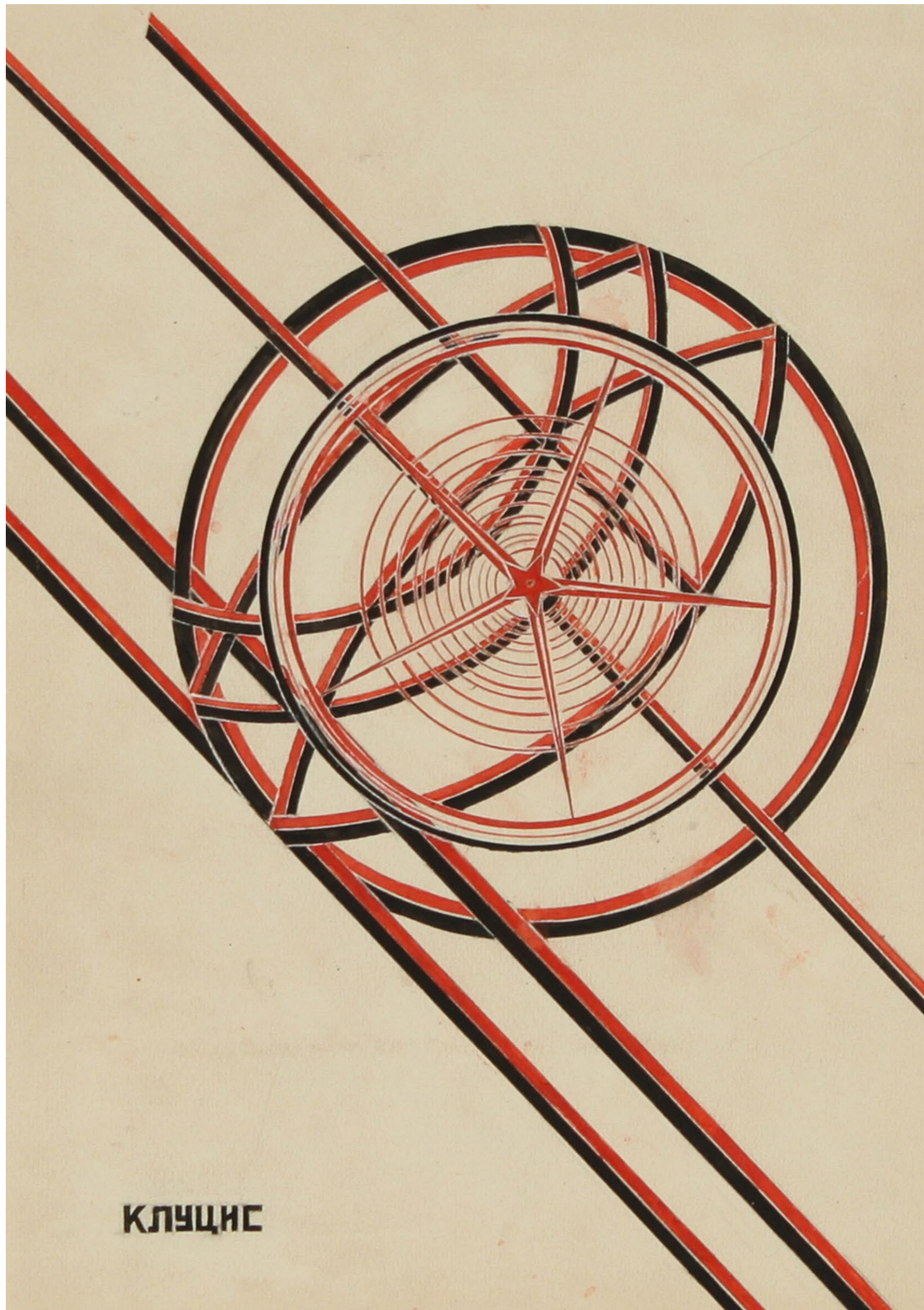
Though undoubtedly an able Dialectician, Žižek is NOT a materialist: he is a Hegelian Dialectician, wearing a misleading Marxist hat, at a jaunty angle!

Returning to a transparent Marxist method, all points and new abstractions must be explained in a straight forward non-esoteric language, and to do this with the Chapter of Hegel's book I am addressing, would be a massive undertaking. So, I have used another method entirely.

Žižek's chapter - entitled *The Limits of Hegel*, is delivered in full, yet wherever I feel he is straying or misleading us, I insert brief notes of my own to highlight this. Only a keen-to-be-informed reader, will trawl through this significant “extension”, but I hope and believe that it will help those that want to understand!

Will you, at the end agree with me?





The Basis of the Holistic Stance as now being revealed by Marxism

On reading a chapter on the supposed “Limits of Hegel”, in Žizek’s *Less Than Nothing*, it became increasingly clear that both Hegel and Žizek’s own bases, were largely unrevealed, and any criticisms of my own could not start from that same hidden basis.

On the contrary, an extremely clear set of basic assumptions would have to be made crystal clear to provide an alternative, very different and better Ground for my many criticisms of both of these contributors.

Though Hegel was a holist, exactly what that entails, and what the alternatives to such a stance might be, were never made clear in the resources at my immediate disposal.

So, doing that must be where I start.

Holism is certainly NOT the stance of almost all contributors currently in the vast majority of disciplines in existence today. Indeed, for almost 2,500 years the chosen stance has been its very opposite: and that has remained the case ever since, and in crucially important areas such as almost all the Sciences, and in Mathematics too. That preferred stance is termed Plurality, and must be understood as to its implications and differences to Holism.

At about the same time as Plurality first occurred in Ancient Greece, Holism was also consciously adopted by the spiritual leader, The Buddha, in India, but for millennia it was limited to spiritual and religious areas almost exclusively.

The point, which has to be established here, is why this major split occurred, and how Holism made such an unusual comeback in Idealist Philosophy, and has now challenged the supremacy of Plurality across the board!

This challenge occurred due to a particular disciple of the great holist philosopher Hegel, Karl Marx, who transferred the whole of the major gains developed by

Hegel, termed Dialectics, from an idealist stance to a materialist one. The seemingly “Other World ideas” of idealist philosophy had somehow to begin to be applied to a vast range of strictly materialist disciplines, and that meant truly major transformations to both.

Let us see why! Holism is, perhaps, the most ancient intuitive stance and was later very widely adopted across Asia. Its principle, that “Everything affected everything else”, made sense in the time before Science and Technology, in a world in which Man lived, and was every day directly confronted by, and in a kind of unity with, the Wild World as it naturally is, and many beliefs were formulated based upon it.

There is little doubt that it is indeed a valid simplification of the complexity of the World, but it was almost useless in guiding interventions-with, and control-over, aspects of that World, where particular useful outcomes were, crucially, always being sought by Mankind.

The alternative, Plurality, arose after many such interventions had been attempted, some with remarkable success. The trouble was that successful attempts to repeat those successes often proved difficult, if not impossible. So, those trying to achieve such successes, began to make restrictions to the conditions in which problems were being tackled. Slowly, appropriate changes made the tasks both easier and more reliable to achieve, so that occasionally those involved began to be able to formulate what they termed as Laws, reliably-applicable in the best-arranged situations.

But, they, surely, had to both realise and say why their arrangements had worked. The generally-agreed conclusion was that the imposed changes had suppressed many other previously-active factors, so that the required (and targeted) law had been left to act almost alone.

It was then incorrectly characterised as an eternal Natural Law, which had been masked, but always totally unchanged, by all the other factors in the natural and

unfettered initial situation. This wasn't true, but it sufficed as a pragmatic rule! But, the trouble was that you could only apply that Law, if, and only if, the very same constraints that had allowed its extraction were replicated during its use. And this proved to be achievable all over the place.

The extracted Laws were considered to be totally unchangeable Laws-of-Nature, and all complex situations were merely seen as straight forward mixtures of many such fixed laws, added together in various proportions. That universal assumption is the Principle of Plurality!

Now, starting with the work of Hegel, important questions began to be asked about Formal Logic, which was based completely upon this belief in Plurality, as it was becoming increasingly clear that such a method of reasoning did not, and indeed, could not, deal with real Qualitative Changes, and, consequently, couldn't begin to address the evidence for both The Development of the Earth over thousands of millions of years, nor the Origin and subsequent active Evolution of Life.

Now, Hegel was not a scientist, but he was increasingly aware of the weaknesses of a method of reasoning, which couldn't cope with a range of extremely important anomalies, and he, in particular, in his chosen area of study - Thinking about Thought, alighted upon the many logical impasses, generated by the emergence of Dichotomous Pairs of totally contradictory concepts - similar, but far more widespread than the Paradoxes revealed by Zeno of Elea (circa 500 B.C.).

Such impasses always brought Formal Logic to a dead halt, and no amount of reasoning could ever transcend them. In fact, every single one had to be tested pragmatically, by trying each option in turn, to discover which could return them to further formal reasoning.

While Hegel, as an idealist, was limited by a focus on Human Thinking, his findings were revolutionary in two important ways.

At the level of dichotomous impasses in reasoning, he found that it was possible, via thoroughgoing critiques of the assumed premises behind such an impasse, to significantly correct them and precipitate a rational transcending, of such grave flaws in Logic. And, he, purposely, even sought out such Dichotomous Pairs to correct as many as possible.

But, eleven more revolutionary was his even more damning critique of Formal Logic, with its pluralistic belief in eternal Fixed Laws. For, he also roundly condemned its total inability to deal with Qualitative Change and hence Development, and instead energetically pursued what he called a New Logic of Change, or alternatively The Science of Logic!

Such contributions were revolutionary and led to his meta-discipline of Dialectics as a means of dealing with such Changes, which occasionally matured into massive Transformation, which became known as Emergences - where the wholly new emerged, and about which Formal Logic had absolutely nothing to say!

Yes, he was an idealist: but the significance of these discoveries opened up a bridge to the then burgeoning discipline of Science. He, it turned out, could not cross that bridge, but his key disciple, Karl Marx could, and indeed did!

Marx abandoned Idealism, yet carried over the essential gains of Dialectics into a strictly Materialist stance. Dialectical Materialism (Marxism) was born!

Now, our initial question, which prompted this essay, suddenly occupies a much greater space than it did, when in Hegel's idealistic hands.

Marx immediately began to apply it to Human History, and, crucially, began to draw political conclusions.

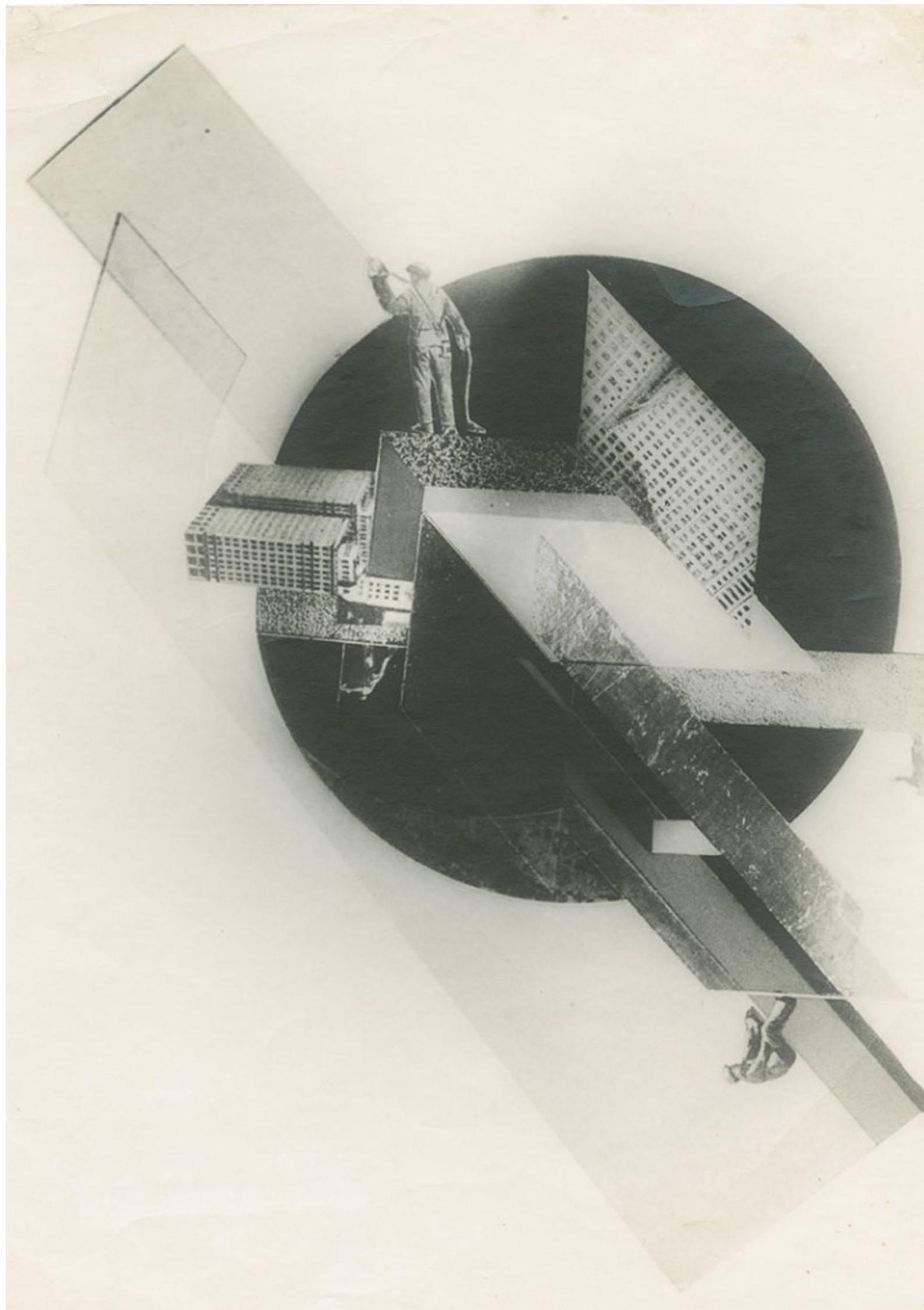
And his carry over of Hegel's Emergences into the Development of Society, immediately focussed upon Social Revolutions: why they occurred, and what they achieved.

Yet, before him lay the vast expanse of human intellectual achievements in a wide variety of areas - all of which would benefit from the methodology of Dialectics. It would, undoubtedly, be the biggest task ever!

Marx focussed upon Economics as his obvious next step, and even that took him many decades to finally result in his master work Das Kapital (Capital) - a thoroughgoing critique of Capitalism.

Marx was preoccupied with primary research AND political activity! He never got the chance to carry over the dialectical methods into the vast majority of





intellectual disciplines, and hence never get around to overtly and adequately describing and explaining both his Ground and his Method.

Indeed, philosophically, the primary task of tackling Science, was never undertaken. He was aware of this major omission and encouraged his colleague Frederick Engels, in several works, but they did not do for Science what Marx had done for History and Economics.

The crucial task was never achieved!

And, now, in the current major crisis of Capitalism, it just has to be done, by attacking, and defeating, the idealist Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Theory And, a root-and-branch review of necessary Ground must be the starting point.

