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HIERARCHIES OF THE DIALECTIC: HEGEL ON IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

ABSTRACT

In my paper, I contend that it is necessary to rely on a categorial reading of Hegel's notions of identity and difference in order to properly understand their non-hierarchical relationship in Hegelian dialectics. Many commentators reduce their speculative nature to a merely instrumental use of the terms in analyzing Hegel's work. In this way, identity and difference are only formally employed and thus ontologically obscured, leaving room for subsequent shortcomings and hierarchizations. I maintain throughout the paper that the best way to elucidate the hierarchical question and prevent dialectical thought from such errors is by inquiring into Hegel's speculative configuration of onto-logical categories. If anything, Hegel replaces the primacy of identity over difference with an internal linkage that determines the structure of these notions, thus granting their immanent relatedness. For him, the relationship between categories is necessarily a movement. The constitution of identity and difference, as determinations of reflexion of essence in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, proves that they are equiprimordial and co-structural, hence preventing any possible hierarchy.

KEYWORDS

identity, difference, speculative dialectics, Deleuze, Hegel, philosophy of identity, Marx, hierarchy.

Introduction

In the following sections, I will argue that the Hegelian speculative dialectics does not hierarchize identity and difference. The accusations leveled against Hegel, such as conferring primacy to identity over difference through the logic of self-mediation and negativity, epitomized by Deleuze, are nevertheless legitimate starting point from which one should inquire into Hegel's Logic. The existing responses to the accusations portraying Hegel as a philosopher of identity miss the core of the Hegelian ontology: the categorial nature of identity and difference. It is imperative to analyze them in their constitutive movement, as evident in Hegel's second book of *Science of Logic*, in order to grasp how Hegel conceived them in and for themselves, beyond mere conceptual instruments.



There is a whole history of such accusations against Hegel. I do not intend to reduce them to our particular issue, but only consider them to the extent to which they prepare the field for debate. Marx, for instance, argued that self-consciousness eventually consumes every object because it regards materiality as intrinsically spiritual. Eventually, there is no legitimate exteriority to self-consciousness, as Nature itself is considered a 'dialectical defect'. Adorno, examining Hegel's relation to exteriority, asserts that the Hegelian totality collapses when left with no external object. The central critique I consider during my account is Deleuze's. From the perspective of the philosophy of difference, he accused Hegel of reducing difference to the production of identity, rendering it only a function of the latter, and therefore reduced to negativity and contradiction. I find Deleuze's account very valuable because it is promising for the Hegelian account itself. However, it represents only a starting point in determining Hegel's immanent response to such a critique.

In the third section of the paper, I will address Hegel's notion of the speculative in order to articulate his philosophical program. Then, I will examine the contributions of authors like De Nys, Maker, or Williams, stressing their strengths and their fundamental shortcomings. I will contend that an exclusively instrumental usage of the notions of identity and difference is illegitimate and non-dialectical. Following this, I will tackle Hegel's movement of essence to identity and difference. At various points, I may overlook elements of Hegel's sophisticated argumentation. Except for some minor instances, any hermeneutical errors is solely my fault.

Logical Monsters: Hegel as *Identitätsphilosoph*

Hegel has probably been the subject of most accusations of articulating a philosophy of identity. Some authors argue that it traces back to Kierkegaard (Maker 2007: 15) and certainly to Young Hegelians such as Marx. There is no extensive space here to delve into this fully, but it is however relevant as a starting point. Through Maker's (2007: 23–24) remark regarding the criticisms against Hegel for conceiving the Real (Nature here) as the Idea in otherness – i.e., the reduction of being to thought – we can observe that Marx reads Hegel in a similar vein, as exhausting the ontology of the object by making it into an abstract and estranging entity mediating self-consciousness. For Marx, Hegel envisions the Logic as the philosophical mind's self-comprehending abstract process. Speculative dialectics represents a form of thought abstracted from nature, conceiving of the latter as an external object or 'self-loss' (Marx 2007: 148). The return of pure speculative thought to itself is thus presented as a return of abstraction to itself after a process of self-estrangement into thinghood, i.e., objectivity. Moreover, Marx argues that, when Hegel understands the object of consciousness as alienated, the estrangement only takes a *thought-form*, so that the retractive process itself isn't but a conflict *within* thinking between abstraction and sensuous reality. This leads Hegel to contend that the object of consciousness is nothing but objectified self-consciousness

(ibid.: 152). The reappropriation of man's essentiality would thus only take place in consciousness. Objects are only thought entities, subsisting subject-like abstractions. If the object is estranged essentiality serving the self-mediation of the subject, it follows that, Marx argues, its reappropriation nullifies and exhausts objectivity as such; thus, the object itself turns out to be nothing but an *intrinsically* abstract entity, making man into an exclusively spiritual and non-objective being. The annulment of alienation is thus only a false negation, taking place at the level of thinking and restricted to a dialectic of pure thought, proving *Phenomenology* an obscure and mystifying criticism (ibid.: 150).¹ The subject totalizes and reduces the object to a consumed abstraction. However, when it is for Hegel to conceive a non-absorbable point of exteriority – Nature – it is displayed as a dialectical *defect* (ibid.: 170), whose only purpose consists in confirming abstraction. It is rather striking to see how this call for exteriority – which is not developed at all by Marx, but rather indicated – is pervasive in Adorno. Notwithstanding the different – both historical and theoretical – respective backdrops, Adorno argues, in this same vein, that the intrinsic tendency of Hegel's absolute subject is to make any difference into its own moment, eventually *consuming itself* when left with no exteriority – when integrating every object –, becoming an objectless subject (Nicholsen & Shapiro 1993, p. xxiii). Because Hegel's totality is hence a self-contradictory subject-object dialectics in the service of identity, the whole turns out to be the untrue (Adorno 1993: 87), leaving the dominating impulse of the Absolute for the 'non-identity of identity and difference'.² Adorno's critique – as well as Marx's to some extent – is, however, anti-Hegelian only to the extent to which it is Hegelian. It explicitly pertains to Hegel's language, system, and vein, in a disarticulating form still dialectical in nature. This is not the case with the poststructuralist camp.

Postmodernists and poststructuralists alike have reshaped the issue in a different language from various positions, but essentially treating Hegel as an

1 The promising 'rational kernel' of Hegelian dialectics, encapsulated into a mystifying shell, is also reiterated by Marx in the "Postface to the Second Edition" of *Capital Vol. I* (Marx 1992: 103). But Marx's focal criticism of Hegel is probably related to the *Philosophy of Right*: see Marx 1977. Even though the continuities and disjunctions of Marx's concern with Hegel might prove interesting, I only want to underline Rose's 2009 account on this – Marx reads Hegel in a non-speculative way: "Marx's reading of Hegel overlooks the discourse or logic of the speculative proposition. He refuses to see the lack of identity in Hegel's thought, and therefore tries to establish his own discourse of lack of identity by using the ordinary proposition" (Rose 2009: 231). Even though her statement is grounded, I believe that her own reading might turn non-speculative by not proving very sensitive to the overall historical determinacies of Marx's reading which subjectivized him. Rather, she revolves around the fact that Marx did not get beyond formal propositions simply because he did not understand Hegel properly: negativity has therefore no historical positive backing, mediation is refused from its contextual determinations.

