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AFTER HEGEL: A POSTMODERN GENEALOGY OF HISTORICAL FICTION¹

ABSTRACT

In this article, we analyze a possible form of the relationship between modernity and postmodernity by examining the transformation of the place of enunciation of criticism as a philosophical narrative and using it as a historical and philosophical criterion. To achieve this, we first focus on key moments in the critical discourse of modernity, and then analyze the role of Kantian criticism in the formation of a postmodern imaginary associated with the notions of useful fiction and linguistification. Finally, from a Hegelian perspective, we consider the validity of the idea of universal history and its connections to emancipatory narratives.

KEYWORDS

Kant, Hegel, Groys, modernity, postmodernity, history, language

Introduction

An important aspect of the debates on postmodernity has been the singling out of the criteria under which it would be coherent to think not only of a historical, political, economic, and cultural break with/of modernity, but also of an epistemic inflection. The simultaneity of global space in the era of digitalization, the normativity of the link between capitalism and liberal democracy, the complacency with authoritarian and fascist impulses, the subordination of criticism to denunciation and its subsequent volatility, and a long *etcetera*, have acted at different times as a kind of frame of reference for the contemporary world: that is, as limits of what the speakable and therefore possible, is.

Especially within the philosophy of language, although not reduced to it, the problem has also been in the debate between the antecedent of each; between

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what is speakable and what is *possible*. If language had sufficient character, it would be enough to name the *possible* for it to become a real reference, guideline, etc., as if language preceded the transformation of reality. On the other hand, if language were insufficient in this matter, naming the *possible* would only have meaning after its realization. Between one position and the other, as an unwanted mediation, there are usually conflicts regarding the present and the real existence of references, thus also regarding the translations of reality and its representation. One could ask a classic rhetorical question as an example: is it enough for us to define ourselves as free to realize freedom; or, precisely because of the lack of immediate real references, freedom can only be named retrospectively? Or, more precisely, under what conditions is freedom speakable and possible; under these really existing conditions or those of the imaginable political imagination of historical subversive perspective? Of course, there is another option that freedom is not possible at all. Several of the most famous pages of Hegelian philosophy deal precisely with this conflict of representations and the validity that logic can have concerning the variability of reality in general. In this sense, what is at stake in Hegelian philosophy, among other things we could say, is the problematization of the *fixity* of this conflict as an expression of the freedom of the spirit, i.e., as history, and its logical form.

Since the middle of the 19th century, debates on the Hegelian philosophy of world history oscillated between two apparently contradictory positions: if, on the one hand, it was said that Hegelian logic legitimized the (reactionary and Prussian) present, on the other it was said that it constituted the foundations of the (atheistic and republican) subversion and transgression of reality: i.e., the famous debate of the “young and old” Hegelians, their terminology, their intentionality and the place of philosophical discourse in the public space expressed more about the urgency of the present than about the consistency of Hegelian philosophy. Now, beyond the history of the early reception of Hegelian philosophy, one of the fundamental aspects of the German philosophical debate after the *Befreiungskriege* was the place of inflection in a long process of continuous transformation that, depending on the logical criterion of the historical representation, could be conducted by religious, philosophical, economic, and/or political impulses; or, in other words, the question was the moment and the limit where the transformation process has no way of turning back, where the inflection is *fixed* as a real historical present (*wirklich*). Certainly, from this perspective, contemporary debates on the postmodern inflection do not differ radically from the question of inflection of modernity in the context of German philosophies of history.

As an example, let's take two texts that stand out among French philosophy's critique of the Hegelian idea of history: Deleuze and Guattari's *What is philosophy?* and Foucault's *Theatrum philosophicum*. When Deleuze and Guattari say that the great conflict of modern philosophy is its need for “reconstitution of universals”, (1994: 12) they are translating what Foucault sees in the liberation “from the opposition of predicates, from contradiction and negation, from all of dialectics” (Foucault 1996: 186) as a real political horizon and perspective.

However, the rejection of universality is not as relevant in this context as the subtext of criticism that dialogues with the development of modernity as a challenge to the validity of universality. That is to say, it is not so much about the rejection as about the subversion of universality. At first, the moment of criticism could be granted, that universality supposes a closed reality, but that also allows us to ask if the universality necessarily has a fixed closure; and if not, the issue lies in the possibility of an essentially *unfixed* closure.