Two areas are immediately evident: one is the application of Dialectical methods to concrete Reality, its study and consequent theories. But, prior to that, there must also be an analysis of the contents and nature of concrete Reality itself.

For example, though it is fairly straight-forward explaining why contradiction arises in the development process of Human Thinking, we clearly also have to show how contradiction emerges with the concrete development of Reality itself, independently of Man's conceptions of it.

Indeed, it is my contention that the full-realisation of The Dialectics of Nature, will also underpin the Dialectics of Human Thinking - after all such Thinking takes place in the brains of human beings, who are totally determined only by the concrete Reality which directed both their origin and consequent development.

Now, such re-establishment of premises and principles, has become vitally important prior-to the necessary assault upon Science, because of the contributions of people like Žižek, whose modern-day contributions are more like those of Hegel than those of Marx, as the latter had demonstrated via his ideas in *Das Kapital*.

Indeed, Žižek's Dialectics seems to be more about Thought, as distinct from Marx's Dialectics, which were about Capital!

NOTE: Now, this is vitally important, because, though committed to Marxism for most of my life, I only realised what Marx was actually doing when I had to solve intractable problems across a very wide range of mostly scientific disciplines, when I was the professional Computer Systems Designer and Programmer, aiding researchers in areas as wide apart as Taxonomy and Nursing, Engineering Test-Rigs, Mathematical Chaos, Computerisation of equipment like the Gas Liquid Chromatograph and even Dance!

Many problems presented themselves, and it was only finally in Multimedia Dance Aids for the teaching of Dance Performance and Choreography, that I realised how Dialectics alone could be employed to deliver exactly what my expert colleague required.

So, before tackling concepts in the Sciences, we must consider concrete Reality itself as a physical, chemical, biological and even social System, and attempt to analyse it in a holistic rather than the usual consensus pluralistic way.

Let us clarify the pluralist assumptions!

That stance assumes that Reality acts in the way that it does due to eternal Natural Laws. These Laws, being inviolate, are what the pluralist scientists seek via their experiments. They then consider that it is by means of a collection of such fixed Laws in various mixes and amounts that produce the next layer of Reality: and so on all the way up to Life, Evolution, Mankind and even Human Thinking.

To a holist, such a fits-all approach is too mechanistic, and incapable of dealing with the actually indisputable Emergences of the wholly New in such Developments.

In contrast, the holist conception - "Everything affects everything else!", surely means something very different? It means that an extracted Law (from experiment) is wedded-inexorably to the context from which it was extracted: change that context, and you change the Law! The pluralist assumption of a fixed Law, assumes that a relation can be totally removed from its producing context, then as an unchangeable Law, be used elsewhere with confidence.

The much more real holist view, in contrast, is that due to the process of farming of such a context, so that the

sought-for Law is displayed clearly, and can therefore be extracted via data measurements over a range of situations. But, what is actually extracted is definitely a simplified version of a real relation that has thus been turned into THE eternal Natural Law.

But, even that isn't all!

Thereafter, the fitting up of that data to a supposedly general, abstract Perfect Form - from Mathematics, takes things even further by idealising the particular instance extracted from a single, arranged-for situation, into a supposedly general, "eternal Natural Law" of sublime mathematical purity!

Now, there are many levels involved prior-to any such extraction, which are usually unknown, or definitely taken from other situations investigated by other scientists. So, in considering what happens holistically we should start with a few assumptions about underlying content.

Important work by the British scientist, Fred Hoyle, explained the almost 100 natural elements known to scientists, as having been the product of a series of phases in Star Development caused by different nuclear fusions in stars - each producing a different element, all of which turn out to have very different properties and affinities for other elements.

Once these are available, along with several even more basic "elementary particles", there becomes possible an even more diverse set of combinations, caused by unions with others to form molecules, and the possible properties then are then vastly multiplied-up, not only to gigantic numbers of different compounds, but also with many, wholly new properties too.

With such a rich mixture of resources and their properties, the possibilities of interactions due to those properties will be diverse, and the rate at which each such interaction, or process, occurs will depend upon the relative proportions of resources required and the differing natures of the active substances to use them.

Now, so far, these primary processes may seem to conform to the pluralist concept, but because of the differences involved in each possible process, governed by the relative abundance or scarcity of the particular resources required, they will no longer conform to

those assumptions. And, also, in addition, the relative abundance or scarcity of the processes that could happen as consequent products.

And, as these could be happening at differing rates in different local circumstances, the very consequent actions of the various processes will unavoidably change the relative proportions of resources - either due to being used up, or even added-to by being products of other possible processes.

And, quite apart from the then primary processes of available entities affecting one another, there will be the possibilities of actual processes being either conducive to others, by producing what the other may require, or instead maybe competing with others, that require the very same resource.

Also, as complication is further compounded via actual systems of conducive processes - linked perhaps in chains or even loops (cycles), and all happening while others can intervene in such systems by stealing intermediate products required in such necessarily-linked sets of processes.

Now, as already suggested, the local situations will be changing in contents and relative proportions all the time, even though overall things may average out into something predictable. Yet, depending upon local contents, it is also possible, and in some circumstances likely, that particular systems of processes will "hog-resources" and hence out compete rivals for the same requirements. The classic "Random Mix", with predictable overall outcomes, will be replaced and even dominated by one or more key systems. And, such situations can persist, as rival systems are deprived of the resources to compete with those that dominate.

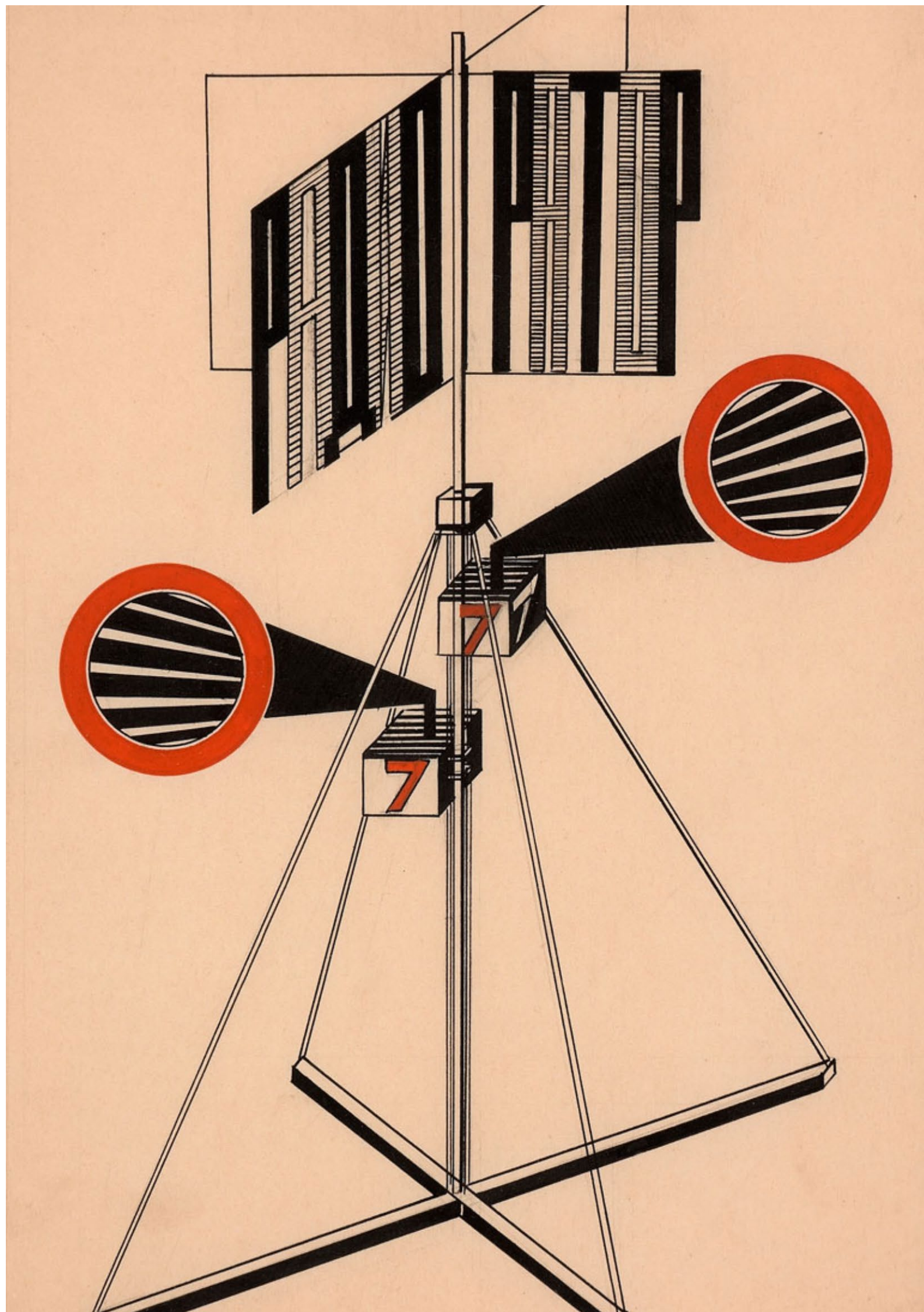
NOTE: It is absolutely crucial to say in what researches the above ideas were formulated, for it certainly wasn't in Physics, but in a very important area - Biology, in the Origin of Life on Earth.

Clearly, Darwin's Natural Selection could not be relevant when considering non-living processes. So, the primary task was similar to the reasoning outlined above; what, indeed, would be the trajectory of development in a complex mix of non-living primary processes, and consequent diverse systems of such processes?

This theorist developed the more general Truly Natural Selection, which was about the interactions, competition and even cooperation between chemical and non-living processes.

Key developments due to the linking of conducive processes and systems into chains and even loops made more sense in moving towards Life than any recourse to mere Random Chance.

Now, all these theories have been described elsewhere in more detail than can be included here. But, clearly, you won't get too many mathematical physicists seeking out dialectical treatises on the Origin of Life, so a suitably sufficient mention had to be included here.



Why Do Dialectics Emerge?

What, in concrete reality, leads to Dialectical features in revealed Natural Relations at absolutely every Level?

Since Hegel, and then Marx, the idea of Dialectics has emerged as a significant feature, first of Human Thinking, and then, in a revolutionary way, concerning the whole nature and development of all aspects of concrete Reality itself.

Now, not everyone agrees with this, or at best they accept only a part of such a claimed scope.

But, as with all discoveries of real merit, there is always a strong temptation to make literally everything fit-the-New-View. So, it is clearly unavoidable, but also necessary, that all such conceptions must be taken to the limit to correctly define their scope. And, crucially, thereby, begin to understand "Why?" each new view leads to real Objective Content.

And, this stance certainly did not, by any means, conquer all past and present philosophers. And, in addition, even fewer scientists were moved to take it on - for it ran directly-counter to their long-established, indeed often founding, assumptions, premises, and even their relied-upon, and universally-employed experimental methods.

Many pre-Hegel thinkers saw things very differently indeed, and many aspects of that long-persisting, historical approach are still dominant in many different areas of current intellectual study.

Apart from supernatural origins, which we can surely dispense with, forthwith, we will certainly have to address these earlier formulisations, as they, very clearly, not only continue to pertain somewhere, but can still be used, with an undoubted measure of success, to this day, but only as long as the determining-conditions that are arranged-for, are entirely appropriate, and steadfastly maintained throughout.

So, to get a real feel for the unavoidable trajectory of development of Mankind's attempt to Understand-its-World, we have to start with the earliest approach, which we now call Pragmatism, that "in a nutshell" can be seen as:- "If it works, it is right!"

This successful principle long preceded what we now call Science - for it has nothing to do with Understanding, but only with clearly-identified, and accurately-described processes - which can indeed "be-thereafter-employed-to-some-useful-end"!

For, Man always was an intelligent, able and flexible user of anything they came across, and they also successfully bent most revealed natural entities and phenomena to their needs, if they possibly could.

The question "Why?", even way back when, did occur, but the actual Knowledge of Man was, for millennia, totally insufficient to deliver either any achievable explanations, or any consequent reasoning.

So, in such circumstances, the Process itself became the "cause", and as it didn't always work as expected, there arose a set of prescriptions about what was to be used, coupled with under what circumstances, and also involving an essential set of "incantations" to elicit a favourable outcome via appeals to The Gods, or other magical powers.

Even, during-and-after the colossal gains of the Neolithic Revolution, such "Magical Rites" persisted and even grew, for they certainly made the retention of all the right-moves easier to remember and employ.

They were not completely discarded until the beginnings of a reinvigorated Experimental Science, which attempted to reveal the essential physical circumstances,

and, within them, the real concrete Causes for studied phenomena. Science meant that many new things, once merely seen as “differently-coloured-rocks” became, instead, named-resources (ores) for producing important products like Tin, Copper, and Iron.

So, instead of spiritual appeals and rituals, things changed into well-described processes, and causal-relationships began to be attached to these wonderful techniques.

Things could no longer come out of Nothing.

They had to require specific causes.

And, very soon, a more complex metal, like Bronze, was discovered with more than one producing “Ore”, to give a sharper edge and more strength to their “alloyed” products.

Mankind was set upon a new path, seeking out the “Elements” that made up all things, and these became an ever growing list, from which new possible processes could be tried, and occasionally established.

It was still mere Alchemy, long before it became Science: but ultimately there arose a stance termed Natural Philosophy, which began to be applied to long unaddressed phenomena - such as the motions of so-called Planets - “wanderers” about the unchanging celestial dome of the stars.

But, the various Principles that were devised to be applicable, to all studied phenomena, were simply not true: nor could they be at that stage.

But, they would work in certain situations, that were adjusted and manipulated in certain ways - so, following such successes, they were mistakenly, generalised to apply to absolutely everything.

On some new elements these methods worked, while on others they didn't. Mankind, pragmatically of course, kept to those that did, and began to gather various different series of reliable processes that “seemed to define” a reliable, overall approach.

Experiments were limited to those that seemed-to-fit, and a narrow, yet often useable, definition of The Nature of Things began to grow.

This was still, at least in part, pure Pragmatism, and it still exists in diverse forms, and in many areas, to the present day.

Indeed, it is the credo of what were, and are still, called technicians, who always delight in knowing “How?”, but couldn't care less about “Why?”

Nevertheless, a growing number of the Natural Philosophers also wanted to know “Why?”, and to apply their extracted hypotheses as to why things happen into wholly new areas - and occasionally they worked effectively, in at least some of them.

They began to seek new Elements, and, thereafter, try to find their properties and their potentialities.

True Science was born, but its philosophical basis was still an eclectic mess: it certainly was not yet really and soundly philosophically established!