2 See also the different tackling of Maker 2007 and De Nys 2007 of the issue, defending Hegelian otherness.

Identitätsphilosoph (Maker 2007: 15). Although Derrida's accounts on Hegel's dialectics is by no means neglectable – as, say, apparent in *Positions* (1981: 43ff) – Deleuze chiefly remains the harshest foe of Hegelian dialectics among poststructuralists with an overtly stated despise towards it (Pezzano 2014: 89; Widder 2013: 18). Even though he had never devoted a work or an extensive and particular concern to Hegel, he has written entire passages formulating well-articulated criticisms to him. Sauvagnargues (2013: 38) even identifies three distinct stages in Deleuze's critique of Hegel: through Nietzsche, a critique of negativity (see Deleuze 2002: 156–164); then, in *Difference and Repetition*, through Gilbert Simondon, an account of Hegelian metaphysics; lastly, after 1968, the concern revolves rather around history and politics than metaphysics and ontology in, for instance, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Probably the most consistent treatment of Hegel is to be found in the first part of *Difference and Repetition* – also of most interest here – where Deleuze explicitly locates his attitude in the line of anti-Hegelianism (Deleuze 1994: xix). Above all, Deleuze distinguishes himself by addressing a critique of Hegel from the assumed position of philosophy of difference (ibid.: 52), with the clear task of replacing the Hegelian (subordinating) relationship between identity and contradiction with difference and disparity, and to save difference from contradiction. Pezzano (2014: 91) correctly holds that Deleuze's anti-Hegelianism relies on two focal points. Deleuze thinks, first, that *in Hegel identity dominates difference*. Every particular object subsists only subordinated to the general identity of the concept or the specific identity of some other difference. Second, *contradiction exhausts difference*; difference is either negated from the general identity of a concept or from another difference. According to Deleuze, difference isn't to be conceived as difference *from* or *of*, but rather “*for, with, between, or ... difference in-between*” (Pezzano 2014: 91). Difference has only been conceived as differences *within* concept, within the identical. The particular is par excellence subordinated to the universal; differences between particulars are nothing but meditations of identities stating their own particularities. Difference is therefore only the non-identical in the way to identity, only the interspace between identicals, thus negative by nature. The core of the issue rests therefore in confusing the *concept of difference* with *conceptual difference* (Deleuze 1994: 27) and hence in reducing difference to negativity and contradiction between identicals. Let's have a closer look at Deleuze's remarks about dialectics. Starting with the negative and its relation to the principle of sufficient reason, he states:

Hegelian contradiction does not deny identity or non-contradiction: on the contrary, it consists in inscribing the double negation of *non-contradiction* within the existent in such a way that identity, under that condition or on that basis, is sufficient to think the existent as such. Those formulae according to which ‘the object denies what it is not’, or ‘distinguishes itself from everything that it is not’, [i.e., the ontological relationship between identity and difference] are logical monsters (the Whole of everything which is not the object) in the service of identity (ibid.: 49).

Difference is made into negativity as a logical precondition of identity. Thus, moreover,

It is said that difference is negativity, that it extends or must extend to the point of contradiction once it is taken to the limit. This is true only to the extent that difference is already placed on a path or along a thread laid out by identity. It is true only to the extent that it is identity that pushes it into that point. Difference is the ground, but only the ground for the demonstration of the identical. Hegel's circle is not the eternal return, only the infinite circulation of the identical by means of negativity (ibid.: 49–50).

Dialectics turns out to be an accumulative spiral of the self-mediating identical, whereby difference is subordinated to the reflexive desires and needs of identity. Hegel thus does nothing but articulate a *hierarchical dialectic* whose structure crowns identity and totalizes an oppressive concept through the logic of negativity and self-mediation. Difference becomes pure negativity, only a pretext for the affirmation of the identical and hence reduced to a means, doomed to contradiction, subsistence and self-negation. It is haunted by the logical monsters of dialectics in the ghostly castle of Identity, with no ontological status of its own for it is always a *conceptual difference*, encapsulated in the identical, and therefore at the mercy of identity itself. Hierarchically structured, within dialectics “difference remains subordinated to identity, reduced to the negative, incarcerated within similitude and analogy” (ibid.: 51). For Deleuze, in Hegel, difference only responds to the coercive structure of identity through the confusion of difference with contradiction (as also highlighted by Widder 2013: 20), as an always-already negative determination. By contrast, difference cannot be reduced or always traced back to opposition since this movement *forces* difference back into a “previously established identity, when it has been placed on the slope of the identical which makes it reflect or desire identity, and necessarily takes it where identity wants it to go – namely, into the negative” (Deleuze 1994: 51). Then, in Hegel, difference is only derived from dialectical opposition, reduced to negativity; it must rather be affirmative, non-recognizable and non-reiterative of identity (Williams 2007: 32). Otherwise, dialectical difference only responds to the production and reproduction of the identical, with no genuine space for itself. It seems thus to be in Deleuze an intrinsic temptation of regarding Hegelian identity as an articulated notion before encountering difference or at least articulating itself through conceptual subjugation. Difference is nothing but opposition, contradiction. But Deleuze doesn't really delve too much into the function of contradiction within the relationship between identity and difference in Hegel. Moreover, he does not – as we will see later on, some Hegelians do not as well – tackle Hegel's particular notions of identity and difference as if it were irrelevant how the latter articulates them as onto-logical categories. This constitutive silence clearly conveys that the reading of Hegel is non-speculative; it perversely oversees the Hegelian conceptual architecture and analyses it through the lens of a formal identity – the very thing Hegel looked forward to