Starting from these premises, this article argues that the notion of historical present has a dimension referring to the validity of the representation of reality that is related at the same time to the notion of fiction as an expression of the link between necessity and possibility. In other words, although modern philosophy did not formulate its own reflection on the present in the terms associated with postmodern discourse, it is possible to read some aspects of modern philosophy from the genealogical perspective of postmodernity within a broad genealogical reconstruction of the problem.

To address this hypothesis, we first expose the ambiguity of the historical limits of modernity within the framework of classical German philosophy, giving special emphasis to the place that Spinoza and Kant directly or indirectly occupied in the demarcation of what was then considered properly “contemporary”. In this context, our objective is to show how Heinrich Heine’s reading of Kantian philosophy as a transposition of the critique of the means of reason to those of the will, a transposition driven by the presupposition of transcendental ideas, is at the basis of a “postmodern reading” of classical German philosophy itself. Secondly, we analyze how the Kantian argument acquires a greater dimension when the emphasis falls on the assumption not of transcendental ideas as conditions for the representation of reality, but of the idea of representation itself. To achieve this, we outline Vaihinger’s debate and retrospectively trace how this epistemological warning can act in the philosophical discourse of modernity as a criterion to resituate the notion of possibility within the framework of necessity as a critique of the dogmatism of the representations of modernity. Finally, we address how this criticism of dogmatism implies at least the conversion of the sense of criticism already present in what we understand as a trajectory of indeterminacy of language. For this last moment, we will begin with a brief discussion of the concept of *Versprachlichung*, and we will end with an exposition of the philosophical link between it and the Hegelian notion of *Bestimmungslosigkeit* within the framework of the philosophy of universal history.

Overall, our purpose in this work is to contribute to the philosophical discussion about freedom in the debate between modernity and postmodernity.

1. What Modernity?

When Hegel says that “Spinoza becomes a proving point in modern philosophy [*Hauptpunkt der modernen Philosophie*], so that one can really say: either you are a Spinozist or you are not a philosopher at all” (Hegel 1995: 283),

he suggests a provocation to public opinion of the German philosophical Enlightenment: Spinoza's philosophy, and with it modern philosophy in general, belongs to the past. After the *Hauptpunkt*, after Spinoza's philosophy as a historical criterion, comes the decadence or, at least, the transformation that represented the change of perspective and the new place of enunciation inaugurated by Kantian critical philosophy. Kant, Hegel says, objects precisely to the relationship between being and thought that grounds the Cartesian principle of Spinozism. However, Hegel insists, the Kantian objection is itself "already old [*ist schon alt*]" (ibid.: 145). As much or more Kantian than Kant, for Hegel, the contemporary present belongs to critical thought.

There's a quite old objection that suggests that the formulation of Rudolf Haym's 1857 Munich lectures clearly implies that in the social context brought up by the experience of the Spring of 1848, the coherence, consistency, and representativeness of the Hegelian criticism also belongs to *his* time and not to ours (Haym's); to the past of pantheism and atheism and not to the present of the "democratic" political Enlightenment. Schelling seems to use a similar criterion in his Munich lectures on the "*neuere Philosophie*", where he criticizes Hegelian logic for having included all the concepts existing in *his* time, explicitly relegating it to the final moment of modern philosophy: "In Hegel's *Logic* one finds every concept which just happened to be accessible and available at *his* time [*seiner Zeit*] taken up as a moment of the absolute Idea at a specific point. Linked to this is the pretension to complete systematization, i.e. the claim that all concepts have been included and that outside the circle of those that have been included no other concept is possible" (Schelling 1998: 144). So, for Schelling, Hegelian dialectics represents a logical representation of the past.

However, this objection can be challenged on its own terms: in 1832 Karl Göschel published the pamphlet *Hegel und seine Zeit*, with a rather suggestive subtitle: "*zum Unterrichte in der gegenwärtigen Philosophie*". In his characterization of the present, Röschel inscribes Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel in the same contemporary moment despite their differences and mutual "spiritual contradictions" (Göschel 1832: 137). Thus, assuming the historical character of the terminology, during the first half of the 19th century the debate on formal post-modernity as a philosophical and political gesture of overcoming the conceptual framework of modernity is a process already *in actu*. The problem nonetheless is that while Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel read Kantian critical philosophy in such a way as to be able to raise post-modern questions in formulable by Kant, the critique of the 1840s will focus its critique on the same systemic principle and that's the reason why they'll argue that Hegel was not Hegelian enough to throw himself into the incessant movement of the present and to assume the consequences of such a logic of the possible inscribed in this (or, *that*) precise present.