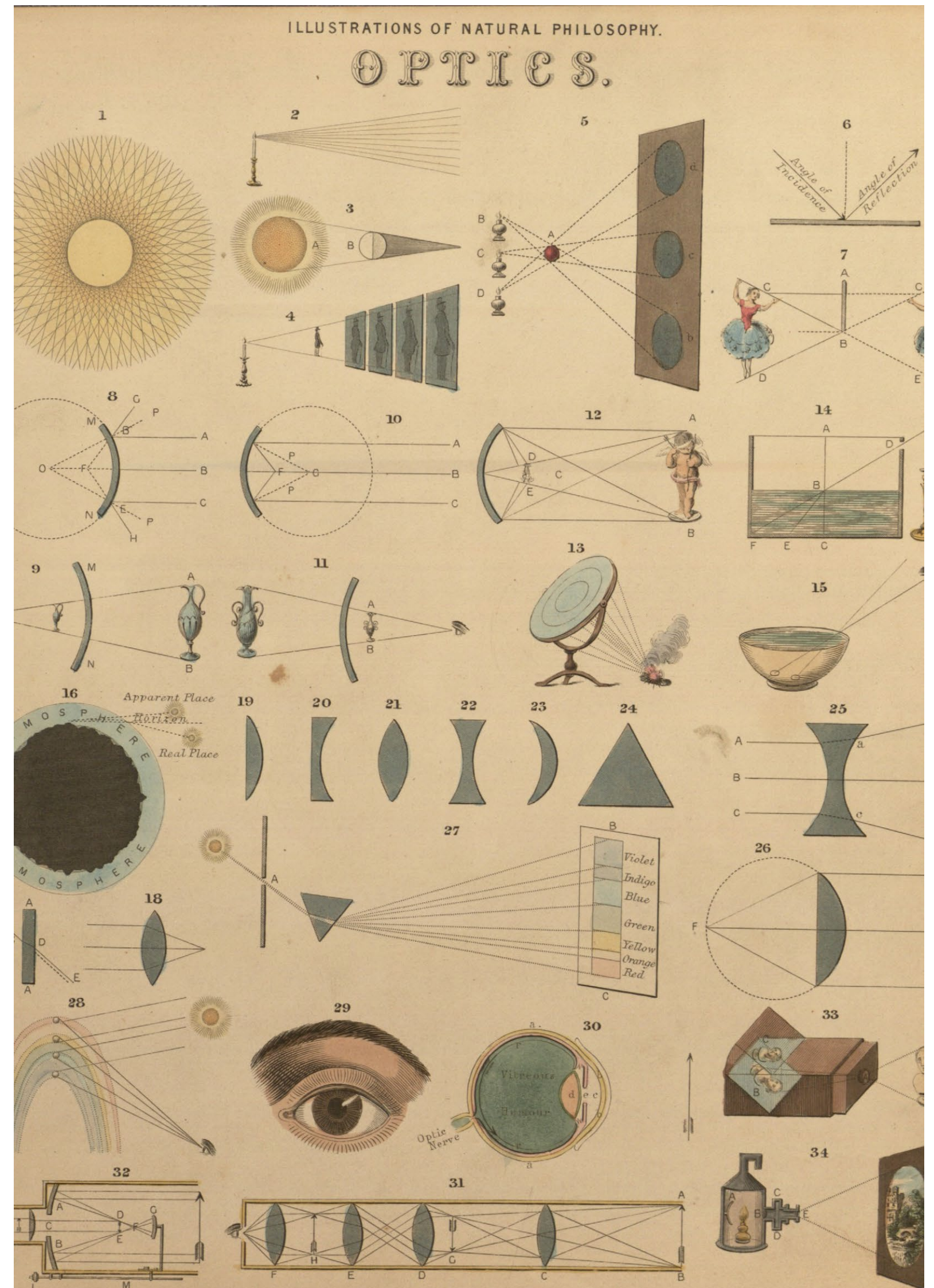
Gradually, sequences of causes and effects began to be linked together, in more complex explanations, and the Principle of Reductionism was devised and widely accepted as the appropriate guide to ever fuller Explanations.

Ultimately, it was believed that a sequence of causes could be unearthed - one-below-the-other, which would, in time, arrive at the bottommost substances, from which everything could be produced.

And, coupled with this was the considered-to-be-essential Principle of Plurality, which saw all known relations between Causes & Effects as Natural Laws, that were also eternal, and could be merely added together in various proportions to produce absolutely Everything that exists.

These principles, though assaulted on all sides, STILL survive to this day, and have finally halted Science, as a consistent, and comprehensive interpreter of phenomena in many important areas.

Indeed, the Logic employed presented many situations, in which the required and usually available rationally-decided-choices appeared to be totally unavailable - situations where Dichotomous Pairs of contradictory concepts seemed to be equally applicable. But, at the same time, absolutely no incontestable reasons were



available for the correct choice to be made. Naturally, the “old-and-reliable” pragmatism was employed - trying each alternative to see which one “had-the-legs-to, thereafter, allow a continuation of the reasoning. It could thereby lead to intended outcomes, but they were NOT the result of continuous sequences of reasoning based upon the supposed Natural Laws.

Hence, all such Theory was full of rational holes - patched by pragmatic, rather than explained, links at some of the necessary steps.

The most dramatic example, currently, is in Sub Atomic Physics, where attempted Explanatory Theory led to the same entity being dealt with sometimes as a Particle, while at others like an Extended Wave - the infamous Wave/Particle Duality delivered a contradiction that simply couldn't be theoretically resolved.

The chosen answer was to abandon Physical Explanation entirely, and wholly replace it by Formulae and Rules-of-thumb, to achieve the required results - and then, quite wrongly, call that Theory: it is no such thing - it is, at best, merely a succinct and useable description, but it cannot, and indeed never can, say “Why?”

Clearly, there was something very wrong in the universally applied stance and methods, which had brought Science to this terminal rationally-undevelopable state, not only once but all over the place.

Clearly, this had both to be diagnosed and corrected, for real Understanding to proceed. But, it never was, in either Philosophy or in Science!

For, since its initial discovery and employment in his famous Paradoxes, by Zeno of Elea, 2,500 years ago, a pragmatic get-around known then, and as described above, has ever since been re-employed whenever such Dichotomous Pairs emerged in reasoning.

Both alternatives were tried and the one which led onto further rational developments was taken as “the right choice” - even though no rational reason had been revealed.

It took a further 2,300 years after Zeno for Hegel to consciously decide to address this important flaw in Formal Logic. And, his extended period of research into Thinking about Thought came up with a damning

criticism of Formal Logic. It certainly couldn't ever cope with Qualitative Changes. And, even ordinary everyday Thinking that arrives at something wholly new, could not be explained within the usual methods of reasoning - for NO way could the “wholly new” be purely-rationally derived. They were just “added-in” to the current content without rational-justification.

Now, Hegel knew this to be incorrect!

The usual “solution” was yet another pragmatic addition. He knew that he, personally, actually arrived at new ideas by reasoning, but it wasn't mere Formal Logic. It involved, what he termed a Logic of Change, and he determined to reveal what was involved, and create such a new Logic himself.

Now, of course, Hegel was an Idealist, so he put Thought first - therefore, he was, unavoidably limited to the processes and rationally-arrived-at products of Thinking and nothing else.

Of course, when you do that, you set yourself an impossible agenda, for everything has to arise only out of prior thoughts, wholly-new-things have no source in such a schema.

You have a closed system driven by fixed Laws and it can only use these, and nothing else to reveal “all possibilities”.

Of course, nevertheless, Thinkers do introduce new ideas, but they handle them only in the prescribed ways. They cannot deliver the origins of their additions, and, if pressed, attempt to explain then in terms of established ideas via the inadequate means of Formal Logic.

Needless to say, even Hegel didn't succeed with his chosen undertaking - but, his best student had a solution!

The actual source of the wholly New was the Real Concrete World outside the Thinker: a solution to the impasses generally would only be possible if the stance was changed from Idealism to Materialism, and the necessary processes-used extended to include concrete investigations in the Real World.

That student was Karl Marx, and he changed his philosophical ground into what he termed Dialectical Materialism - using the methods which Hegel had

established within Thinking in a very much wider realm - including all of Physical Reality too. In other words, the sources of new concepts would be there in studies of concrete Reality itself. Philosophy would have to be extended to include Science!

And, by establishing crucial links between Thoughts and concrete Reality, he even found the same features in concrete Reality that Hegel had revealed for Thinking alone!

Now, Hegel, being an Idealist, couldn't do that, but he could very carefully seek answers within Thinking, and he did make a significant breakthrough. It was, of course, his attempt to deal with Dichotomous Pairs, and the consequent unavoidable impasses in ordinary Logical Reasoning.

He discovered that situations that led to these impasses, always, in connected reasoning, had assumed-premises, and he decided that it was in these that the problem lay.

His task, then, was, therefore, for any Dichotomous Pair, to reveal those premises, in full, and work out which were either wrong or even missing, and then by a correcting adjustment of those premises, he would not get an impasse, as previously, but instead a straight-forward fork in reasoning, at which a strictly rational decision was possible to correctly and easily transcend the difficulty.

Hegel realised that instead of either:-

1. ignoring the impasse and getting around it purely pragmatically, or
2. Trying to determine which arm was “primary”

- he would, instead, seek out Dichotomous Pairs, AND their necessary premises, in order to, if possible, reveal and correct those premises to always attempt to clear a pathway for a clear, consistent and comprehensive form of Reasoning - to address absolutely Everything.

Of course, it turned out to be an infinite, onerous and debilitating task - the same processes would have to be followed at each and every impasse, which repeated forever. And, was actually impossible within any current incomplete state of Knowledge.

So, a half-way house alternative was proposed which constantly re-stated the problem by always first finding, and then juxtaposing the absolute opposite to every concept! So, to every Thesis, he required an Antithesis, and it was then up to the individual involved to attempt a particular Synthesis.

Now, this wasn't a means to the same end at all!

Indeed, the contradiction began to be taken as only being such, because the contributions of these opposite concepts to the actual problem were not being adequately considered. So, instead of a flat sought-for Reality, the task became a Struggle of Opposites, either side of which could dominate in their particular selecting circumstances.

It also, introduced a “kind” of dynamic for Events of Significant Change, if there were embedded in a situation Two-Direct-Opposites, which, with a changing situation, could lead to an seemingly-irrational transformation.

The simplified tenets arose:-

**Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis
Extremes Meet
Quantity into Quality**

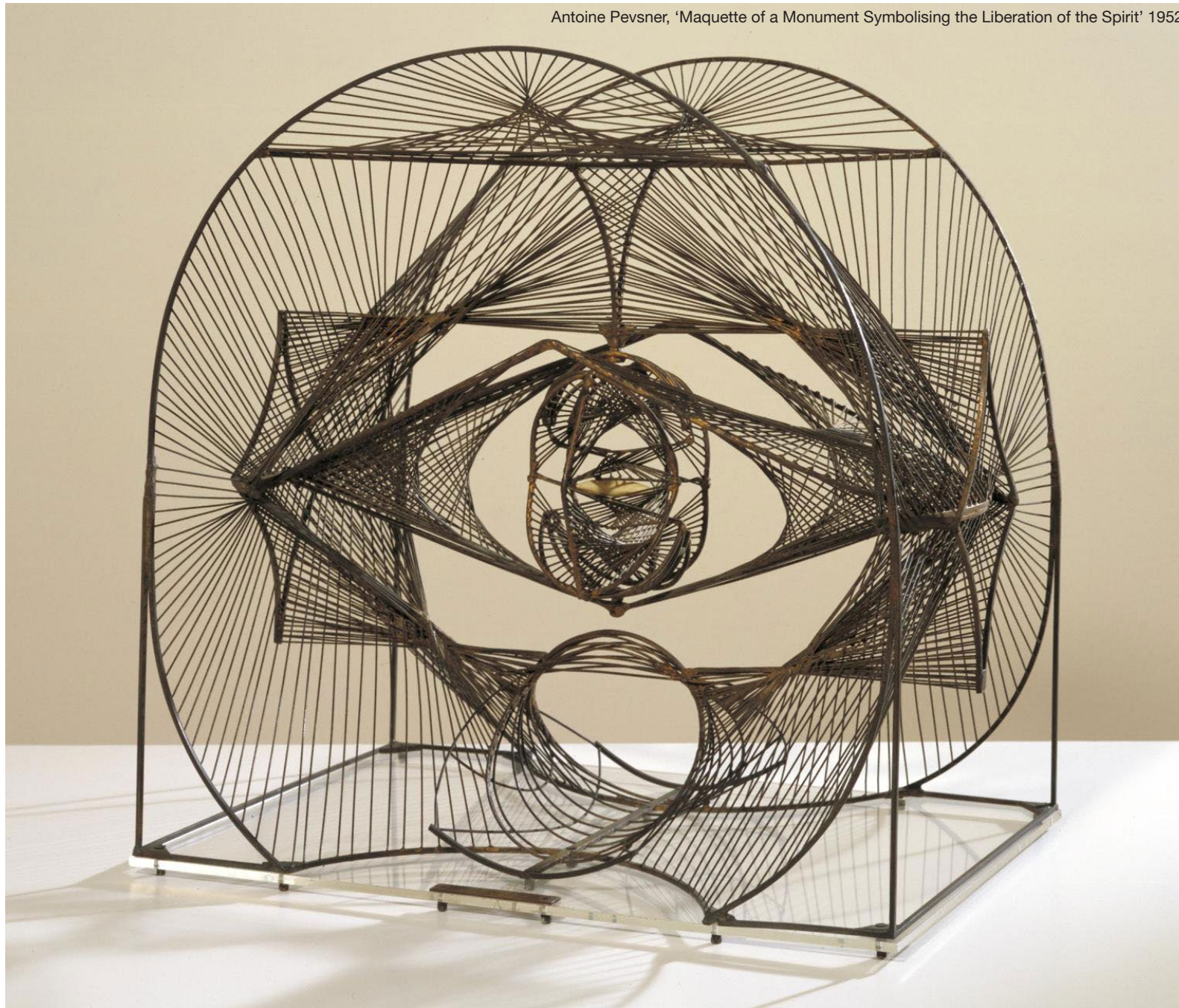
And, beware, many a false “dialectical argument” has been constructed upon such tenets.

Only Marx, with his Dialectical Materialism, could take such arguments beyond Human Thought, and consider concrete Reality too. He couldn't, of course, do it with every impasse in Thought, but Marx applied the approach to the History of Human Societies, and took the things to be considered away from mere conceptions alone.

By vastly widening the scope of Hegel's discoveries, he also extended the sources of possible causes of contradiction, and hence made it about Reality-in-General!

Now, in this attempt to get to the bottom of Real Contradiction, we, of course, have still to go very much deeper, and explain why contradiction is so important, and why it emerges at every single Level in Reality!

And, in so doing, we will surely arrive once more at Hegel's paramount problem with Formal Logic -



namely its inability to deal with Qualitative Change, Development, Evolution and finally Revolution too!

And, perhaps surprisingly, the beginnings of a solution came not from Science, Philosophy or Dialectics, but from a detailed Holistic study of the Origin and Evolution of Life on Earth.

Origins?

The Key Phase, in that Origin, had to be in the transition within an initially, purely non-living, chemical world of a different kind of process possessing the very first instances of an extremely primitive form of Life!

These entities would have been very different to any that survive today, but, surprisingly, rather than having only a very-weak, precarious existence, they would have survived, and grown in numbers, for the very opposite reasons: as "chemical-systems" they would have been more vigorous and strongly-persisting than other simpler chemical systems that surrounded them, and competed with them on all sides, for the very same resources. For, these new systems would both grow faster, and persist better, than everything else.