overcoming. However, this is not to say that Deleuze only understands Hegel at ‘the level of *Verstand*’, for this is a hierarchical understanding itself naively opposing the formal and the speculative I am not fond of. It also does not mean Deleuze is a poor reader of Hegel. The legitimacy of the problems he raises makes him a rather informed one. I am merely suggesting that his reading is incomplete and thus distorted, and the ambition of exhausting the object of inquiry through implicitly rejecting a conceptual framework explicitly designed by Hegel to surpass the insufficiencies of what Deleuze would later call arborescent judgement is unjustified. In this light, there are some authors even suggesting very strong similarities between Deleuze and Hegel on the issue of rhizomatic judgement, where conjunction takes the place of the copula (the universal/particular non-signifying existential relationship), escaping the hierarchical structure of traditional metaphysics. Sommers-Hall argues that Hegel’s description of the plant in the *Philosophy of Nature*³ is rhizomatic: with no centralizing subject, each element is an individuality of its own with no conceptual *subjugation*, but rather *conjunction*. It is a non-hierarchical structure with no supposed underlying identity of thought (Hall 2013: 63–65). Moreover, from a Hegelian point of view, one can criticize Deleuze for falling into the traps of spurious infinite: if a form of judgement articulates only the conjunction, it eventually becomes an incoherent and indeterminate series of differentials with no underlying unity, hence incomprehensible. I would only suggest that Hegel does not only overcome arborescent judgement but also the rhizomatic through a speculative articulation of both within a non-hierarchical dialectics; the conflict, if existing, between conjunction and existential, is conciliable; in this way, the Hegelian framework supersedes both the universal/particular dominating temptation and the *spurious conjunction* through a dialectics of relationship I will explore below. Some other authors, such as Widder, argue that strong similarities and affinities are to be found between Hegel and Deleuze regarding the theory of forces because Deleuze places his ontology of sense on an already established Hegelian terrain (Widder 2013: 34). Nonetheless, Widder argues that however close Hegel and Deleuze would get, there are still separated by an unbridgeable gulf.

My aim here is not to build such a bridge. I will further underline neither the similarities nor the differences between Hegel and Deleuze. This task has already been comprehensively carried out, for instance, in Houle & Vernon 2013 or Pezzano 2014; literature is still to be written. My only intention here is to *(re)situate* Hegel’s notions and articulation of identity and difference as onto-logical categories; only from this standpoint can their relationship be legitimately analyzed. Deleuze’s critiques are therefore only a pretext backed by an authoritative – though not without its lacunae – reading of Hegel. Therefore, they are only indicative and serve as a starting point. In tackling them, I will only articulate elements *within* Hegel himself with Deleuze at hand; for the temptation to respond to a critique can turn into an external treatment of

3 As apparent in Hegel 1970: 56–57; also see Hegel 1991: 237–238.

the object of inquiry due to the ambition of abolishing the critique itself; I will argue below how certain commentators on the topic have fallen into such a trap. Taking critique as a pretext safeguards the inquiry itself from remaining confined within the inscribed susceptibilities of such objections. Critique is thus turned into *suggestion*: the object of inquiry is not underlined by a conceptual imperative of self-critique; it doesn't coercively have to continuously justify itself. Rather, it has to internally respond to externalities and integrate them. In this light, I want to start with three methodological questions. Firstly, is there any dialectical primacy of identity in Hegel's program? Secondly, what is the relationship between identity and difference for Hegel and how is it articulated? Thirdly, is, or can speculative dialectics be hierarchical? In the following section, I will briefly explore Hegel's notion of the speculative and how some authors have shaped the issue at stake.

The Status of the Issue

Relation as Subject

The ironical point to be first and foremost emphasized is that Hegel himself explicitly debates and opposes what he calls 'philosophy of identity', deemed at the time to be the feature of speculative philosophy. In effect, Hegel distinguishes between a formal understanding of identity and a speculative one, safeguarding dialectics from such an accusation and directing it against the empiricists:

Among the reproaches that have been levelled against recent philosophy, the one that is heard very frequently is the claim that it reduces everything to identity; and hence it has even been given the nickname 'Philosophy of Identity'. But the argumentation that we have just presented shows that it is precisely philosophy that insists on distinguishing between what is, both conceptually and experimentally, diverse; on the contrary, it is the professed empiricists who elevate abstract identity to the highest principle of cognition, and whose philosophy should therefore more properly be called 'Philosophy of Identity' (Hegel 1991: 164).

although recent philosophy has frequently been nicknamed 'Philosophy of Identity', it is precisely philosophy, and above all speculative logic, which exhibits the nullity of the mere identity that belongs to understanding, the identity that abstracts from distinction. This philosophy then also insists, to be sure, that we should not rest content with mere diversity but become cognizant of the inner unity of everything there is (ibid.: 184).

There is no reason to insist on Hegel's constant demand for a speculative reading of his work; Hegel himself explicitly and aimfully articulates the dialectics as he does to overcome the issues of (post)Kantian philosophy. It is pervasive from the very *Differenzschriften*, especially in *Faith & Knowledge*, where Hegel attacks the hierarchical separation of Reason and Absolute by

Kant and post-Kantians. Faith, by having infinitude as object, is rejected from reasonable concern, which is supposedly confined to finite objects. This contention actually turns out to be a counterintuitive movement, for the making of the Infinite into an exteriority of Reason rather places the former *above* the latter even though Reason essentializes itself through such an ejection based on Reason's own criteria (Hegel 1977a). This perverse hierarchy makes Hegel to suggest, through the critique of Kant's antinomies of Reason, that such an inquiry reduces difference to opposition: the Absolute as otherness of Reason, through its noumenal form, is externally appropriated as a negative object (Kant 1998). Kant then excludes God, freedom, and immortality from philosophical concern in order to save philosophy itself, casting them out as unattainable exteriorities. But by imposing limits to thought, separating the Finite and the Infinite as irreconcilable objects of critical philosophy, *the antinomies of reason become themselves antinomial*: in order for the subject to recognize the limits of thought, it has to actually overpass them.⁴ Moreover, if the subject is thus concealed to phenomenal objects, i.e., only concerned with the non-essential-in-itself par excellence (appearance), it simply follows that it becomes finite and a phenomenon itself, thus non-essential (Hegel 1977a: 77; Hegel 2010: 342–343). Kant's system implodes once again through Hegel's speculative reading; whenever the former tries to draw the boundaries of thought in order to save the subject from antinomies, he fuels the antinomies themselves. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel would reshape the the issue peculiar to the Kantian inquiry by articulating a speculative dialectic in all its rights which could eventually surpass antinomial antinomies by centralizing the object's self-movement, an ambition translated into the distinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*, which is of no immediate interest here but only due to its conceptual consequence apparent in Hegel's 'Preface'. The distinction is established in order to overcome the predicative, or what Hegel calls formal, sentences, pointing to different forms of identity between subject and predicate. For Hegel, the formal – or *Verstand's* – thought, Understanding, essentializes the propositional subject through the predicative relationship: 'the self is a *Subject* to which the content is related as Accident and Predicate. This Subject constitutes the basis to which the content is attached, and upon which the movement runs back and forth' (Hegel 1977b: 16–17). This subject is, in Hegel's view, conceived as fixed, bearing its predicates as logical attachments attributed in an external way. This view is comprised as follows:

The Subject is taken as a fixed point to which, as their support, the predicates are affixed by a movement belonging to the knower of this Subject, and which is not regarded as belonging to the fixed point itself; yet it is only through this movement that the content could be represented as Subject. The way in which this movement has been brought about is such that it cannot belong to the fixed point; yet, after this point has been presupposed, the nature of the movement cannot really be other than what it is, it can only be external (ibid.: 13).