That's the late critique Engels will make in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, and it is also the foundation of the critique of the restitution principle of Hegelian logic that Feuerbach emphasizes in the *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*: a philosophy (Feuerbach's), moreover, in which the movement of the present moves forward rather than backward, a

philosophy for which Hegelian logic, the “culmination of modern philosophy [*neueren Philosophie*]”, (Feuerbach 1986: §19) is still *too* modern: “the contradiction of modern philosophy [*neueren Philosophie*], especially of pantheism, is due to the fact that it is the negation of theology from the point of view of theology or the negation of theology which itself is itself again theology; this contradiction especially characterizes Hegelian philosophy” (ibid.: §21). Perhaps even *too* Cartesian:

The secret of the Hegelian dialectic lies, in the last analysis, only in the fact that it denies theology by philosophy and then, in turn, denies philosophy by theology. Theology constitutes the beginning and the end; philosophy stands in the middle as the negation of the first affirmation, but the negation of the negation is theology. At first, everything is overthrown, but then everything is put back in its place; it is the same as with Descartes (ibid.: §21).²

The critique of Moses Hess highlights this limit of modern philosophy identifying the problem with Descartes, “only the first word of the Cartesian philosophy is true; it was not really possible for Descartes to say *cogito ergo sum*, but only *cogito*”, (Hess 1964: 249) while stressing at the same time the absence of possibility in the enunciation of historical time prior to the post-Cartesian *Neuzeit* that underlies Spinoza’s *Ethics* and decays into the Fichtean self-positioning of the “I” without transgressing the limits of intrinsically German idealism. Hess translates the Hegelian rhetoric into a criterion of reality, “the value of negation was perceived in Germany in the realm of thought, but not in the realm of action” (ibid.: 267). Germans, Hess concludes, failed *to repeat* Kant, for “in order for Germany to achieve socialism, it must have a Kant for the old social organism, as it had for the old structure of thought” (ibid.: 267).³

2 We have decided to leave the original reference in German between square brackets [] to emphasize the difference between “*modern*”, “*neue*” and “*gegenwärtig*”, which English translations usually translate as “modern”, neglecting the philosophical and political nuance that the terminological difference entails.

3 The full reference continues to be an inevitable statement in the history of literature: “Without revolution, no new history can begin. As strong as was the approval of the French Revolution in Germany, its essence, which consisted in nothing less than tearing down the pillars upon which the old social life had stood, was just as strongly misunderstood everywhere. The value of negation was perceived in Germany in the realm of thought, but not in the realm of action. The value of anarchy consists in the fact that the individual must once again rely upon himself, and proceed from himself. But Kant’s philosophical criticism brought about this state of anarchy nowhere but in the realm of thought, and so his immediate successor, Fichte, laid the groundwork of modern history only, once again, in the realm of thought, and not in the realm of the whole life of the spirit, of free social activity. In this respect, people were happy simply to appropriate ‘the results of the French Revolution’ for themselves. But nothing more than that is done about it. In History, in the life of the spirit, results mean nothing; it is only the carrying out of legacies that is effective. The ‘realizing’, not the ‘realization’ is the important thing. With the ‘realization’, the spirit has nothing more to do, nothing new to realize, to work out and strengthen. Simply to appropriate results is to place old patches upon old clothes. People in Germany have become satisfied with just this kind of patchwork as far as

Hess, like Heinrich Heine before him, inscribes the radicality of the new enunciation in Kant or, rather, in what to do with Kant while accepting that Germans weren't Kantians enough.

The project of a tribunal of the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics in general was intended to be grounded in rational *a priori* principles; paradoxically this also meant the possibility of an interpretation of critical thinking as a guillotine that dismantles any pretension of transcendental grounding of any political and religious relation. Kant, “the great destroyer in the realm of thought, [who] far surpassed Maximilian Robespierre in terrorism”, (Heine 2007: 79) put the King and God in their place, Kant “has stormed heaven, he has disposed of the whole crew, the ruler of the world swims, unprovable, in his own blood, there is now no more mercy, no fatherly benevolence, no reward in the hereafter for abstinence now, the immortality of the soul lies in its final agonies – moans and death rattles” (ibid.: 87).