Clearly, at such a stage, we are not yet talking about Evolution: these systems would be mostly chemical, but, for some reason, were also exceedingly persistent, and could very quickly grow in numbers of individual

processes. Even after a major calamity, they would also have some significant advantage over ordinary chemical processes - perhaps with access to energy not so easily available to the usual purely chemical processes, surrounding them.

Now, of course, we don't know anything about these initial systems, but from what certainly happened later in their vast History (it is reckoned that such a period must have spanned around 3,000,000,000 years and is characterised crucially by what we call Evolution).

Now, clearly, our earliest "living systems" could not yet do that: Evolution involves living-competition, and the first entity would have no living competitors - only ordinary chemical processes to contend with.

So, initially, its success would be in the increasing amount of its actual substance. It would, because of its advantage(s), become locally abundant.

No evolutionary change could yet be possible!

And yet, the presence of this successful variant system would actually, in time, change the nature of its local environment: and hence it would also convert itself from being an odd variant, among a population of purely chemical processes, to becoming more of a context-for those individual chemical processes, at least locally.

And, this would ultimately have two different effects.

First, it could, and often did, affect the conditions for those other strictly chemical processes!

and

Second, it could compromise its own growth or even existence by separating areas-of-itself, progressively, by-itself, from the crucial resources it essentially required.

Now, such obvious and physically simple constraints would begin to put various limitations upon our almost-living systems' future, and increasingly define the best situations for optimum success.

It may have been limited to only surface positions on solid stable substances, or even to extensions in length rather than in area, or volume.

Certainly, once in existence, and proliferating, it would certainly encounter successively-less conducive conditions, either natural, due to local surrounding substances, or even due to its own dominating presence.

Conducive Circumstances?

But, before we go any further, it is clearly essential that we clarify those optimum conditions (as best we can from where we are trying to visualise this never experienced situation), for the appearance and continuation of life to have actually and finally occurred.

The extremes of within a star or so-called Empty Space would certainly prohibit the sort of developments we are considering, and the very presence of life over billions of years on Earth points strongly to a planetary origin. But, of course, not on any planet, and not in all possible conditions.

The primary states of Matter - namely Solid, Liquid and Gas certainly will present many very different constraints upon life's origins. Perhaps the main one is the capability of movement for our life-scrapes, not initially via its own means of locomotion, but, passively, due to the nature of its context.

Movement through a solid is not conducive, but it is certainly possible both in liquids and in Gases. But, within a gas, seems too agitated an environment, while a liquid would certainly be significantly better. Yet, we also know Life did originate on Earth, so, perhaps, we are considering a context with both solid-for-stability, and a liquid with currents and tides for passive transportation, as the most conducive situation.

And, clearly, the simplest common liquid, Water (H₂O) would require a very constrained range of temperatures for it to remain liquid, at least somewhere. And, only large amounts (as in oceans) to both cause currents and tides, and allow the necessary movements to ensure that life will find where-it-needs-to-be.

Clearly, Stanley Miller in his famous Experiment considered these conditions too, and constructed his transparent-yet-sealed apparatus, containing what he knew of the Earth's primeval atmosphere, as well as water. He sealed them absolutely from our own contaminating environment, and adding-in only heat (from a supposed Sun) and electrical sparks (from supposed Lightning).

He also included a condenser to turn water vapour back into liquid water - via "rain".

He set his sealed apparatus in motion, and left it to see what would happen.

Within only one week, when he inspected his apparatus from the outside, he saw that the contained liquid water had turned brown-red, which upon subsequent analysis was shown to contain amino acids - crucial building blocks in the subsequent DNA of present-day living things. It was an excellent demonstration, if undevelopable at that time.

NOTE: the writer of this paper, Jim Schofield, has devised a whole system consisting of a sequence of experiments - each devised from the lessons learned from its predecessor, and all of them developed from Miller's prototype, but using inactive barriers to channel internal flows and with non-intrusive regularly-timed monitors, positioned at intervals along these channels, to deliver, each time, a "changing" account of what was happening. Each experiment was designed only to provide appropriate data for following re-designs of the inactive channelling. It would, overall, be a major and expensive undertaking, but certainly worth it!

But, returning to the topology of potential situations for early Life to occur, we have to consider all interactions, whether non-living or our early forms of Life, in various topological contexts, and also consider the consequent non-living development of such contexts - entirely due to their own intrinsic multiple processes, and passive distributions, as well as the possibility of stable niches, that were possible due to stationary, immersed solids to provide protected enclaves to allow a wide range of early possibilities to be tested-first, in the most conducive situations.

Admittedly, such wide ranging requirements may seem inhibiting, but as has been proved with Miller's foray into his area, and possibly also by Schofield's suggested developments, well-designed experiments in developmental sequences, could be employed here too!

I am drawn to returning to an earlier pre-Life stage to consider the development of multiple, non-living processes, all requiring resources and delivering products, BUT, involving no pre-existing purposes: in other words, entirely determined by what was available, and what was

possible within the available contexts. You can see why a liquid (water) medium would facilitate maximal mixing, and hence present the widest possible range of conditions and possibilities. And, if we assume large numbers of possible processes, we can, (even long before Life) still consider what I have termed Truly Natural Selection occurring at the pre-life level.

Indeed, such developments and the topology in which they occurred, would be invaluable both in our originally stated objective, and perhaps also in revealing the concrete (rather than intellectual) origins of relationships such as Opposition - directly opposite processes, and at higher levels perhaps Dialectics too!

[You can see why this writer, being a scientist, as well as a philosopher, would naturally be drawn to such extended objectives being considered.]

So, following the above extensive, though absolutely-necessary detour, perhaps we can, in the sorts of contexts considered above, begin to address the origins of Dialectics, at a non-intellectual, and hence purely concrete, purely materialist, level!

That is, of course, within concrete Reality and its natural processes - the ideal context for such considerations to be explored has to be a maximally varied, maximally mobile, and rich environment.

Let us assume a body of liquid water, with a history (at least) of access to further stretches of water, solid land, and interchanges with a global atmosphere. Such a context would guarantee, a maximal number of dissolved molecules, and even suspended tiny solid particles, and thus ensure a truly large range of processes going on simultaneously.

Needless to say, these processes will not be going on entirely independently of one another. In our Holist World, they would constantly affect one another, and, even in some circumstances, promote both conducive (supportive) relations, while also causing inhibitions due to competition for the same resources. Indeed the original primitives - formed in specific conditions will soon encounter other processes - some entirely complementary, and hence allowing combined sequences, while others potentially competing for the same resources and being detrimental to one another.



DAMIÁN ORTEGA, Controller of the Universe, 2007

And, in the latter situations one or the other may dominate, or an active balance between them may be caused.

Clearly, in a complex and chaotic mix of multiple different processes, one significant determinant will be such diametrical oppositions - indeed Opposites!

NOTE: Indeed, such totally opposite processes have been used in research to get oscillating pairs of processes, which with differing colours, have enabled the solution of the actual nature of reaction-fronts in liquids, which revealed them to be in the form of Toroidal Scrolls - the maths was done by a friend and colleague of mine, Jagan Gomatam, when we worked together in Glasgow Caledonian University.

While, at the same time, the majority of other processes may be so random as to present a general background "noise", minimally affecting both each other and our opposing pair.

But the opposites, which, though competing, are likely to be producing very different products, will certainly affect one another, and in dominance-outcomes change things for the context in general.

Indeed, we must consider a range of outcomes for these opposing processes, ranging between the dominance of one, via various proportions of each, in a particular, possibly-oscillating, balance, all the way to the dominance of the other exactly opposite process!

Let us consider the trajectory of such a relationship over time.

The usual changes will be towards one or the other's dominance, which are likely to persist once established. Indeed, it will require quite major changes elsewhere in the local mix to challenge a current dominance, and perhaps, in quite a short period of major transformation, flip the situation over to the dominance of the other alternative.

Now, such considerations may seem unlikely to prove anything, but that would be a mistake.

Another product of Hegel's Dialectics was "The Emergence of the Wholly New", and with Marx's revolutionary transference of these to a Materialist stance, he could include Chemical, Physical, Biological and Social Emergences of the wholly New too. Indeed, at much higher levels, Marx explained Social Revolutions in just such terms.

This paper is certainly NO pluralist attempt to explain the higher in terms of the lower, and, indeed lowest-of-all levels, but does indicate clear resonances at all the different levels, with ever more novelty as things developed.

In a hierarchy of such Levels, the most primitive examples of the change-overs will be easily repeatable. But, as things complicate, with a regular increase in wholly new additions, such repeatability will become ever more difficult, and at some point become impossible - that is it will cease to be "exactly repeatable" - for the outcomes will get more and more different, and future significant changeovers will be from very different contexts from their immediate predecessors.

Now, another significant kind of process will also be changing its initial context from a merely additive set of primary processes, to something increasingly more complex. For, in addition, individual, conducive processes will be effectively joining together, where the product from one becomes the resource for the other. The basic nature of their successes will be the same: for as Process-A increases, it will also cause the consequent increase in the linked Process-B. And not only in pairings, but even in longer chains, and occasionally in the closed loops of processes, that will also occur.

Independent primary processes will gradually form Systems-of-Processes. And, these too will also tend to have opposites - that is systems that do the opposite, so similar possibilities could occur as did with primitive processes.

But, in addition the survival of a system of processes could be challenged in a new way. For, the chains of a system don't always involve only the linked-product-resource kind, but others too, and if these are taken away by a competing process, the whole system can begin to

be dismantled. These spoilers are termed dissociative, indeed parasitic processes, and they will become increasingly important as things develop ever further.

The point, I am making is that though some patterns will recur at higher levels, many will be changed and make exactly-repeated oppositional flips less and less likely. Indeed, by the time we consider Human Societies, the major changeovers - Revolutions, can never be exactly repeated, and both successful, and even failed, revolutions will always permanently change both what is produced by it, and the nature of any future Revolution. For, too much has been transformed for things to be ever returned to their prior states.

Clearly, there is still much to be addressed in this area. And though many phases of the overall trajectory are beyond our reach at present, much can be done in the still accessible areas, such as in the study of past revolutions (the works of Michelet, Marx and Trotsky come immediately to mind). But, also, with a steadfast holistic stance, and incisive and innovative thinking, new forms of experiment can be devised to research particular past developments, often in an imaginative "transferred" context (here the brilliant "Walker" contributions of the French scientist Yves Couder come to mind, as does the mathematical researches of the writer of this paper, with his demonstration of the appearance of Double Helices, as in DNA, in his "Soma Strand").

POSTSCRIPT: For those interested in more detail of Jim Schofield's theoretical work, it is all freely available in the soon-to-reach 100 Issues (eight years) of SHAPE Journal.

Jim Schofield is a scientist, I.T. specialist and Marxist philosopher. He has some 50 years experience teaching in all levels of Education, especially in multi-discipline work, in Hong Kong, Glasgow, London, Leicester, Leeds and Bedford, the last 24 has been spent entirely in research.





Notes on *The Limits of Hegel* by Slavoj Žižek

Part I critical notes by Jim Schofield

SZ: Let us jump in medias res and confront the question head-on: can Hegel think the notion which, according to Lacan, condenses all the paradoxes of the Freudian field, the notion of the non-All?

If we take “Hegel” as the ridiculous textbook figure of an absolute idealist who, under the headline “the Whole is the True;” claims to integrate the entire wealth of the universe into the totality of rational self-mediation, then the answer is, of course, a resounding NO!

If, however, we take into account the true nature of the Hegelian totality - that it designates a Whole - plus all its “symptoms; the excesses which do not fit into its frame, antagonisms which ruin its consistency, and so on - then the answer becomes more blurred.

JS: Of course the real flaw in Hegel is the idealist mistake that “the totality of rational mediation” or Formal Reasoning alone can deliver Reality. So the answer to the question isn't just blurred: it is still a resounding NO!

Here is an Improvised List of what Hegel “cannot think”; a series of concepts mostly elaborated by psychoanalysis and Marxism:-

Repetition; the unconscious; overdetermination; object a; matherne/letter (science and mathematics); lalangue; antagonism (parallax); class struggle; sexual difference. 1

Upon a closer look, however, it becomes clear that one should be very precise about what Hegel “cannot do”: it is never a question of simple impossibility or inability. There is, in all these cases, a tiny, imperceptible line of

separation which compels us to supplement the assertion of impossibility with a qualifying “yes, but . . .”

Hegel does (indeed) think Repetition, but not a pure non-productive one, not a “mechanical” repetition, which just strives for more of the same: his notion of repetition always-involves sublation; in other words, through repetition, something is idealized, transformed from an immediate contingent reality to a notional universality (Caesar dies as a person and becomes a universal title); or, at least, through repetition, the necessity of an event is confirmed (Napoleon had to lose twice to get the message that his time was over, that his first defeat was not just an accident). The fact that Hegel misses the excess of purely mechanical repetition, in no way implies that he is excessively focused on the New (the progress which takes place through idealizing *Aufhebung*) - on the contrary, bearing in mind that the radically New emerges only through pure repetition, we should say that Hegel’s inability to think pure repetition is the obverse of his inability to think the radically New, that is, a New, which is not potentially already in the Old, and has just to be brought out into the open through the work of dialectical deployment.

Unless Zizek is going to relate mechanical repetition (as in most science) and Emergence, the question posed cannot be answered.

Hegel does also think the unconscious, but it is the formal unconscious, the transcendental universal form of what I am doing, as opposed to the immediate particular content, which is the focus of my attention - to take the most elementary example from the beginning of the *Phenomenology*: when I say “Now!” I mean this particular moment, but what I say is every now, and the truth is in what I say.

The Freudian unconscious is, on the contrary, is the unconscious of particular contingent associations, and links - to take a classic Freudian example, when his patient dreams about a funeral she attended the previous day, the “unconscious” of this dream was the totally contingent fact that, at the funeral, the dreamer had met an old flame for whom she still cared.

Linked to this is the impossibility, for Hegel, of thinking overdetermination: Hegel can think it, but only in the formal sense of a universal genus which includes itself as its own species and thus encounters, among its species,

itself in its “oppositional determination.”

What he cannot think is the complex network of particular links organized along the lines of condensation, displacement, and so on

Isn't it just that he is not a materialist, and hence looks for absolutely everything in Thought alone? If Zizek is arguing FOR Hegel's real contribution, he won't find it in extending what Hegel's idealist approach can do. Otherwise, why did first Feuerbach and then Marx turn to materialism?

In more general terms, the Hegelian process always deals with radical clear cut (re)solutions; what is totally foreign to it is the Freudian logic of pragmatic and opportunistic compromises-something is rejected, but not quite, since it returns in a Ciphred mode; it is rationally accepted, but isolated or neutralized in its full symbolic weight and so on and so forth. We thus get a mad dance of distortions which follow no clear univocal logic, but form a patchwork of improvised connections.