4 See Hegel 1977a and Jameson 2017: 28–29.

For instance, in the following sentence, ‘God is being’, ‘God’ is employed as the underlying (*sub*-ject) passive logical entity and as an already articulated self, from which proceeds the movement towards determinations or predicates (ibid.: 37). But, if anything, in order for such a statement to be substantial, it has to make the predicate into the fundamental moment of judgement in which the subject, as Hegel puts it, dissolves; therefore, ‘being’ has to become the essential logical instance. Hence, predicative language itself implodes because its form limits and coerces the content⁵, and thus cannot grasp the real ‘philosophical’ relationship between subject and predicate. Hegel has to reshape and articulate a different linguistic discursivity. In order to have any real meaning, the subject/predicate relationship must become internal, so that neither of the two logical entities is fixed and essential in itself. This change does not involve the abolishment of subject/predicate logical distinction. For Hegel, the superseding of the formal proposition only consists of overcoming its *form* (ibid.: 43), for the content to move freely and self-determine itself. The alternative speculative proposition presents itself as follows:

it is not a passive Subject inertly supporting the Accidents; it is, on the contrary, the self-moving Notion which takes its determinations back into itself. In this movement the passive Subject itself perishes; it enters into the differences and the content, and constitutes the determinateness [...] the content is, in fact, no longer a Predicate of the Subject, but it is Substance, the essence and the Notion of what is under discussion (ibid.: 37).

To put it this way, whereas in the formal sentence the *propositional* subject is made into the *onto-logical* one, the speculative dialectic turns *the very relationship* between subject and predicate into the actual Subject. Neither the propositional subject nor the predicate, is in and for itself, but attains any essentiality through conceptual inter-movement. Subsequently, through this change, the subservience of predicate and ‘accidents’ to the *sub*-ject is abolished; the traditional logical structure, hierarchizing subject over predicate, is unintelligible in a speculative understanding.⁶

5 See also Yovel 2005: 108–109.

6 Hegel’s abolishment of the predicative sentence has immediate consequences over a Hegelian ‘theory’ of truth, entailing the need to revisit the idea that truth consists in the accordance of predicate to subject. Hegel himself distinguishes, in the *Encyclopedia Logic*, between conceiving truth as ‘correctness’, covering empirical, mathematical and historical objects (see also the ‘Preface’ to *Phenomenology*), and as ‘deeper, philosophical truth’ (i.e., speculative), contending that the latter should rather be conceived as the correspondence of the object to its concept or essence. For an insightful debate around the topic, see Stern 1997, Harris 1997 and Giladi 2022. I myself believe that, unlike the authors just mentioned, the object-concept correspondence compels us to think of Hegel’s notion of truth not as a property, but as an *ontological quality* of an object (hence Hegel speaks of a ‘true state’, ‘true friend’ or ‘true work of art’).

Identity and Difference in Hegelian Literature

However, the establishment of Relation as Subject doesn't exhaust the issue at stake, but only opens it up. Hegel's articulation of a speculative dialectic represents the framework of his treatment of identity and difference. The issue regarding Hegel's view on the topic has already been object of exegetic scrutiny (as comprised in Grier 2007), often starting from the very prejudices or readings I have highlighted above. They are very valuable, but nonetheless incomplete. I will briefly sketch their strong and weak points. Maker (2007) tries to safeguard Hegel's view of difference by underlying the general conceptual architecture of his metaphysics, centralizing the notion of a presuppositionless science of philosophy. From his point of view, neither identity nor difference is assumed by Hegel from the very outset, which otherwise could grant one's systematic primacy over the other. Through this onto-logical ambition, Hegel articulates categories only through difference in a process of *mutual* self-determination and self-grounding, making the whole process into a bi-constitutive relationship. Moreover, the demand for systematic completeness peculiar to Hegel's program – which represents for critiques the ground of a totalizing identity with no exteriority – leads Hegel to rather establish an irreducible difference, which is Nature; without this point of exteriority as a conceptual need, systematic completeness couldn't be achieved (Maker 2007: 19). From the very outset of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, we can see that “difference is not denied, diminished, or derived, but is equally originary with identity, as the two can be thought neither as at one nor as separate” (ibid.: 21). The equiprimordiality of identity and difference in Hegel warrants the non-privileging structure of his inquiry. Even though I believe Maker's general argument is correct, two points need to be made.

First, Maker states that Hegel should be regarded as ‘*the philosopher of difference, otherness, and nonidentity*’ (ibid.: 16). But this thesis contrasts with the general argument that identity and difference are inter-determining each other. Maker seems to be subject to a confusion partisan to the perspective he criticizes; it falls into the trap laid by the very object of criticism, suggesting that in Hegel *there can be* such a primacy as to define Hegel as an advocator of either of them. But Maker himself turns against this idea, making his stated thesis either into a rhetorical evocation or into an inconsistent equivocation. Second, Maker states at some point that “Hegelian thought turns the traditional notion of identity inside out. Unlike traditional metaphysicians, he does not fetishize identity, and unlike postmoderns, he does not fetishize difference” (ibid.: 19). However, he doesn't suggest at any point throughout his account the Hegelian meaning of identity and difference, explicitly stating to rest on ‘their usual philosophical sense’ (ibid.: 29). But this ‘usual’ sense – a formal understanding – is explicitly refused by Hegel. How is he then changing their meaning? Again, Maker writes from the point of view he is actually criticizing. There is, however, some legitimacy in this approach. For one has firstly to use the notions of identity and difference in a non-speculative manner in order