Of God, the soul, and the world, Kant says, we cannot formulate sufficient but only satisfactory logical reasons. What we can do is to satisfy the existential need to avoid at all costs the *horror vacui* of logical insufficiency: in God, the soul, and the world we must believe as if (*als ob...*) they were really justified as logical and narrative fictions of the experience of reality. For Heine, against the Kantian claim to establish a solid scientific foundation for all future metaphysics, what Kant did was to transform God into a volitional and decisional possibility. Kant's atheism, as unforeseen as Spinoza's at the time, became the model of philosophical radicalism for the post-revolutionary Germans. Philosophy then had the task of giving a name to the empty signifier of secularized power: the French political revolution had shown that where God used to be now there was nothing but men – not just any men, but the French white male proprietor, the *citoyen* of the *Déclaration*, and therefore, *that* specific type of men became the object and model of all definition of men.

Now, when Kant tries to show the natural tendency of men toward good, he is forced to assume a parallel dimension concerning the “I” of reason so that the apperception of the transcendental order expresses itself as the person in the practical and social order. The problem in this case is not the supposition of the “I” in its double transcendental and practical variable, but the consequences of the supposition. For Kant, “true politics can take no steps forward without first paying tribute to morality” (Kant 2006: 104), and so he is confronted with a problem paradoxically derived from the consistency of his

social life is concerned, and they believe that they have thus wrought justice. Only in France was the spirit given its due in the matter of free social activity. From the anarchy of terrorism stepped forth Babeuf, the French Fichte, the first communist, who laid the groundwork for the further development of the new ethic with respect to social activity, just as Fichte, the first true atheist, laid the groundwork with respect to thought. On the other hand, matters pertaining to thought were not set right in France, and as much as people there strive to appropriate the ‘results of German philosophy’ for themselves, they have not been able to make any sense out of it all, for the same reason that this appropriation of ‘results’ miscarried in Germany” (Hess 1964: 267).

critique in relation to the hypothetical universalization of the transcendental and practical self as a valid assumption. If the “I” of pure reason makes possible the continuity and consistency of individual representations, that same “I” is a necessary condition for the “I” of practical reason that acts in society in accordance with morality, but the “I” in its double dimension, being a logical supposition that operationalizes the system of thought as if it really exists, it remains referred to a decisional dimension. Here the problem with the Kantian assumption lies not in the universality of the “I”, or in the hypothetical idealism of the assumption but in the abstract character of universality.

When Heine places Kant beside or rather above Robespierre and associates the critique of reason with the guillotine of universality, he is also saying that a Kantian terror analogous to that of the Jacobins would be thinkable – a terror that, like Robespierre’s, takes itself to the revolutionary scaffold. In that precise sense, for Kantians, Kant also belongs unfailingly to the past, even if he announces the present within the realm of the possible. Like Robespierre in French politics, he constitutes the liminal moment of contemporary critique by refereeing its own assumptions into the past – and, in doing so, according to Heine, he denies any possible restitution. Thus (for Heine) post-modernity starts unexpectedly and utterly with Kant.

2. Present As If

In the 20th century, Hans Vaihinger took the Kantian argument to a logical dimension not only unsuspected by Kant but openly contradictory to his epistemological framework. For Vaihinger the philosophy of the “As if” expresses the so-called new idealism, a representation of the present that resembles contemporary social needs when dogmas come back into play as a sort of imaginary, figurative and anthropomorphic covers of ethical thoughts, where “the fiction can be regarded as a ‘legitimized error’, i.e. as a fictional conceptual construct that has justified its existence by its success” (Vaihinger 2009: 106). However, Vaihinger points out, “it would be wrong to argue from the success of such a logical procedure to its logical purity or real validity. Fictions are and must remain circuitous and indirect mental paths, which cannot, because they conduct us to our goal, be regarded as really valid or free from logical contradiction” (ibid.: 106). Let’s assume this insight for now.

When Feuerbach argued in favor of the sufficiency of atheism in showing the anthropological essence of Christianity, he was taking a position that presupposed the sufficiency of language as a codification of reason and of error as opposed to some kind of truth: “every limitation of the reason, or in general of the nature of man, rests on a delusion, an error” (Feuerbach 1989: 7); confusion, Feuerbach continues, is the reason why, as Hegel would say, the stage is confused with the curtain of the *Schauplatz* of universal history (ibid.: 7). Unlike Feuerbach, Vaihinger’s emphasis is that the existence or non-existence of God is not logically demonstrated but functionally assumed, which implies granting a double game of sufficiency and insufficiency of language and its

representative function of reality. Language is sufficient because it expresses useful fictions in a social context, but at the same time, it is insufficient because the usefulness or uselessness of a category cannot be regulated by decree. Ultimately Vaihinger's point is that useful fictions do not express a relativism of any kind, nor do they express a social manipulation but rather introduce the contested consistency of essentially variable essences into the representation of reality as a whole. Speaking in a Hegelian fashion, useful fictions are determining essences, but they are not invariable substances, and precisely in this sense they are also transgressions of the *Ding an sich*, the "foreign body [*Fremdkörper*] of the Kantian system" (Scholz 1921: 32).