Recall the legendary case of the forgetting of the name Signorelli from Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*: Freud could not recall the name of the painter of the Orvieto frescos and produced as substitutes the names of two other painters, Botticelli and Boltraffio; his analysis of the blockage brings to light the signifying associations which linked Signorelli to Botticelli and Boltraffio (the Italian village of Trafoi was where he received the message informing him of the suicide of one of his patients, who had been struggling with sexual problems; Herr, the German word for Mister-Signor - is linked to a trip to Herzegovina, where an old Muslim had told Freud that if one can no longer have sex, then there is no reason to go on living). The complex rhizomatic texture of such associations and displacements has no clear triadic structure with a clear final resolution; the result of the tension between “thesis” (the name Signorelli) and “anti-thesis” (its forgetting) is the compromise-formation of falsely remembering two other names in which (and this is their crucial feature) the dimension on account of which Freud was unable to remember Signorelli (the link between sex and death) returns in an even more conspicuous way.

If such omissions in Hegel as this are to be considered important, it tells you what is also considered to be missing in Marxism too, and hence Žižek's job to bring it in!

There is no place for such logic in Hegel, who would have dismissed Freud's example as a game of trifling contingencies. The Freudian negation of negation is not a radical resolution of a deadlock, but, in its basic guise, the "return of the repressed" and, as such, by definition, a compromise-formation: something is asserted and simultaneously denied, displaced, reduced, encrypted in an often ridiculously ad hoc way.

Am I right in noticing the absence of the idea of a Dichotomous Pair of contradictory concepts, and their resolution via a study and correction of the premises which delivered them both?

Hegel does think a kind of "object a", but it is merely the contingent singularity, to which the rational totality clings-like the state clings to the monarch - or the indifferent pretext for a struggle.

For example, one way for the subject to demonstrate its autonomy is for it to be ready to put everything, even its life, at stake for some minor object: although this object is in itself unimportant, its very indifference signals that what the struggle is about is the subject's dignity and autonomy, not its interests.

This, however, is not yet the material remainder, to which the subject's very consistency clings: Hegel does propose the formula "the Spirit is a bone;" but as the absolute contradiction, not as a little bit of the real constitutive of subjectivity.

Although one finds in Hegel's texts surprising evocations of jouissance (Geniessen, not just pleasure, Lust)-for example, Geniessen of the believer is for him the true goal of religious rituals - there is no place in his thought for jouissance as the Real, as a substance (the only substance recognized by psychoanalysis).

Insofar as jouissance is Real and truth is symbolic, one should add that, in Hegel's notional space, there is also no place for the gap that separates Truth from the Real - or, as Lacan put it succinctly: "The true or the real? At this level, everything is set up as if these two terms are



synonymous. But the unpleasant thing is that they are not . . . When we are dealing with the real, the true is in divergence:'2

Here (as elsewhere), and as is always the case, in a properly dialectical misrecognition, what Hegel does not see is not simply some post-Hegelian dimension totally beyond his grasp, but the very "Hegelian" dimension of the analyzed phenomenon.

For example, what Marx demonstrates in Capital is how the self-reproduction of capital obeys the logic of the Hegelian dialectical process of a substance-subject which retroactively posits its own presuppositions. Marx designates capital as "an automatically active character" - an inadequate translation of the German words used by Marx to characterize capital as "automatischem Subjekt;" "automatic subject;" an oxymoron uniting living subjectivity and dead automatism. This is what capital is: a subject, but an automatic one, not a living one.

Can Hegel think this "monstrous mixture;" a process of subjective self-mediation and retroactive positing of presuppositions, which, as it were, gets caught in a substantial "spurious infinity;" a subject which itself becomes an alienated substance? Perhaps, this same limitation also accounts for Hegel's inadequate understanding of mathematics, his reduction of mathematics to the very model of the abstract "spurious infinity:'



What Hegel was unable to see is how, like the speculative movement of capital in Marx, modern mathematics also displays the same “monstrous mixture of the good infinity and the bad infinity”: the “bad infinity” of repetition combined with the “true infinity” of self-relating paradoxes.

No modern science can be reduced to mathematical formalism since it always includes also a minimum of empirical testing and measuring which introduce the aspect of contingency - no one knows in advance what the measurements will show. This element is missing in mathematics, where the contingency is limited to the selection or positing of the axioms with which the theoretician begins, and all that follows are the rational consequences of those axioms. Even such an “abstract” science like quantum physics, in which dense positive materiality is dissolved into the pure virtuality of quantum waves, has to expose itself to measurement. Modern science from Galileo to quantum physics is thus characterized by two connected features: mathematization (the statements to be proven are mathematized formulae) and a reliance on measurement which introduces an irreducible element of contingency.

Both aspects (formulization & contingency) imply the meaningless real of the silent, infinite universe: the real of mathematized formulae deprived of sense, the real of radical contingency.’

I do not trust Zizek as much as I trust myself on Mathematics. This needs inserting here!

What isn't given due regard in this account are 3 crucial processes. First, simplification by the 'farming' of context to reveal a particular factor.

Second, idealisation by fitting up of data to an ideal mathematical form.

Third, the illegitimate assumption of a strict Plurality.

There seems to be much that is valuable here. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating. For later in *Less Than Nothing* there is a chapter upon Quantum Physics: I am looking forwards to that!

Is there a place for modern science in Hegel? Is his thought not the last great attempt to “sublate” empirical-formal science into speculative Reason?

Is not the explosive growth of of society as a social organism and of the human body - all these levels harmoniously reflected in each other. 3

Along the same lines, the time has come to declare Bach the greatest modernizer of European music, the key agent in inscribing music into the Newtonian scientific formalized universe. Prior to Bach's time, music was perceived within the Renaissance horizon of *harmonia mundi*: its harmonies were conceived as part of the global harmony of the universe, expressed in the harmony of celestial spheres, of (Pythagorean) mathematics.

Around Bach's time, a totally different paradigm started to emerge: that of a “well-tempered” scale, in which musical sounds are to be arranged following an order not grounded in any higher cosmic harmony, but which has an (ultimately arbitrary) rational structure. (True, Bach was obsessed with the Pythagorean mysticism of numbers and their secret meanings, but the status of this obsession is exactly the same as that of Newton's obscurantist Gnostic fantasies, which comprise more than two thirds of his written work: a reaction to the true breakthrough, an inability to assume all its consequences.)

This was Bach's true fidelity (in the Badiouian sense): to draw all the consequences from this de-cosmologization of music.

All the talk about Bach's deep spirituality, about how his oeuvre is dedicated to God, should not deceive us here: in his musical practice, he was a radical materialist (in the modern formalized - mathematized sense), exploring the immanent possibilities of the new musical formalism. It is the “Italian” re-assertion of emotional melody (pursued also by his composer-son who, in taking this line, committed a kind of parricide and was for a short while even more popular than his father) which marked the expressive-idealist reaction to Bach's materialist breakthrough.

Was the natural sciences from the eighteenth century onwards simply beyond of the scope of Hegel's thought? The topic of nature confronts us with yet another problem raised by Hegel's critics: does not Hegel's deduction of nature clearly posit a limit to this retroactivity?

Is not the passage from logic-to-nature a case of externalization, of the concept positing its otherness? Does not Hegel begin with logic, with ideal categories, and then try to “deduce” material reality from this shadowy realm? Is this not a model case of idealist mystification? The problem with this counter-argument is that it knocks at an open door: Hegel himself explicitly says that his “system of logic is the realm of shadows, the world of simple essentialities freed from all sensuous concreteness.”⁴

Hegel is thus no Platonic idealist for whom Ideas constitute a higher ontological realm with regard to material reality: they form a pre-ontological realm of shadows

of reflectons of reality

For Hegel, spirit has nature as its presupposition, and is simultaneously the truth of nature and, as such, the “absolute first”; nature thus “vanishes” in its truth, is “sublated” in the spirit's self-identity: This identity is absolute negativity, because the notion has its complete external objectivity in nature, but this, its externalization, has been sublated, and it has become identical with itself. At the same time therefore, it is only as this return out of nature that the concept constitutes this identity.

this needs addressing further! For the process of correction and improvement, and the arriving at unavoidable impasses is not addressed!

Note the precise triadic structure of this passage, in the most orthodox ‘Hegelian’ mode:

thesis - the notion, has its complete external objectivity in nature;

antithesis (“but”)-this externality is sublated and, through this sublation, the notion achieves its self-identity;

synthesis (“at the same time therefore”) - it is only as this return out of nature that the concept constitutes this identity. This is how one should understand identity as absolute negativity: the spirit’s self-identity emerges through its negative relationship (sublation) of its natural presuppositions, and this negativity is “absolute” not in the sense that it negates nature “absolutely;’ that nature “absolutely” (totally) disappears in it, but in the sense that the negativity of sublation is self-related, in other words that the outcome of this work of negativity is the spirit’s positive self-identity.

Good Grief! This is certainly hegelian “dialectical” nonsense, for it does not include error and improvement, or exactly why such occur!

The key words in the quoted passage are: complete and only. The notion “has its complete external objectivity in nature” : there is no “other” objective reality, all that “really exists” as reality is nature, spirit is not another thing that adds itself to natural things. This is why “it is only as this return out of nature that the concept constitutes [its] identity”: there is no spirit pre-existing nature which, somehow, “externalizes” itself in nature, and then re-appropriates this “alienated” natural reality - the thoroughly “processual” nature of spirit (spirit is its own becoming, the result of its own activity) means that spirit is only (Le., nothing but) its “returning to itself” from nature. In other words, returning to” is fully performative, the movement of the return creates what it is returning to.

Clearly, without a comprehensive and understood role for Science in this “explanation”, it is mere idealist invention, and delivers NO new understanding whatsoever.

Notes on *The Limits of Hegel*

by Slavoj Žižek

Part II

critical notes by Jim Schofield

JS: Great care will be necessary in the following important section, as there is a regular “personification of concepts” by Zizek - as if the concept, itself, is somehow “conscious”! Beware!

Also, there is an unusual choice of terms. For example, in his very first sentence, does he mean:- “The journey from Reality to Understanding...”?

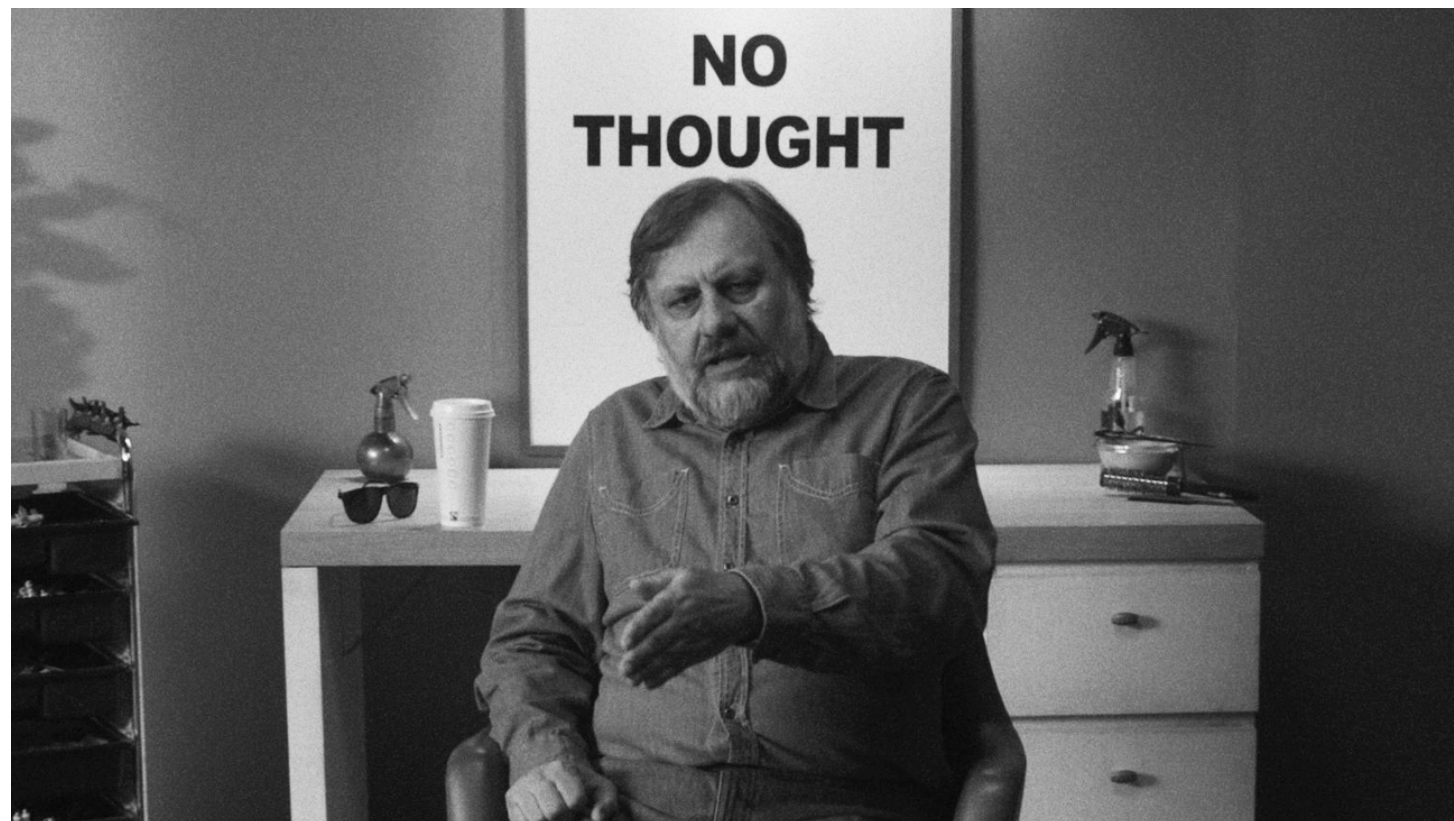
And, later, does he mean:-

“the dialectical relationship between Law and Chance....”?

You could very easily be discussing a discourse of “Gods”?

SZ: The passage from nature to freedom can be rendered in terms of a very precise reversal of the dialectical relationship between necessity and contingency: “nature” stands for the contingency of necessity (in nature, events occur necessarily, following inexorable laws; however, the very fact of these laws - why such a ratio between velocity and mass and not a different one - is utterly contingent, things are just like that, there is no “why”),

No! The Laws of Nature are NOT inexorable! And, it is only when Dialectics is extracted from Nature via Science and Marxism, that this can be understood. Hegel was an idealist! And Zizek is not a scientist, and it is clear he is unaware of the built-in Principle of Plurality in literally all of Science. He accepts the simplification and idealisation of extracted data into Fixed Natural Laws, demoting all variability to what he calls contingency, which usually means the sum of many other fixed laws in different proportions - acting as an imposed variation. The opposite idea that the laws affect one another is not even considered as relevant in this section.



while “freedom” stands for the necessity of contingency (freedom is not just blind contingency, an act is not free just because it is contingent, just because “I could have decided otherwise” ; in true freedom, my abyssal/contingent decision grounds a new necessity of its own, actualized in the chain of reasons-I acted in such and such a way for that reason . . .). To put it another way: in nature, necessity appears (realizes itself) in the form of contingency (necessity is the underlying law which regulates what appears a chaotic contingent interaction), while in freedom, contingency appears (realizes itself) in the form of necessity (my contingent decision is a decision to ground a new necessity, a necessity of a deontological-ethical-order).