to eventually use them in Hegel's sense. However, in Maker, the discourse on identity and difference does only revolve around a common usage of the notions, leaving in shadow Hegel's 'meaning'. Maker is not the only one to respond to criticisms only from a formal point of view. Robert Williams correctly holds, against William Desmond, that the kernel of Hegel's *Science of Logic* is the double transition, a trans-categorical principle preventing mediation from being one-directional; this movement is, of course, speculative in nature. It saves difference from subordination to a self-mediating identity, replacing it with the conceptual coercion of a double mediation. Thus, "instead of a simple subordination of one term to another, double transition implies a mutual, joint a reciprocal mediation in which both terms are sublated and together constitute a new whole" (Williams 2007: 39). Williams' insights will be fundamental for my later development of the issue. However, he himself doesn't delve too much into the issue of Hegel's notion of identity and difference, but rather, like Maker, he only applies a formal understanding of identity *within* a speculative framework. The issue is to *speculatively* read *speculative* Hegelian categories. For, essentially, if the notions of identity and difference are not tackled comprehensively, they are obscured; and sustained silence isn't but concealment. Finally, I find De Nys' account also very valuable, especially for addressing the categories of identity and difference in their Hegelian meaning. He contends that, starting from a Hegelian totalizing subjectivity of thought, it cannot follow that otherness (or Being) is suppressed and consumed into identity (Thought); for him, in Hegel we find otherness integrated as *difference* through the conciliation of consciousness and self-consciousness in the Absolute and exhausting of exteriority as a source of knowledge. However, this perpetual integration, surpassing the externality of the object, carries with it two implications: "a negative and a positive meaning. It means that the object belongs to the unity of self-consciousness with itself. And it means that the unity of self-consciousness with itself preserves and does not annul objectivity, so that self-consciousness is 'in communion with itself in its otherness as such'" (De Nys 2007: 92). Hence, neither Thought nor Being are reducible to one another, but rather *recognize* each other in the process of speculative integration. Otherness is thus preserved. De Nys' account, though comprehensive, leaves an aspect unanswered. The process of integration does not necessarily mean that, if the object is preserved, it is not ontologically consumed or doesn't meet fundamental changes of status determined by the subject's movement. Certainly, it seems to shift from exteriority to interiority, from objectivity to subjectivity and from negativity to conciliation. Aren't these changes affecting the object internally? In the meantime, the object still seems to be reduced to negativity, placed under the conceptual imperative of integration. A response on this matter will be provided below in the discussion of determining reflexion. Thus, what De Nys and the other commentators do not properly tackle is Hegel's purported reduction of difference to contradiction – the kernel of Deleuze's critique. Even though after speculative integration the objectivity is not annulled and difference shares its due, it still leaves

unclear what difference *as* contradiction means. It doesn't therefore focus *on* the process of integration as such, but rather on its effects.

The non-speculative reading of identity and difference in Hegel is, no doubt, necessary. What I believe the forementioned authors have done has been to correctly start from their common understanding in order to display the way in which certain structures of Hegel's thought are configured non-hierarchically; they use the formal in order to articulate the speculative. But the movement stops here. Doesn't this mean that the notions employed to *determine* are themselves left *undetermined*? Aren't identity and difference used to understand the speculative, but themselves not understood speculatively? And, after all, isn't this movement, by using Hegel's categories only to clarify others, one-directional and therefore non-speculative itself? Isn't the very 'principle' of double transition thus violated? We have to turn back to the notions of identity and difference themselves, *back from their estrangement*, in order to complete the movement and understand the very instrument of understanding: and thus, to genuinely understand understanding itself. The transition must therefore be completed, rearticulating the whole effort of determining the dialectics of identity and difference in Hegel.

The Birth Pains of Identity and the Dialectics of Essence

Essence and Seeming

Identity and difference cannot be understood within Hegel's framework without first and foremost understanding and dealing with the dialectics of essence. In the existing analyses on the issue, even when identity and difference are considered in their categorial meaning, as in De Nys, essence is entirely neglected as if it were irrelevant or at best secondary.⁷ Hegel's account of essence is both the prerequisite and their intrinsic logic, for both identity and difference are, for Hegel, *determinations of reflection* of essence, which only means that they can be understood categorially only through the moment of essence. As Hegel recognizes, the dialectics of essence is the hardest part of his Logic (Hegel 2010: 207; Houlgate 2011: 139) mainly because it responds to the dialectical need of overcoming immediacy by means of immediacy itself. The first part of Hegel's Logic, the *Doctrine of Being*, is mainly concerned with immediate being, opening with pure being and nothingness, reaching to quality, quantity and finally to measure. Although from the very outset pure being turns out to be mediated by its opposite, therefore implying some form of mediation, the movement remains *immediate* in nature because the determinateness is not yet negative in itself; or, as Houlgate puts it, "each category retains a character of its own, and in that sense remains *itself*, even though it turns into its opposite" (2011: 140); categories are not primarily evolving through over-determining

⁷ However, Yeomans 2007 is the exception here, dealing with essence as self-identity.

contradictions as Hegel would prove through reflexion to be the case;⁸ the *relationship* between concepts as the main catalyst is still to be developed. Even though, of course, these categories are dialectically deduced, their opposition is somewhat external; their object is determinate being – which is not yet ‘materiality’ or ‘concreteness’, but rather the very *determinations* onto-logically previous to it (but nonetheless dialectically intertwined). It is only the *structural configuration* of immediacy, standing for the manifoldness of determinate being (Trisokkas 2016: 99). Thus, it is not concerned with necessity: how is an object intrinsically and thus necessarily identical to itself? For instance, this piece of paper has a quality, a determinacy: it is made of wood, cellulose etc.; it is also *a piece*, so it is limited: thus, it retains a quantity; then, it has a certain extent, a measure, that is, a quantity out of a quality (Burbidge 2006: 53). But these categories themselves cannot explain why this piece of paper is essentially itself rather than another piece of paper. What is it beyond this determinate being that exerts so much force but nonetheless itself is not immediate? With this question, we have already stepped into the realm of mediated being (reflexion). Moreover, this movement subsequently represents a passage into the dialectics of finitude and infinitude: essence is, if anything, non-finite itself but always contained *within* the object without which it cannot exist;⁹ essence thus rearticulates this dialectic, already tackled by Hegel in the *Doctrine of Being*. In the same respect, essence gives rise to the dialectics of materiality and immateriality: for an object is material only as immediacy mediated by essence, therefore by something immaterial in itself.¹⁰ Because essence will prove to be the unity of immediacy and non-immediacy, it represents for Hegel the posited concept (Hegel 1991: 175). Even though anticipating, essence seems from the very outset nothing but a bubbling cauldron of contradictions. Fundamentally, in order to comprehensively tackle the categories of identity and difference, we have to follow the movement of essence in three main steps: the essentiality and unessentiality, shine, and reflection. This movement steadily articulates identity and difference to the point where identity generalizes essence from simple self-identity to the mediation of difference (Hegel 2010: 356).

8 I use the notion of ‘over-determinate contradiction’ in Althusser’s 1967 sense that contradiction is placed into a dynamic relationship with its domain: it is both determining it and lets itself be determined, both subject and object interchangeably. Even though Althusser directs this understanding of contradiction against Hegel himself, I think that a close glimpse into Hegel’s Logic proves that it is as close to Hegel as it is to Marx.

9 Or, as Stace (1955: 180) puts it, if an object is destroyed, essence is destroyed as well. Moreover, when an object as immediacy is destroyed, it ceases to exist only when ‘the essential’ disappears as well. Their relationship is therefore both guaranteeing their ontological status and limiting it.

10 This does not, however, mean that I conceal Hegel’s analysis of essence to ontology. It is also a logical analysis of essence disregarding the object of inquiry. So ‘material’ here is content-sensitive.