If for Kant, "under the government of reason our cognitions cannot at all constitute a rhapsody but must constitute a system, in which alone they can support and advance its essential ends", (Kant 1998: 691), thus opposing any prosaic model, what Vaihinger and Scholz emphasize is precisely the arbitrary character of the Kantian anti-prosaic critique, its inconsistency with the *Diesseitigkeit* of the absolute.⁴ The Hegelian philosophical project, to conceive of the present as it is without going beyond concrete reality, which exists "God knows where", (Hegel 2008: 13) is partly a radicalization of the Kantian critique at least in this sense: if the three regulative ideas of experience are conditioning and necessary assumptions of every possible representation, then every representation is by definition also an assumption, a narrative useful fiction – a "Marxian" *bestehenden Voraussetzung*.⁵ This is what Hegel refers to in the Introduction to the *Science of Logic* when he says that the error of Kantian philosophy does not mean a mistake but a limitation, i.e. not having submitted

4 "Of course, one knows from the introduction to Phenomenology how far Hegel went beyond Schelling in just a few years. So much so that it led to a complete break between the two thinkers. But this Introduction, for all its greatness, is an act of ingratitude against Schelling. Schelling had a right to be angry. With disproportionate sharpness, this Introduction only reveals what separates them: the spiritualistic rather than the identity-philosophical conception of the absolute and the new dialectical method. But it hides the basic idea that, despite everything, connects Hegel with Schelling and continued to do so until the end; the unshakable conviction of the this-worldliness of the absolute [*die unverrückbare Überzeugung von der Diesseitigkeit des Absoluten*] — an idea that makes his phenomenology possible in the first place. Given this situation, it seems hopeless to judge Hegel directly against Kant. There are so many incommensurable events between the criticism of reason and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* or even Hegelian *Logic* that the transformation of Kant by Hegel has become a complete revolution [*zu einer völligen Umwälzung geworden ist*]" (Scholz 1921: 32).

5 When Marx and Engels say in their now famous formulation that "communism is for us not a state of affairs [*Zustand*] which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself" but the "real movement [*wirkliche Bewegung*] which abolishes the present state of things", they do so assuming that "the conditions [*Bedingungen*] of this movement result from the premises now in existence [*bestehenden Voraussetzung*]" (Marx and Engels 1976: 57). That assumption can be read as a transposition of the place of enunciation of the transformation of reality from the plane of pure possibility to that of the necessity of possibility, from the assumption that for something to be possible it must first be necessary for it to be possible.

the critique of pure reason itself to the tribunal of reason as such. Hegel grants Kant the merit of having demonstrated the necessary and non-arbitrary logical character of dialectics, but criticizes him for having focused only on “the negative aspect of dialectics”, which unfailingly implies affirming that reason “is incapable of knowing the infinite – a peculiar result indeed, for it says that, since the infinite is what is rational, reason is not capable of cognizing the rational” (Hegel 2010: 35).

When Kant is forced to deduce the *Ding an sich*, he not only reaffirms the decisional character of the analytic position but also suspends the logical process where the speculative consists precisely in the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative. If the affirmation of negativity does not mean a radical skepticism that presupposes the effective possibility of the non-existence of God, the soul, and the world, for Hegel Kant is not wrong in affirming the three presuppositions but in stopping too soon and leaving aside what there is of nothing in the being of all possible experience. The Kantian antinomies, Hegel says, are logically grounded in the “common dialectic” which is based on “fixing the opposition of being and nothing” (ibid.: 79); and, if this opposition is preserved, “nothing can begin, neither insofar as something is, nor insofar as it is not; for insofar as it is, it does not begin to be; and insofar as it is not, it does not begin to be” (ibid.: 79). The presupposition of the absolute split implies then that nothing was, and nothing will be, but there is only experience of the presupposition of what is. Quite on the contrary, Hegel concludes, “becoming is the non-separation of being and nothingness, not the unity which is abstracted from being and nothingness; as unity of being and nothingness it is rather this determinate unity, or that in which being and nothingness are equally. However, insofar as being and nothingness are each not separated from their other, each is not. In this unity, therefore, they are, but as vanishing” (ibid.: 80).