You can see that he is preoccupied with “Thinking and Decisions made” - most obviously by people like himself. He struggles, and fails to address the relationship of such things to Reality, by which I mean “Things as they actually are, as distinct from how we have to consider them”. It is so bound up with “Thinking” that he personifies his concepts - by talking about their “self-realisation” etc etc.

Necessity and contingency thus not only dialectically supplement each other, but, in a much more stringent way, free each other into their own essence through the mediation of freedom. Mere blind necessity is best encapsulated in the formula “It is so because it is so” -no further questions asked - as if we are dealing with a contingent decision, since all we could add to this brute fact is that “it could (also) be otherwise:”

Zizek is clearly preoccupied with the power of HIS Thought - even rendering it capable of seeing through its current inadequacies, by stressing he knows where it is going and how to deal with its progress.

“Sit him in a corner and set him thinking, and he will deliver the answers, if not in detail then in general form and trajectory”

Blind natural necessity is thus “radically passive in relation to itself”: it is, as it were, oppressed by its own imposition, without any space to relate to itself-and, on behalf of this imposition, it coincides with its opposite, with contingency.

Re-read the above sentence as i have modified it below :-

(My) Blind natural necessity is thus “radically passive in relation to its-own-nature”: it is, as it were, oppressed by its own imposition, without any space to relate to itself - and, on behalf of this imposition, it requires with its opposite, with contingency - to take it further.

Which version makes more sense?

So, how can necessity redeem itself from this contamination by blind contingency and posit itself as true necessity?

Hegel's answer is: through the mediation of freedom:

Doesn't he mean Understanding? Carry on with the substitution below to see if I am right!

“Necessity does not become freedom by vanishing, but only because its still inner identity is manifested.”⁷ It is in this sense that freedom is “conceived necessity”: necessity posited as such, conceived in . . . In what? In its necessity, precisely: in its inner logic (surely he means Causality) that makes it necessary and not just something that merely “is so because it is so.” Freedom is thus the very “inter-” the gap that separates necessity from itself.

Once again, the language confuses the content!

Conversely, contingency, in its immediacy, as blind natural contingency, also coincides with its opposite, with necessity: that something is contingent ultimately means that it is just so according to blind natural laws.

Yes!

The only way for contingency to get rid of this stain of necessity and posit itself (manifest itself) as true contingency is through the mediation of freedom: it is only here that contingency is a matter of a subject's contingent decision.

Contingency is thus not externally opposed to necessity, it is the result of necessity's self-relating: when necessity loses its immediate-natural character and reflects itself as such, it acquires freedom which, in its immediate appearance, is contingency, the abyss of “It is so because I want it so, because I decided it so!”

This reflection-into-itself equals the inscription of the enunciation into the enunciated content: as we saw earlier, when the Hegelian monarch announces “So be it! I want it so!” this is not only the moment of the contingent supplement which concludes the chain of necessity, but simultaneously the moment of enunciation with regard to a series of statements: through his act, statements prepared by the state bureaucracy acquire performative power, become actualized.

Note the context that Zizek puts it in! Make the suggested substitutions here and the real content is revealed.

The absolutely glaring lack of any scientific experience, can only leave Zizek with this purely abstract way of addressing something which to the scientist is trivial and understandable.

Clearly, Zizek is not really talking to fellow Marxists here, but to academia and to his own critics from the anti-Marxist constituency, and even those who pretend to be Marxists, and aren't.

And, this is a major mistake! Much has still to be done in Marxism - in politics and economics and particularly with respect to Science. That should be the focus today, and it certainly isn't here at all!

Common sense tells us that every statement has to be enunciated in order to actualize itself, and that the moment (and location) of its enunciation is contingent; what philosophical reflection adds is the insight into how this contingent moment is not simply external, but immanent: the contingent expression of a necessary truth signals the contingency of this necessary truth itself.

When someone like him re-iterates it- it gets listened to?

We should then oppose the Marxist line, from the young Lukacs to Kojève, which rejected the dialectics of nature as a mistake: the philosophy of nature is a crucial and immanent part of the Hegelian system. It is also by far the most discredited part of Hegel's philosophy, the permanent butt of jokes, from quoting Hegel's alleged claim that "if theory doesn't fit the facts, so much worse for the facts" to the anecdote that he deduced the necessity of eight planets around the sun, not knowing that astronomers had already discovered the ninth (Neptune).

Surely Pluto is the ninth 'planet'?

(The irony here is that, a decade or so ago, astronomers re-categorized Neptune as a satellite, no longer as a planet- so, in fact, Hegel was right . . .) The standard reproach to Hegel is that he tries to abolish the absolute heterogeneity of the Other, its thoroughly contingent character. But there is in Hegel a name for such irreducible contingent Otherness: Nature. It is irreducible in the sense that, even if it is gradually more and more "conceptualized;" mediated, it remains there as the irreducibly contingent background for human history.

He isn't a scientist!

No big fuss for Hegel here: the contingency of nature means, among other things, that there is no guarantee that a meaningless asteroid will not hit the earth and kill us all.

Nature is contingent, there is no secret substantial Mind overseeing things to make sure that nothing terrible will happen.

When Hegel defines nature, he says not only that it is the Otherness of the Idea, but that it is the Idea itself in its Otherness - however, what this "idealist" turn means is that Otherness should be displaced into nature itself: nature is not only the Other of the Idea, but Other with regard to itself: (So, insofar as the Idea returns to itself in spirit, one should raise the question: is spirit then also in some mode "Other with regard to itself"? Yes - precisely as what we usually call "second nature;" spirit petrified in spiritual substance.) This is why nature at its zero level is space: not only the Otherness of the Idea (the Idea in its Otherness), but Otherness with regard to itself - a coexistence of points (extensively side-by-side), with no content to it, no difference, the same throughout in its pure extensive in-difference. Far from being the "mystery" of something containing objects, space is literally the most stupid thing there is. And it does not get "sublated" in the sense that it is no longer there: natural objects which "sublate" space remain spatial objects! Where spatiality is negated is in chemism, magnetism, and then organism, where objects are no longer dead composites of elements-parts, where we get an "eternal" ideal unity which cannot be located at a certain point in space: there is no "center" of an organism at some point in space.

Ignore the mental and conceptual gymnastics: attempt to translate from pure Conceptualisation to Reality and Man!

Here, perhaps, Hegel points towards relativity (it has been noted that his critique of Newtonian space foreshadows the Einsteinian critique): if the zero level of nature is space, then natural objects should develop out of space, not be conceived as mysterious chunks of matter that from who-knows-where "enter" space. The only thing that can happen to pure space is asymmetry, its becoming de-homogenized, "curved"-so the idea that "matter" is the effect of curved space is implied by Hegel's theory of space.

What absolute rot! The dichotomies of current positions in Sub Atomic Physics can all be removed by the re-instatement of a Universal Substrate. Einstein's Space-Time continuum is a formal analogue for reality at best!

Even such a perceptive dialectician as Jameson falls into a trap here in his dismissive judgment that Hegel's concept of life, "pre-Darwinian as it is, is probably far too metaphysical and epistemological (highest form of the unity of subject and object) to be of much interest for us today." What about recent biological theories which focus on self-referentiality (drawing a line between inside and outside) as a constitutive feature of the life process, and which often read as verbatim passages from Hegel's Naturphilosophie? However, even when, in reading Hegel's philosophy of nature, one stumbles upon many unexpected pearls (his critique of Newton uncannily pointing towards Einstein; his theory of life uncannily prefiguring theories of autopoiesis; etc.), the basic fact remains that its fundamental tenor is totally inadequate in relation to the two key features of modern Galilean science: mathematical formalization and openness to the contingency of (experimental) measurement.

As Popper made abundantly clear, the very core of the modern scientific method lies in its effort to formulate a precise experimental setup capable of falsifying a prior hypothesis - and there is simply no place for such a stance in Hegel.

It is also vital, to that same scientific method, that precise experimental set-ups are absolutely crucial in establishing an artificially-stable-Domain, in which Plurality, which is generally false, actually gets reasonably close to being true, and hence in which eternal Natural Laws falsely appear to be the driving determinators of Reality.

This inability of Hegel to think mathematical formalization is the obverse of his inability to think the overdetermined space of what Lacan called *lalangue*.

What happens in late Lacan is the passage from (or the splitting of) the unity of conceptual thinking (in)to the duality of *atheme* and *lalangue*: on the one hand, mathematical or logical formulae and schemes (formulae of sexualization, the four discourses, etc.); on the other, the explosion of word-play and other forms of poetic discourse - a move unthinkable for Hegel, who insists on the priority of conceptual thinking.'

NECESSITY AS SELF-SUBLATED CONTINGENCY
What if Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel, which endlessly varies this motif of irreducible contingency, relies on a

fatal misunderstanding of Hegel's fundamental insight? The first thing that strikes the eye is that Kierkegaard's critique is based on the (thoroughly Hegelian!) opposition between "objective" and "subjective" thought: "While objective thought translates everything into results . . . subjective thought puts everything into process and omits the result . . . because an existing individual is constantly in process of coming to be:"

For Kierkegaard, obviously, Hegel represents the ultimate achievement of "objective thought": he "does not understand history from the point of view of becoming, but with the illusion attached to pastness understands it from the point of view of a finality that excludes all becoming:"

Here, one should be very careful not to miss Kierkegaard's point: for him, only subjective experience is effectively "in becoming;" and any notion of objective reality as an open-ended process with no fixed finality, still remains within the confines of being. But why, we may ask? Because any objective reality, as "processual" as it might be, is by definition ontologically fully constituted, present as a positively existing domain of objects and their interactions; only subjectivity designates a domain which is in itself "open;" marked by an inherent ontological failure: Whenever a particular existence has been relegated to the past, it is complete, has acquired finality, and is, so far subject to a systematic apprehension . . . but for whom is it so subject? Anyone who is himself an existing individual cannot gain this finality outside existence which corresponds to the eternity into which the past has entered.'

What if, however, Hegel actually does the exact opposite? What if the wager of his dialectic is not to adopt the "point of view of finality" towards the present, viewing it as if it were already past, but, precisely, to reintroduce the openness of the future into the past, to grasp that-which-was in its process of becoming, to see the contingent process which generated existing necessity? Is this not why we have to conceive the Absolute "not only as Substance, but also as Subject"?

This is why German Idealism already exploded the coordinates of the standard Aristotelian ontology structured around the vector running from possibility to actuality.

In contrast to the idea that every possibility strives to fully actualize itself, one should conceive of “progress” as the movement of restoring the dimension of potentiality to mere actuality, of unearthing, in the very heart of actuality, a secret striving towards potentiality.

What is actually striving? Reality itself? Personification does nothing to reveal actual changes which culminate in significant developments.

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 potential) which was betrayed in the actuality of revolution and in its final outcome (the rise of utilitarian market capitalism). Marx’s point is not primarily to make fun of the Jacobin’s wild revolutionary hopes, to point out how their enthused emancipatory rhetoric was just a means used by the historical “Cunning of Reason” to establish the vulgar commercial capitalist reality; it is rather to explain how these betrayed radical-emancipatory potentials continue to “insist” as historical “specters” that haunt the revolutionary memory, demanding their enactment, so that the later proletarian revolution should also redeem (lay to rest) these past ghosts.

These alternative versions of the past which persist in a spectral form constitute the ontological “openness” of the historical process, as was-again-clear to 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 Bolshevik revenges. But in this age of free-thinkers, men’s minds are not really



Barricades in the streets of Paris (French Revolution of 1848)

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.¹³

This, however, does not mean that, in a historical repetition in the radical Benjaminian sense, we simply return 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, for only the first choice, in its wrongness, literally creates the conditions for the right choice. The notion that we might have already made the right choice the first time, but just blew the chance by accident, is a retroactive illusion.

A reference to Georg Buchner may be of some help here, with his great motif of Destiny as that which predetermines our lives - there is no free will, “the individual is no more than a foam on the wave” (as he put it in a letter to his fiancée in 1833): “The word must is one of the curses with which mankind is baptized. The saying ‘It must be that offenses come; but woe to him by whom the offense cometh’ is terrifying. What is it in us that lies, murders, steals? I no longer care to pursue this thought”⁴

What terrified Buchner was the fact that, although our acts are predetermined, we experience ourselves as thoroughly responsible for them - the paradox resolved by Kant and Schelling with the hypothesis of an atemporal transcendental act by means of which each of us has always already chosen our eternal character: what we experience as fate is our “nature,” the outcome of an unconscious choice. And it is only at this point that the true dialectic of freedom and necessity, of choice and determination, begins.

Notes on *The Limits of Hegel* by Slavoj Žižek

Part III critical notes by Jim Schofield

SZ: The common-sense “dialectics” of freedom and necessity conceives of their articulation in the sense of the famous lines from the beginning of Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” We are partially, but not totally, determined: we have a space of freedom, but within the coordinates imposed by our objective situation.

What this view fails to take into account is the way our freedom (free activity) retroactively creates (“posits”) its objective conditions: these conditions are not simply given, they emerge as the presuppositions of our activity. (And vice versa: the space of our freedom itself is sustained by the situation in which we find ourselves.) The excess is thus double: we are not only less free than we think (the contours of our freedom are predetermined), we are simultaneously more free than we think (we freely “posit” the very necessity that determines us). This is why, to arrive at our “absolute” freedom (the free positing of our presuppositions), we have to pass through absolute determinism.

JS: But what does that mean, and who has he got in mind? My parents made some small decisions themselves, but it was impossible for them to break out of the cast-iron limitations of their unskilled Working Class background. I was able to get significantly further, but only because I was clever enough to get to Grammar School & University. Literally nobody else in the district I was brought up within were able to do likewise. And, It also has to be said that any capacity to make the decisions I wanted to make, didn’t really become possible



until I retired from a professorial post in London University!

Who then has Zizek got in mind - who's freedom?

But does not Hegel's rejection of the "Cleopatra's nose" thesis in his great Logic (what we would call today the "butterfly-effect" thesis, the idea that small accidents can change the course of world history-as the beauty of Cleopatra's nose changed the course of ancient Roman history) point towards a view which reduces the role of contingency in history? For Hegel, the error of such reasoning involves the "inadmissible application" of a mechanical notion of cause to large-scale processes in organic or spiritual life: the "common jest" that, in history, great effects can result from ridiculously small causes is "an instance of the conversion which spirit imposes on the external; but for this very reason, this external is not a cause in the process, in other words, this conversion itself sublates the relationship of causality:"

Once more it is the preoccupations of Men, which confuse causality. Most causes are entirely beyond the reach of individuals.

There are things which can be done, but it is NEVER the case that the sole cause was in someone's decision. In other words if ever a person could decide upon something majorly affecting things, that person could have been placed in such a context almost entirely by things totally outside his control.