The dialectics of essence can be regarded as an extensive self-critique of essence. The *Doctrine of Essence* opens with Hegel's same ambition as the first book: to build a presuppositionless science of philosophy. Therefore, we do not know what essence is from the very outset, be it 'the true nature of things' or a 'substrate' (Houlgate 2011: 140–141), but we can only find it out by making the conceptual movement of categories into the object of inquiry. All we know about essence at this stage is that it is something other than immediate being which is trying to articulate itself but meeting and integrating accumulating contradictions that need to be resolved. Trisokkas states that essence might be regarded as the *superstructure* sublating immediate being (Trisokkas 2018: 102) it seems to me that Hegel suggests rather the opposite: essence is the *base* on which qualitative-quantitative determinations of being had been tacitly articulated on so that they themselves call for an explicit treatment of essence in order to achieve genuine 'immediacy'. Being itself cannot get any further without mediation. Therefore, Hegel states that essence is the truth of immediate being (Hegel 2010: 337). From this point of view, it has both cancelled and preserved immediacy; it is now simultaneously immediacy and non-immediacy; therefore, the previous immediacy of Being has turned into 'illusion': *what only seemed to be true* (Houlgate 2010: 141). However, essence defines itself through the negation of immediacy; only in this form does it relate itself to itself or be equal to itself as negative and as higher unity. In this respect, non-immediacy articulates itself as *the essential*, whereas immediacy represents the unessential. However, Hegel contends that this movement is somewhat problematic: non-immediacy achieves essentiality here only contrasted with the unessential and therefore *relative* to the same object: immediate being. It is therefore only a negation of a determinate being, not immediacy as such.¹¹ Moreover, as mere contrast, it is relative to a knowing subject – a 'third' – and thus external. Essence must therefore make the immediate into something unessential *in itself*, an object which is 'null *in and for itself* – *a shine*' (Hegel 2010: 342). If the first movement still renders immediate being on the part of essence (ibid.: 341) – unessential in relation to an object – immediacy as shine [*Schein*] is reduced to absolute negativity. As such 'appearance' or 'seeming' (as used by Houlgate 2010), it is nothing but 'the negative posited as negative' (Hegel 2010: 342). Hegel defines its ontological status as follows:

Since the unessential no longer has a being, what is left to it of otherness is only the *pure moment of non-existence*; shine is this *immediate* non-existence, a non-existence in the determinateness of being, so that it has existence only with reference to another, in its non-existence; it is the non-self-subsistent which exists only in its negation (ibid.: 342).

¹¹ Another way of looking at this movement is the following one, though Hegel doesn't address the problem this way: if the essential negates only the unessential in order to negate immediacy itself, it falls into the logic of spurious infinite: it is an undeterminable negation of immediate qualities-quantities which cannot make the leap to the negation of immediacy itself.

Seeming is the nothing in the form of being. It subsists only by virtue of mediation of its negation. However, even though seeming is reduced to this status, it still retains an immediate presupposition (ibid.: 343), and is therefore relatively independent from essence. It cannot be abolished as such, but only reduced to negative subsistence. The contradiction intrinsic to seeming is that it denies its being and subsists only through this perpetual denial without cancelling itself thoroughly. However, the nothingness ‘intrinsic’ to seeming is not seeming’s internal nature as external to essence; its self-denial is nothing but essence’s denial of its immediacy. Shine’s nature is thus determined by essence: seeming is nothing but *the seeming of essence itself* or essence in the form of immediacy it negates: “its inherent *nothingness* is the *negative nature of essence itself* ... shine is essence itself in the determinateness of being” (ibid.: 344). Seeming is thus turned into a moment of essence. All this time, it has actually been internal to it. Essence has proven to be the unit of absolute negativity – as the negation of immediate being in general – and shine or immediacy. It is now its own negative object: the movement from immediacy to essence is the movement from the external negativity of immediacy to the *internal* negation of immediacy, and therefore the coming back of the negative to itself. It is the turning back of essence into itself, and thus *reflexion*.¹²

Essence as Reflexion

This first movement of essence into itself – from nothing to nothing and hence from seeming to seeming (Houlgate 2010: 141) is called by Hegel absolute reflexion. For Hegel, there are three (other) ways in which the relationship between essence and seeming becomes a subject which configures the internal structure of essence: as positing reflexion, external reflexion and determining reflexion. I will tackle each one briefly.

As seen above, seeming is internal to essence. The latter is now the simple equality of the negative with itself; it still preserves the contradiction between immediacy and non-immediacy, but shifts its domain. As essence’s *return* to itself, immediacy isn’t but a *self-sublating* immediacy turning back into essence. Reflexion, as the sublation of the immediacy (Hegel 2010: 347), makes the latter into the activity of self-negation and *turning back* into the negative. It is therefore intrinsically reflexivity. But in this sense immediacy is *posited* as turning back, and a result of essence’s activity. Thus, essence *creates* immediacy now (as also underlined by Houlgate 2010: 144), and doesn’t exclusively destroy it.

¹² As already noted by Houlgate 2010; 2006: 115–143 or Trisokkas 2016: 98 against Pippin 1989 or Burbidge, reflexion isn’t concerned solely with the structure of thought; I will just note that Hegel underlines the necessity of regarding this movement of essence “neither [as] the reflexion of consciousness, nor the more specific reflexion of the understanding that has the particular and the universal for its determinations, but reflexion in general” (Hegel 2010: 350); that is, reflexivity is an internal structure of both to thought and being, in contrast with Kant’s reflexive and determining judgements. It seems to me that otherwise Hegel’s Logic is not even intelligible.

However, this movement turns out to be pretty shady. As Trisokkas underlines, positing reflection gives out “the illusion of having a starting point, that from which the return-to-self is made” (Trisokkas 2016: 106). In other words, this posited immediacy is actually ‘pre-supposed’ in the very act of positing, generating a *speculative circle*: “Reflection thus *finds* an immediate *before it* which it transcends and from which it is the turning back. But this turning back is only the presupposing of what was antecedently found” (Hegel 2010: 348). Once generating immediacy, essence has to continuously suppose that there is always something *beyond* itself which has to be reflexively integrated in order to justify itself as the negative of immediacy. A constitutive lack is necessary. Still, since essence creates immediacy now, it can find beyond itself only what *it itself* puts there. An *essential* or reflexive object must always be supposed to exist outside essence itself. Thus, there cannot be established a legitimate point of departure of reflexion which is not itself presupposed: “essence is as much *prior* positing as it is positing” (Trisokkas 2017: 106). In this way, positing reflexion cancels itself out. We escape this speculative circle by the very notion that, through presupposing a beyond, essence is rather affirming the independence of immediacy which it perpetually integrates and eventually fails to. If there is always a beyond, it means that immediacy is not intrinsically dependent on essence. It is non-reflexive immediacy. Thus, Hegel turns the issue upside down in order to analyze the opposite movement: external reflexion.

Immediacy is not anymore a result of reflexion, but explicitly presupposed as external to essence and as independent or already given: “[essence] therefore *finds* this presupposition before it as something from which it starts, and from which it only makes its way back to itself” (Hegel 2010: 349). However, this movement soon proves problematic as well; if essence finds and appropriates the object *as it is*, the external reflexion makes its relationship to immediacy into a polarizing external and non-immanent one; it therefore ‘freezes’ essence and the movement itself (Trisokkas 2016: 107). The formalization of the speculative is depicted by Hegel in a non-dialectical language with ironical overtones: “This external reflexion is the syllogism in which the two extremes are the immediate and the reflexion into itself; the middle term is the reference connecting the two” (Hegel 2010: 349). However, the movement is consumed through formalization because it represents just one part of the relationship between external reflexion and immediacy. On a second line, the immediacy itself is *reflexively posited as external*. Fundamentally, external reflexion (still) presupposes immediacy, but negates its own generative activity of positing (Houlgate 2010: 146) by setting an *external* relationship with an independent object. The latter is thus both external and internal. For Hegel, this movement results in determining reflexion, which is the unity of the positing and the external one. We have seen that, in positing reflexion the one-sidedness of the movement of essence annulled immediacy through the totalizing logic of reflexion. In the external one, the reflexion is sacrificed when the movement reaches a non-speculative point. Or, as Trisokkas captures this situation, “positing reflexion is too much of a reflexion; external reflexion is too little of

a reflexion” (2016: 106). Now, in determining reflexion, immediacy must be understood as independent even though it is presupposed: for it is posited *as* genuine immediacy and thus not *generated* by essence. It has escaped both the logic of absolute self-negation and that of non-speculative unrelatedness. It is genuine *and* reflexive simultaneously; reflexivity does not annul its independence, but *makes it possible* (Houlgate 2010: 147).

Identity and Difference¹³

Essence is now the simple unity between absolute negativity and immediacy. By positing genuine immediacy, it has achieved equality-to-itself as sublated immediacy. Hegel names this new state *immediacy of reflexion* (Hegel 2010: 356) or absolute self-related negativity, one that has nothing as an object but itself – identity. An identical object is one whose fundamental relation points to itself only: this tree defines its own identity from within, not without; it is self-related. This identity, Hegel states, is internally produced by essence – a ‘pure production’ (ibid.: 356). At this very moment, it is neither related nor characterized by any object outside itself. Nevertheless, Hegel points out that we risk getting back to external reflexion; our identity is speculatively derived, but behaves formally, as simple self-relatedness abstracting difference and externality, remaining only in itself (Hegel 1991: 179). The external relationship between identity and non-identity is described by Hegel as follows:

such a thought [the formal one] will always have only abstract identity in mind, and, outside and alongside it, difference. In its opinion, reason is no more than a loom intertwining warp (say, identity) and woof (say, difference), joining them externally; or, if it turns to analysis, now specifically pulling out identity, and *at the same time also* obtaining difference *alongside* it; now a comparing, and *also* a differentiating *at the same time* – a comparing in that it *abstracts* from difference, and a differentiating in that it *abstracts* from comparing (Hegel 2010: 357).

However, Hegel points out that identity speculatively derived is not ‘simple’ self-relatedness, indifferent to non-identity. It is essentially the self-relating of the self-negating negative, or essence (Houlgate 2010: 148). It is intrinsically compelled to be reflexive and mediated. In this way, identity as absolute negation is an identity of a self-differentiating unity that constantly collapses back into itself. Any mediation, though negating and being a difference, still

¹³ The similarities between the configuration of identity and difference here and the way in which the moment of perception articulates the object of knowledge in the *Phenomenology* is interesting. Hegel states that, in perception, “the object is *in one and the same respect the opposite of itself: it is for itself in so far as it is for another, and it is for another, so far as it is for itself*” (Hegel 1977b). The dialectical movement is furthered by this mutual negativity. This form of relatedness represents, for Hyppolite, essential for the genesis of the concept: “the object of perception is simultaneously the site of properties ... and the unity in which these matters dissolve” (Hyppolite 1974: 103). See also Pinkard 1991 and Kojève 1980: 203–205. Even though such a comparative analysis might be fertile, it exceeds the scope of this paper.

remains identical: “as absolute negation, [identity] is negation immediately negating itself – a non-being and difference that vanishes as it arises, or a distinguishing by which nothing is distinguished” (Hegel 2010: 357). In other words, identity is actually a self-identical difference. Its internal self-differentiation is the affirmation of the non-being of the other and hence a re-affirmation of itself as identical. It is concomitantly the sublation of differentiation itself, since it falls back again and again into identity. But then identity is actually defined by a *lack of identity* – a constitutive non-being which is the being of identity. Identity is thus in itself *difference*, defined by what it lacks. Still, it is difference *from* itself, difference *within*; identity is not defined by an external lack, but by its immanently negative constitution. This tree, to recall Yeomans’ example¹⁴, remains identical to itself despite the fundamental changes it meets during spring, summer, fall or winter. It is differentiating itself *from* itself through change and preserve itself this way. Moreover, in order to be this tree, it has to actually *identify* with the very difference, to appropriate it as its own, hence Hegel states that ‘identity is absolute non-identity’ (ibid.: 358). In this way, identity must be mediated by difference; an object is identical to itself only by changing. Therefore, identity becomes a mediated unity: it is now “the whole, but as reflexion it posits itself as its own moment, as the positedness from which it is the turning back into itself” (ibid.: 357–358). Identity is the whole which contains identity and difference as moments.

Difference mediates identity. It is confined by identity *in* the identical and its movement and serves to its reflexion. It is intrinsically reflexion, since it is mediation. Deleuze seems then right. Difference is only the negative of identity, the necessary trade-off that the concept has to make with the dialectical. Difference is contradiction, the fertile negative, which reproduces the identical within it; it is deduced from the essential constitution of identity as a need for its development. It actually takes the place of seeming in positing reflexion, since it is posited by identity as something that always turns back to fuel and extend the circle of identity. Difference is totalized and reduced to negative subsistence; as reflexivity, it is contradictory in itself, and hence its ontological status depends on identity. Then, the poststructuralist critique of Hegel seems right. Difference is nothing but contradiction mediating identity, getting only where the identical wants and needs, not smuggling any border. It is the contradiction that takes the form of the other of identity in order for the latter not to totally collapse into itself and become an ontological tautology. Difference is consumed as negativity; it does not move freely by itself: but is chased by the logical monsters of the dialectic.