One should read these lines very closely, not as a simplistic dismissal of external mechanical causality. What does Hegel mean here by "conversion"? Recall the case of language: the leader says a simple word ("yes" or "no"), and the result can be a great war with hundreds of thousands of dead - from the external mechanistic standpoint, the vibration of a few sounds (a human voice pronouncing a brief word) "caused" a concatenation of events, leading to thousands of deaths - and in a way this is true, but only if we take into account the "conversion", which makes material elements the bearers and transmitters of meaning in a way which has nothing to do with their little bit of immediate material reality.

See my explanation above: it is clearly more comprehensible!

In this sense, the relation of causality is “sublated” here: it is negated, but maintained and elevated at a higher level, for the causality is no longer immediate mechanical causality (like the proverbial billiard ball hitting another ball), but a causality mediated by meaning.

But in all this, we should bear in mind that the whole process has also to take place at the level of immediate materiality: there is meaning, but this meaning can exert its “higher” causal power only as materialized in sounds or letters, it has no “pure” existence of its own,¹⁷

¹⁶ Hegel, *Hegels Science of Logic*, pp. 562-3.

¹⁷ And it is easy to see why Hegel mentions not only spiritual life, but also organic life: organic life already points towards such a “conversion” which sublates mechanical causality. Due to the organic unity of a living body, a weak part (the brain) can direct the movements of much larger and stronger parts, i.e., to account for how an organism

What, then, is the central insight of the Hegelian dialectics of necessity and contingency? Not only does Hegel (quite consistently with his premises) deduce the necessity of contingency - namely how the Idea necessarily externalizes itself (acquires reality) in phenomena which are genuinely contingent - he also (and this aspect is often neglected by many commentators) develops the opposite and theoretically much more interesting thesis, that of the contingency of necessity.

That is to say, when Hegel describes the progress from “external” contingent appearance to “inner” necessary essence, the appearance’s “self-internalization” through self-reflection, he is not thereby describing the discovery of some preexisting inner Essence, something that was already there (this, exactly, would have been a “reification” of the Essence), but a “performative” process of constructing (forming) that which is “discovered.” As Hegel himself puts it in his *Logic*, in the process of reflection, the very “return” to the lost or hidden Ground produces what it returns to. It is then not only inner necessity that is the unity of itself and contingency as its opposite, necessarily positing contingency as its moment; it is also contingency which is the encompassing unity of itself and its opposite, necessity; that is to say, the very process through which necessity arises out of necessity is a contingent process.

I have to reveal my doubts as to these arguments. Especially as I am primarily a scientist as well as a philosopher. The attempt by Hegel (seemingly agreed to by Zizek) insists that Necessity and Contingency are opposites. I would attempt to say something similar, but as a scientist my examples would be concrete, whereas here they are Conceptions. And while I would have no difficulty explaining one level in terms of another, I find that the same things limited to generalised concepts are too cerebral too abstract.

Surely, it limits what is being discussed to ONLY the cerebral level, while promoting the concepts to complete generality. Finally, I ask myself the question, “What does he mean by the unity of itself and its opposite?” Does not that reflect my misgivings, for I can show such relations causally between levels, where he includes that generality within his definitions!

One can put it also in the terms of the dialectics of ontology and epistemology: if the encompassing unity of necessity and contingency is necessity, then the necessity (gradually discovered by our cognition as the underlying Notion of the phenomenal contingent multiplicity) had to be there all the time waiting to be discovered by our cognition-in short, in this case, Hegel’s central idea (first clearly formulated in his *Introduction to the Phenomenology*) that our way towards truth is part of the truth itself, is canceled, and we regress to the standard metaphysical notion of Truth as a substantial In-itself, independent of subject’s approach to it.

Only if the encompassing unity is contingency can we claim that the subject’s discovery of necessary truth is simultaneously the (contingent) constitution of this truth itself, that, to paraphrase Hegel, the very return to (rediscovery of) eternal Truth generates this Truth.

Surely, there is no such thing as eternal Truth, so are these contortions a result of generalising too much? It has to be emphasized that no amount of rational gymnastics can substitute for a scientific knowledge of actually investigating situations. Both the complexity and holist interpenetrations soon reveal themselves, and our manipulations and farming of those not only reveal, but also cause, particular relations, which we extract as-if-they-were eternal Laws.

So, far from being an “essentialist”, who develops the entire content out of the necessary self-deployment of the Notion, Hegel is - to use today’s terms - the ultimate thinker of autopoiesis, of the process of the emergence of necessary features out of chaotic contingency, the thinker of contingency’s gradual self-organization, of the gradual rise of order out of chaos.

How, then, can necessity arise out of contingency? The only way to avoid the obscurantism of “emergent properties” is to bring into play negativity: at its most radical, necessity is not a positive principle of regularity that overcomes contingency, but the negative obverse of contingency: what is works. one has to refer to a minimum of ideality, of links which cannot be reduced to the mechanical interaction of physical parts.

“necessary” above all is that every contingent particular entity find its truth in its self-cancellation, disintegration, death. Let us imagine an entity which persists in its singularity, endeavoring to impose itself as a lasting necessity-the actual necessity is the negativity which destroys this entity. This is Hegelian universal necessity in its actuality: the negative power which brings to its truth every particularity by way of destroying it. Necessity is thus nothing but the “truth” of contingency, contingency brought to its truth by way of its (self-)negation.

Once again generalised-all-level notions confuse us by prioritising concepts and not states! And, I don’t like his chosen concepts Order and Chaos either: I greatly prefer temporary Stability and (a nadir of) Dissolution! Chaos is an abstraction of many different contending processes, but is also THE opportunity for the natural Emergence of systems of such process, which we abstract as Order.

You can see the weaknesses of the purely idealist approach, even when it strives towards a dialectical description. Dealing in abstractions is essential, as long as you realise that they are only OUR current view, and NOT the essences of Reality.

This isn’t rubbish: but the very way it is posed detracts from a Real Understanding by making the *Principles* of Dialectics primary!



The standard view of Hegel's system is that of a closed circle of categories which succeed one another with a logical necessity, and the critical energy is focused on the "weak points" of that deduction, on passages where Hegel seems to "cheat," proposing a new category which does not really follow from what precedes it. This perspective must be radically reversed: each passage in Hegel is a moment of creative invention, the New does not arise automatically but comes as a miraculous surprise. This is what it means to reproduce a process through its dialectical analysis: to re-introduce possibility and ontological openness into what retroactively appears as a closed succession determined by its immanent necessity. So when Hegel says that, in a dialectical process, the thing becomes what it always already was, this clearly offers itself to be read as an assertion of full ontological closure: there is nothing radically new, what emerges in the dialectical movement is just the full actualization of what was in potential (or in itself) already there. However, the same statement can also be read in a much more radical (and literal) way: in a dialectical process, the thing becomes "what it always already was"; that is, the "eternal essence" (or, rather, concept) of a thing is not given in advance, it emerges, forms itself in an open contingent process—the eternally past essence is a retroactive result of the dialectical process. This retroactivity is what Kant was not able to think, and Hegel himself had to work long and hard to conceptualize it. Here is how the early Hegel, still struggling to differentiate himself from the legacy of the other German Idealists, qualifies Kant's great philosophical breakthrough: in the Kantian transcendental synthesis, "the determinateness of form is nothing but the identity of opposites. As a result, the a priori intellect becomes, at least in principle, a posteriori as well; for a posteriority is nothing but the positing of the opposite:"

This deserves detailed criticism, for though as with all Hegel's discoveries, there is something valuable there, the way it is explained makes it an explanation, when in fact it is a process of revelation.

In principle, the meaning of this dense passage seems clear: the "determinateness of form" is another name for concrete universality, for the fact that the universal form of a concept generates out of itself its particular content, that it is not merely a form imposed on an independent empirical content. And since the notional universality and the particularity of its content—in short, the a priori

of the universal form and the a posteriori of its content—are the opposites (precisely the opposites...

Once again there is something of value here. But notice, as a scientist, I would explain Universal Form as Mathematics, and Content as Physics. The Hegelian language positions Hegel historically and philosophically prior-to-Science.

...that Kant keeps apart, ultimately external to each other, since the immanent transcendental form is imposed onto a content that affects the subject from the outside), the determinateness of form equals the unity of opposites, the fact that the content is generated by its form.

Once again the errors of Mathematics are given an incorrect precedence!

The question is how, concretely, we are to read this identity of opposites. The standard critical reading is satisfied with seeing in it the very model of how the Idea mediates or posits all its particular content, that is, as the extreme "idealist" affirmation of the primacy of the a priori over the a posteriori. What such a reading clearly misses is the opposite movement, the irreducible "umbilical cord" on account of which every a priori universality remains attached to ("overdetermined" by) the a posteriori of a particular content. To put it somewhat bluntly: yes, the universal notional form imposes necessity upon the multitude of its contingent contents, but it does so in a way which itself remains marked by an irreducible stain of contingency, as Derrida would have put it, the frame itself is always also a part of the enframed content. The logic here is that of the Hegelian "oppositional determination" (*gegensätzliche Bestimmung*), in which the universal genus encounters itself among its particular and contingent species." Hegel introduces this notion of "oppositional determination" in his logic of essence, when he discusses the relationship between identity and difference; his point there is not only that identity is always the identity of identity and difference, but that difference itself is also always the difference between itself and identity; in the same way, it is not only necessity that encompasses both itself and contingency, but also—and more fundamentally—it is contingency itself which encompasses both itself and necessity.

Perhaps, I would bring in the regular appearance of Dichotomous Pairs of contradictory alternatives in Reasoning, which Hegel finally put down to inadequacies in the generating premises assumed. This regular appearance of opposites, says something not only about the Nature of Reality, but also, and crucially, about how Mankind processes Reality in his attempt to understand it.

Or, with regard to the tension between essence and appearance, the fact that essence has to appear not only means that essence generates or mediates its appearances, but that the difference between essence and appearance is internal to appearance: essence has to appear within the domain of appearances, as a hint that “appearances are not all” but are “merely appearances.” Insofar as this opposition appears in language as the opposition between the universal content of meaning and its expression in a contingent particular form (of the signifier), it is no wonder that language provides the ultimate example of this dialectical unity of opposites and no wonder that Hegel rejects the idea of constructing a new, more precise, artificial language which would eliminate the imperfections of our natural languages: “There is no such thing as a superior language or benchmark idiom. Every language is an instance of the speculative. Philosophy’s role is to show...

19 In Marx’s hands, this is rendered as follows: among the species of production, there is always one which gives a specific character to the universality of production within a given mode of production. In feudal societies, artisanal production itself is structured like another domain of agriculture, while in capitalism, agriculture itself is “industrialized”; that is, it becomes one of the domains of industrial production.

... how, in each language, the essential is said and exhibited through the idiom’s accidents:’20
The starting point of a philosophical thought has to be the contingency of one’s own language as the “substance” of one’s thinking: there is no direct path to universal truth through abstracting from the contingencies of one’s “natural” tongue and constructing a new artificial or technical language whose terms would carry precise meanings. This, however, does not mean that a thinker should naively rely on the resources of his own language: the starting point for his reflection should rather be

This paragraph echoes what I am attempting to express elsewhere to do with dominance within a collection of simultaneous processes.

the idiosyncrasies of this language, which are in a way redoubled contingencies, contingencies within a contingent (historically relative) order itself. Paradoxically, the path from the contingency (of one’s natural language) to the necessity (of speculative thought) leads through the redoubled contingency: one cannot escape thinking in one’s language, this language is one’s unsurpassable substance; however, thinking means thinking against the language in which one thinks—language inevitably ossifies our thoughts, it is the medium of the fixed distinctions of Understanding par excellence. But, while one has to think against the language in which one thinks, one has to do so within language, there is no other option. This is why Hegel precludes the possibility (developed later especially in Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy) of purifying our natural language of its “irrational” contingencies and constructing a new artificial language that would faithfully reflect conceptual determinations.

Where, then, in language itself, can we find some support for thinking against it? Hegel’s answer is: where language is not a formal system, where language is at its most inconsistent, contingent, idiosyncratic. The paradox is that one can only combat the “irrationality” of language on behalf of the immanent notional necessity if this necessity itself relies on what is most “irrational” in language, on its redoubled irrationality or contingency. The situation is similar to that of the Freudian logic of the dream, in which the Real announces itself in the guise of a dream within a dream. What Hegel has in mind here is often uncannily close to Lacan’s notion of language: word-play, double meanings, and so on—his great example in German are words with opposite or multiple meanings (like *zu Grunde gehen*, “disintegrate / fall apart” and, literally, “to go to, to reach, one’s ground;” etc., not to mention the notorious *Aufhebung* with its three meanings: to cancel/annihilate, to preserve, to elevate to a higher level). *Aufhebung* is often put forward as exemplary of everything that is “idealist-metaphysical” about Hegel: does it not signal the very operation by means of which all external contingency is overcome and integrated into the necessary self-deployment of the universal notion? Against this operation, it is fashionable to insist that there is always a remainder of contingency, of particularity, which cannot be *aufgehoben*, which resists its conceptual (dis)integration.



El Lissitzky

Notes on *The Limits of Hegel* by Slavoj Žižek

Part IV critical notes by Jim Schofield

SZ: The irony here is that the very term Hegel uses to designate this operation is marked by the irreducible contingency of an idiosyncrasy of the German language. There is no conceptual clarity without taking language as a starting point or, to put it in more conceptual terms, not only does necessity express itself in the appearance of contingency, but this necessity itself does not pre-exist the contingent multitude of appearances as their ground-it itself emerges out of contingency, as a contingency (say, the multiple meanings of *Aufhebung*) elevated into the necessity of a universal concept.

JS: This is a crucial feature of the dialectical/holist approach. Though expressed in the way it is here, and in Hegel, it smacks too much of cerebral concepts, whereas its true basis is in the nature of concrete Reality, and the mutually-affecting of multiple factors into some higher level conformity (necessity), which is NOT directly derivable from the factors that comprise it - as different proportions can lead to different resulting necessities.

Does not Freud intend something strictly homologous with his notions of symptoms, jokes, and slips of tongue? An inner necessity can only articulate itself through the contingency of a symptom, and vice versa: this necessity (say, the constant urge of a repressed desire) comes to be only through this articulation. Here also, necessity does not simply pre-exist contingency: when Lacan says that repression and the return of the repressed (in symptomal formations) are the front and the back of one and the same process, the implication is precisely that the necessity (of the repressed content) hinges on the contingency (of its articulation in symptoms) . Critics

of Hegel emphasize only the first aspect, necessity as the inner principle dominating its contingent expressions, neglecting the second one, namely how this necessity itself hinges on contingency, is nothing but contingency elevated into the form of necessity.

This brings us to the Hegelian *Aufhebung* (sublation) as a movement through which every contingent particularity is *aufgehoben* (sublated) in its universal notion. The standard argument against *Aufhebung* is that there is always a remainder which resists it, which persists in its immediate idiocy. What if, however, this is the very point of the truly Hegelian *Aufhebung*, of the “negation of negation”? The direct attempt at *Aufhebung* is the initial “position”; it is “negated” in its failure, in the element that resists it; the “negation of negation” is then the insight into how this resisting element, this obstacle, is in itself a positive condition of possibility—the *Aufhebung* has to be sustained by its constitutive exception.