Or is it really so? Let’s reevaluate the above-analyzed movement. We have seen that identity is, in the first instance, relating to nothing but itself; it is the ‘negation immediately negating itself’ (ibid.: 358). It is so because every difference and differentiation eventually turns back into itself. Differentiation collapses as differentiation, *annuls itself as activity*: it is the non-being in relation

14 Yeomans 2007: 64.

to itself. However, Hegel points out that this moment is crucial: the self-relatedness of the non-being actually confers some autonomy on the part of difference. Then this non-being and indeed non-activity is rather affirmative within identity: without this very collapsing as process of its own identity would die out. Hegel states that, due to this constitutive nature of the non-being, difference becomes *reflexive* and therefore *absolute* itself (ibid.: 357). *Change* has an ontological status of its own; it is not merely the change of something; or, the existence of change is not canceled out once an object changes. Rather, change actualizes as *changing*, but is not reduced to it. Difference is not consumed by identity. Instead, this autonomization of the former points to the co-structurality of identity and difference. As reflexive, difference itself has gained essentiality: the self-related non-being is *in and for itself*; it is not reducible to the identical: “not different through something external but *self-referring*, hence *simple*, difference” (Hegel 2010: 362; Hegel 1991: 181). Difference is not only mediating the identical in order to justify its subsistence. Rather, its reflexive essentiality guaranteed before the act of mediation makes possible the mediation itself. Difference is self-related through reflexivity; therefore, as in the case of identity, it mediates itself. It is not the difference of another, but difference *in* itself and *from* itself. However, that which differs from difference is identity. Therefore, difference is both itself and identity. But difference is thus, as co-structural with identity, the *whole* and its own moment doubled by identity. Therefore, identity and difference are both in themselves – reflexive – and for the other – mediative. Or rather, *because* they are reflexion and thus essentialities, they have to mutually mediate each other. In this light, Hegel points out that the relationship between the two categories “is to be regarded as the essential nature of reflexion and as *the determined primordial origin of all activity and self-movement*” (Hegel 2010: 362). The archetype of the speculative is co-substantiality. This is actually where all discussion on the relationship between identity, difference or their relationship in Hegel starts. Only now, after the analysis of essence and why identity cannot stay in any other relation to difference, have we reached the movement of double transition in its essentiality; only at this point is the speculative affirmed in its entirety. We have followed the conceptual movement of essence, identity and difference and found out that its very development perpetually nullifies any form of hierarchy and *instantiates the moment of cancellation as the defining one*. Without the treatment of essence, without finding out the way in which essence shapes identity and difference as mutual categories, the whole inquiry into Hegel’s supposed hierarchical dialectics is hollow – it responds to an external object and thus makes itself external.

Conclusions

Let’s now, conclusively, make explicit the answers to the underlying questions of the paper which represented our point of departure. The logic of the relationship between identity and difference is, as seen, one of sheer mediation. The initial being of identity as exclusively mediated by difference, giving

nothing in exchange, has turned itself to be a mere *seeming*. With the movement completed, a direct answer must be provided to the initial thorny questions. First, is the relationship between identity and difference hierarchical in Hegel's view? The answer is not a simple 'no'; actually, this question cancels itself out. It supposes that there can be such a relationship between identity and difference, imposing a conceptual framework which compel us to adopt a language Hegel didn't speak. Instead, not only is a supposed primacy of identity non-sensical in Hegel's view, but the speculative dialectics abolishes this priority's very conditions of possibility – external reflexivity and formal understanding – by making the relationship between identity and difference into a subject, a movement that defines categories as self- and other- related through over-determining contradictions. Categories instantiate themselves as mutually constitutive and necessary. Second, is difference reducible to contradiction, to the 'needs' of identity? It is not, for two main reasons: on the one hand, difference is *prior* to the relationship with identity; on the other hand, it is *in itself* difference, autonomous, self-related. However, we have seen that both identity and difference must mediate each other; their mutual negativity is constitutive, not simply destructive. Neither is reducible to the other. Contradiction is thus nothing but conceptual intimacy. Identity and difference are equiprimordial and co-structural. Dialectics is not hierarchical and cannot be so.¹⁵

15 The analysis of the essence and the immanent relationship between categories have immediate consequences regarding social ontology. Lukács, in his *Ontology of Social Being*, already stressed that Hegel's determinations of reflexion are instructive for the relationship between theory and practice, arguing that 'the elucidation of the character and realm of operation of the reflection determinations can also cast light on an often used, very popular but seldom analysed concept, that of the abolition of contradictions' (Lukács 1982: 112). By also pointing to the fact that the determinations of reflexion define a concrete dimension within a complex of being (ibid.: 112), he argues that the overcoming of contradictions implies different actualizations in a logical realm and an onto-social one. Hence, this movement synthetizes thought and being as follows: "in social being, social consciousness is involved in the series of real components of the abolition ... An adequate knowledge of the complexes that press towards or away from abolition can thus in certain circumstances become an ontologically real component in the process of abolition" (ibid.: 113). It seems to me that Lukács places on another footing his early thesis that the proletariat's self-understanding represents the understanding of the whole social realm, an essential step in theorizing the proletariat as the subject-object of history (Lukács 1971: 2–3). The notion of totality central to his *History and Class Consciousness* articulated specifically against the reification of Marxist consciousness, represents the cornerstone of Orthodox Marxism, elevated at the rank of method (ibid.: 1; 10–15). The fact that the dialectics of essence proves once and for all the non- and anti-hierarchical structures of categories can only have as a consequence the centralization of concrete totality in social analysis. Essence and how the dialectics of immediacy and non-immediacy configure ontology represent a crucial moment not only in the progression of Hegel's *Science of Logic* but also in the logic and history of dialectical thought. Lukács is, as far as I am concerned, the first to point to and to theorize the importance of this relationship between Hegel's *Science of Logic* and social ontology (see also Lukács 1982: 67–68). I am indebted to the reviewer of the manuscript for pointing to the analogy between this paper's thesis and that of Lukács.

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Ionuț Vaduva

Hijerarhije dijalektike: Hegel o identitetu i razlici

Apstrakt

U ovom radu tvrdim da je neophodno osloniti se na kategorično čitanje Hegelovih pojmova identiteta i razlike kako bi se pravilno razumeo njihov nehijerarhijski odnos u hegelijanskoj dijalektici. Mnogi komentatori svoju spekulativnu prirodu svode na samo instrumentalnu upotrebu termina u analizi Hegelovog rada. Na taj način se identitet i razlika samo formalno koriste čime se ontološki zamagljuju, te ostavljaju prostor za naknadne nedostatke i hijerarhizacije. U radu tvrdim da je najbolji način da se razjasni hijerarhijsko pitanje i spreči dijalektičko mišljenje od takvih grešaka ispitivanje Hegelove spekulativne konfiguracije ontologičkih kategorija. Ako ništa drugo, Hegel zamenjuje primat identiteta nad razlikom unutrašnjom vezom koja određuje strukturu ovih pojmova, dajući im na taj način imanentnu povezanost. Za njega je odnos među kategorijama nužno kretanje. Konstitucija identiteta i razlike, kao određena refleksije suštine u Hegelovoj knjizi *Nauka logike*, pokazuje da su oni ekviprimordijalni i ko-strukturalni, čime sprečavaju svaku moguću hijerarhiju.

Ključne reči: identitet, razlika, spekulativna dijalektika, Delez, Hegel, filozofija identiteta, Marks, hijerarhija.