As mentioned in the previous note, the preoccupation with Psychoanalysis of the last century, or so, though doubtless worthwhile at some point, here *masks* the more important lower level bases in concrete Reality. Instead of both embracing and transforming Science, the arguments here KEEP the emphasis upon Mind.

So what if the lesson of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* is that the loss itself (the failure) is to be celebrated? Hegel was fully aware of how the weight given to an event by its symbolic inscription “sublates” its immediate reality—in his *Philosophy of History*, he offers a wonderful characterization of Thucydides’s history of the Peloponnesian war: “In the Peloponnesian War, the struggle was essentially between Athens and Sparta. Thucydides has left us the history of the greater part of it, and his immortal work is the absolute gain which humanity has derived from that contest.” One should read this judgment in all its naivete: in a way, from the standpoint of world history, the Peloponnesian War took place so that Thucydides could write a book on it. The term “absolute” should be given here all its weight: from the relative standpoint of our finite human interests, the numerous real tragedies of the Peloponnesian war are, of course, infinitely more important than a book; but from the standpoint of the Absolute, it is the book that matters. One should not be afraid to say the same thing about some truly great works of art: the Elizabethan era

occurred in order to produce Shakespeare; Shakespeare’s work is “the absolute gain which humanity has derived” from the vicissitudes of his era. And yes, why not? —Hitchcock’s masterpieces of the 1950s are the “absolute gain” which humanity derived from the Eisenhower period in the US. Sometimes, even, an author’s importance may be condensed not in his work, but in a book written on him—although Samuel Johnson was the author of *A Dictionary of the English Language* and the spiritus movens of the thriving “public sphere” of eighteenth-century London, he is today remembered almost exclusively for *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, the ample biography written by his friend James Boswell (1791).

Here a surprising link with Heidegger suggests itself. In his reading of “essence” (*Wesen*) as a verb (“essencing”), Heidegger provides a de-essentialized notion of essence: while, traditionally, “essence” refers to a stable core that guarantees the identity of a thing, for Heidegger, “essence” is something that depends on the historical context, on the epochal disclosure of being that occurs in and through language as the “house of being.” The expression “*Wesen der Sprache*” does not mean “the essence of language;” but the “essencing” done by language, language bringing things into their essence, language “moving us” so that things matter to us in a particular kind of way. so that paths are made within which we can move among entities. and so that entities can bear on each other as the entities they are . . . We share an originary language when the world is articulated in the same style for us, when we “listen to language;” when we “let it say its saying to us.”^{2.3} For example, for a medieval Christian, the “essence” of gold resides in its incorruptibility and divine sheen, which make it a “divine” metal, while for us, it is, among other things, a resource to be traded in commodity markets or a material appropriate for aesthetic purposes.

(Or, to take another example, the voice of a castrato was for Catholics the very voice of an angel prior to the Fall, while for us today it is a monstrosity.) There is thus a fundamental violence in this “essencing” ability of language: our world is given a partial twist, it loses its balanced innocence, one partial color gives its tone to the Whole. The operation designated by Laclau as that of hegemony is inherent to language.

VARIETIES OF SELF-RELATING NEGATION

However, the question persists: does this Hegelian assertion of radical contingency open up the space for the coincidence of repression with the return of the repressed which exemplifies the properly Freudian “negation of negation” (the repression-negation-of some content only works if it is itself negated, if the repressed returns)? Lacan repeats the classic argument against the dialectical triad, the return of the starting point back to itself through its self-mediation:

“When one makes two, there is never a return. It never comes back to make one again, even if it is a new one:” It may seem that Hegel’s basic premise is that the two come back to One, even if we concede the key point that this One is a new One: not the One which was lost in alienation-externalization, but a new One “performatively” created in the very process of returning-to-itself. When a substantial unity dissolves into the multiplicity of its predicates, it is one of its former predicates which establishes itself as a new subject, retroactively positing its presuppositions. However, even this properly dialectical image of permanent transubstantiation remains misleading: to put it bluntly, for Hegel, there is no One at the beginning, every One is a return-to-itself from the two. The One to which one returns is constituted through return, so it is not that One splits into two-One is a Two of which one part is nothing. Here is how, in an extremely condensed passage, Hegel formulated the gap that separates the dialectical process proper from Plotinian “emanation” : “The simple unity, its becoming, is that sublation of all predicates-the absolute negativity; the coming-out [emanation: Herausgehen] is this negativity in itself-one should not begin with oneness and then pass to duality:” The last part says it all, directly rejecting the standard notion of the dialectical process as the deployment or division of the initial or immediate One into Two-one should not begin with oneness and then pass to duality. Why not? Because the One is only constituted through the passage to duality, through its division.

The unexpected consequence of this fact is that, contrary to the common notion that the number of Hegelian dialectics is 3, in other words that Hegel’s goal is to overcome all dualisms in a higher “synthesis:” to reconcile the opposites in an encompassing third medium, the proper number of dialectics is 2: not 2 as the duality of polar opposites, but 2 as the inherent self-distancing

of the One itself: the One only becomes One by way of redoubling itself, by acquiring a minimal distance towards itself. This is why, when Badiou defines love as the construction of a world from the perspective of the Two, one should recognize in this definition an echo of the Hegelian dialectic: love brings the two together so that their gap is maintained, there is no pseudo-Wagnerian or mystical fusion here, the gap between the two is parallaxic and as such unsurpassable. This point has already been made by Jameson when, apropos Antigone, he insisted that the opposition between human law and divine law has to be read not as a struggle between the state and the family or clan that tears society apart; but first and foremost as the division which brings society itself into being in the first place by articulating its first great differentiations, that of warrior versus priest, or of city versus clan, or even outside versus inside . . . Each of these larval powers brings the other into being and reinforces the distinctiveness of its opposite number . . . the contradiction which ultimately tears the polis apart and destroys it . . . is the same opposition that brings it into being as a viable structure in the first place.

This poetic offering upon “one”, reveals the “need” to make everything fit the “Dialectical Necessity”, with the evident danger of forcing things beyond where they should be forced. It is clearly about Thought, a la Hegel, and reveals the still unfinished task of extending Dialectics into Science, and Science into Dialectics.

Here we can see again the gap that separates Hegel from historicist evolutionism: from the historicist standpoint, every historical figure has its moment of maturity which is then followed by the period of decay. For example, capitalism was progressive until the middle of the nineteenth century, when it had to be supported in its struggle against premodern forms of life; but with the aggravation of class struggle, capitalism became an obstacle to the further progress of humanity and will have to be overcome. For a real dialectician, there is no moment of maturity when a system functions in a non-antagonistic way: paradoxical this may sound, capitalism was at the same time “progressive” and antagonistic, in decay, and the threat of its decay is the very driving force of its “progress” (capitalism has to revolutionize itself constantly to cope with its constitutive “obstacle”) . The family and the state are thus not simply the two poles of

the social Whole; it is rather that society has to split itself from itself in order to become One-it is this tearing apart of the social Whole, this division itself, which “brings society itself into being in the first place by articulating its first great differentiations, that of warrior versus priest.’ It is in this precise sense that one should read Badiou’s claim: “The real is not what brings together, but what separates.’ Even more pointedly, one should add that the real is the separation (antagonistic split) which, as such, brings together a socio-symbolic field.

The Hegelian reading of Antigone as a play dealing with “the emergence of an articulated society as such” thus demonstrates the radically anti-corporatist nature Hegel’s social thought:” the underlying premise of this thought is that every social articulation is by definition always “inorganic;’ antagonistic.

And the lesson of this insight is that, whenever we read a description of how an original unity becomes corrupted and splits, we should remember that we are dealing with a retroactive ideological fantasy which obfuscates the fact that such an original unity never existed, that it is a retroactive projection generated by the process of splitting. There never was a harmonious state which was split into warriors and priests. Or, at a different level, when we use a conventional gesture like shaking hands, we should not presume that originally such a gesture or expression had a literal meaning (I offer you my hand to demonstrate that I am not holding a knife, and so on)-the gap between literal meaning and cliched use is there from the beginning: that is, from the moment shaking hands became a gesture, it meant more than demonstrating that one was not armed, it became a performative act of signaling an openness to social contact, and so on and so forth. We encounter here the topic of what quantum physics calls the two vacuums:” in order for the hierarchical power to establish itself, it has to redouble or divide itself into “true” (warrior) and “false” (priestly) power-it is this division which, far from weakening power, constitutes it. The ruling class has to divide itself in order to rule-the rule is here “divided we stand, united we fall”

A certain “negation of negation” is also constitutive of the phallic signifier. That is to say, what makes the phallic signifier such a complex notion is not only that, in it, the symbolic, imaginary, and real dimensions are intertwined, but also that, in a double self-reflexive step which uncannily imitates the process of the “negation of

negation;’ it condenses three levels: it is (1) position: the signifier of the lost part, of what the subject loses and lacks with its entry into (or submission to) the signifying order: (2) negation: the signifier of (this) lack: and (3) negation of negation: itself the lacking/missing signifier.” The phallus is the part which is lost (“sacrificed”) with the entry into the symbolic order and, Simultaneously, the signifier of this 10ss.30

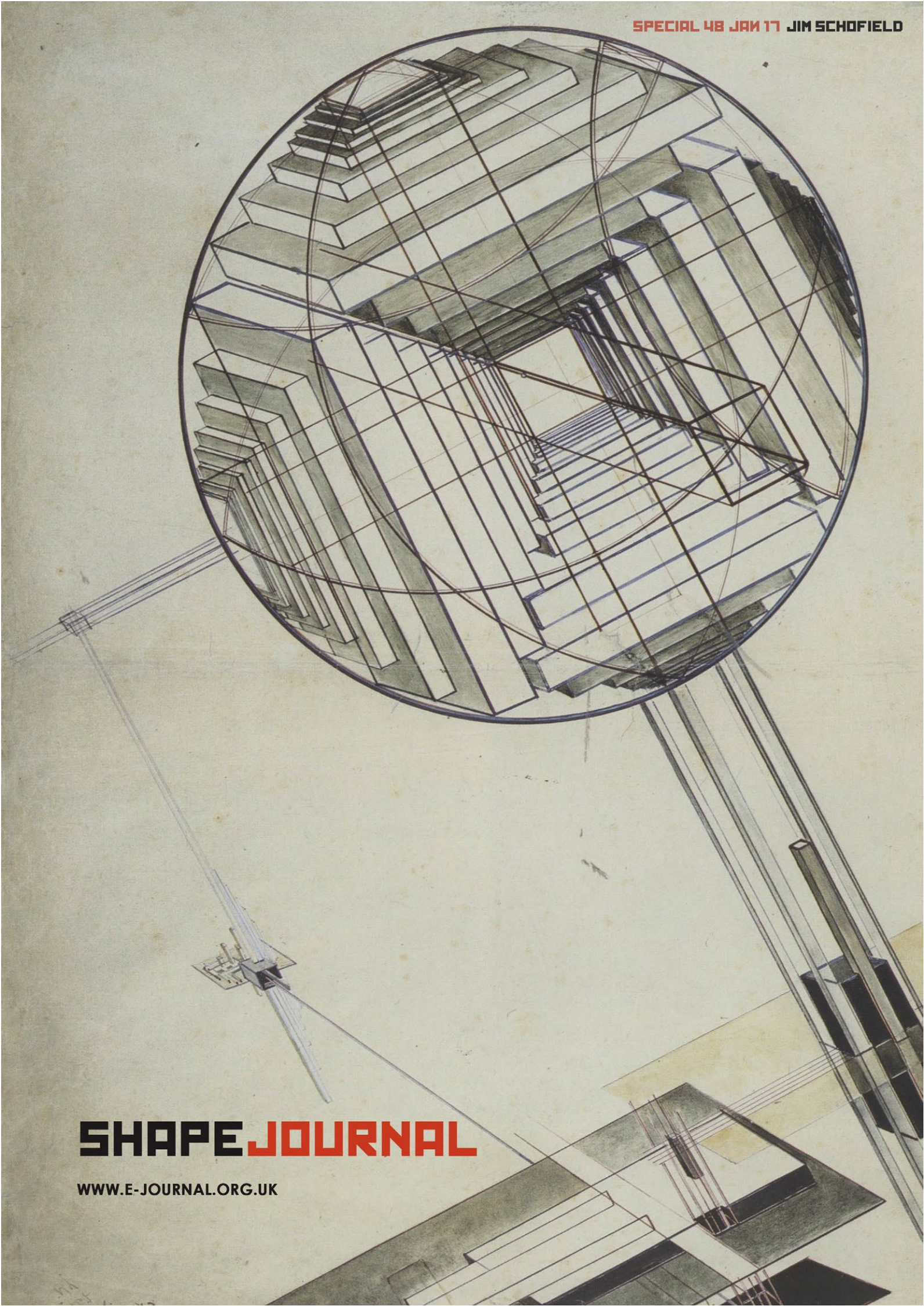
When Badiou emphasizes that double negation is not the same as affirmation, he thereby merely confirms the old Lacanian motto “les non-dupes errenf”

Let us take the affirmation “I believe.’ Its negation is: “r do not really believe, I am just pretending to believe.’ Its properly Hegelian negation of negation, however, is not the return to direct belief, but the self-relating pretense: “I pretend to pretend to believe;’ which means: “I really believe without being aware of it.’ Is not irony, then, the ultimate form of the critique of ideology today-irony in the precise Mozartian sense of taking statements more seriously than the subjects who utter them themselves? Or, as Descartes put it at the beginning of Chapter 3 of his Discourse on Method: “very many are not aware of what it is that they really believe; for, as the act of mind by which a thing is believed is different from that by which we know that we believe it, the one act is often found without the other.’ Again, how does this Lacanian “negation of negation” relate to the Hegelian one? Let us take negation in the guise of man’s abandonment by God: there is no happy ending here; in the “negation of negation” we are no less alone and abandoned as before, all that happens is that we experience this abandonment in its positive dimension, as the space of our freedom. Another version of this reversal was discerned by Chesterton who, in his wonderful text *The Book of Job*, shows why God has to rebuke his own defenders, the “mechanical and supercilious comforters of Job”:

The mechanical optimist endeavors to justify the universe avowedly upon the ground that it is a rational and consecutive pattern. He pOints out that the fine thing about the world is that it can all be explained. That is the one point, if I may put it so, on which God, in return, is explicit to the point of violence. God says, in effect, that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained. He insists on the inexplicableness of everything. “Hath the rain a father? . . . Out of whose womb came the ice?” (38:28). He goes farther, and insists on the positive and palpable

unreason of things; «Hast thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is, and upon the wilderness wherein there is no man?» (38:26)

. . . To startle man, God becomes for an instant a blasphemer; one might almost say that God becomes for an instant an atheist. He unrolls before Job a long panorama of created things, the horse, the eagle, the raven, the wild ass, the peacock, the ostrich, the crocodile. He so describes each of them that it sounds like a monster walking in the sun. The whole is a sort of psalm or rhapsody of the sense of wonder. The maker of all things is astonished at the things he has Himself made.



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