This reading focused on the dialectic as the becoming of the opposition-unity of being and nothingness operated as a hermeneutical key for 19th-century Hegelianism because it meant that the structure of reality is the dynamic of change and transformation itself. From that perspective, the problem was not the assumption itself but the moment of validity of presuppositions, or the moment of utility of fiction. Now, in Hegel’s philosophy there is no infinite regression to the presupposition of assumptions – what Marx and Engels called the “critique of critical critique”, (Marx and Engels 1956) because the balance remains on the side of reality; and, in this or that present assumptions appear as the essential foundations of reality and representations of reality, of its *Bedingungen*.

That’s precisely why modernity and post-modernity are in this sense not a matter of pure temporality and historic succession, but of historical enunciation. Let us take the classic example of the 19th century. The essence of the *ancien régime* was indeed the assumption of monarchical power, but with the revolutionary process, this essence became ineffective in the face of the rise of the bourgeoisie and the new secular assumption of capital and legal

constitutionality. After the Revolution of 1789, the King is still *a* King, but he's no longer King as he used to be – and one could say the same about God after Kant. Thus, the revolutionary aspect of Hegelian philosophy does not lie in the rationality that reality has at one moment or another, but in the structural irrationality of reality itself. Now, irrationality here does not refer to a kind of unknowability of reality, or a possible unknowable character of the subject; what it refers to is the necessary mismatch between the concrete configuration of the social organization and the society it represents, to the vanishing moments of becoming or to the vanishing useful fictions of reality, because one could ask if anyone really believed in the divine character of monarchy or the universality of the *Déclaration*, in the representativeness of modern democracy, or the promise of equity in capitalism – and if so, most likely not as real, but *as if*.

Engels asserts that the problem of the Hegelian dialectic is not its idealist “mysticism” or in the analytical limits of a bourgeois consciousness as Lukács supposed. For Engels, the main problem of Hegelian logic is the necessity of closure, the form and formality of the system, and its internal functions. What Hegel criticized of the revolutionary terror of subjectivity, of its political or religious fanatical form, forced him to slow down, Engels says, or to suspend the logical process and to decide the position of the “I” in the collectivity without further criticism of that place, for the affirmative character of Hegelian logic is not so much an acceleration as a suspension of critique. Engels' critique is the same critique that Hegel made of Kant, namely not to have submitted to the tribunal of reason – here, of dialectics – the exposition of the realization of the absolute Idea. Hegel, Engels says, was coerced by the need to construct a system because by definition a system “must conclude with some sort of absolute truth”, and while Hegel insisted in the *Science of Logic* that an absolute truth is nothing more than the logical (and, respectively, historical) process itself, he is forced to arbitrarily establish an end and a closure (Engels 1941: 13). With that final proposition the whole dogmatic content of Hegel's system is erected as absolute truth, in contradiction with his dialectical method which destroys every dogmatic assumption. Hence Engels reads the *Doppelsatz* of 1820 as a sort of systematization of the critique (dogmatic, in his terms) of all dogmatism, epistemological or social: “In accordance with all the rules of the Hegelian method of thought, the proposition of the rationality of everything which is real is dissolved to become the other proposition: All that exists deserves to perish” (ibid.: 11). Just as rational concepts at a moment of inflection no longer represent reality, so do social institutions err at an analogous moment in attempting to represent society. Now, if the paradox of Hegelian logic is the production of a logical dogmatism in order to dismantle all possible dogmatism, the question is, which critique dismantles Hegelian dogmatism itself?

In that order, we can say that the *fixed closure* that Hegel saw in Kantian philosophy acquires a wider meaning in the scope of Engel's critique of the Hegelian *fixed closure* of dialectics; so dogmatism – as Heine foresaw – does not rely on the closure of universality but on its *fixity*, and as we will argue now, that is a problem regarding freedom and language.

3. The Realm of Language

The reading that Žižek has popularized of Hegelian philosophy proposes a variable or counterpoint to the interpretation that Engels popularized at the end of the 19th-century. The main feature of historical thought, Žižek says, “is not ‘mobilism’ (the motive of liquefaction or historical relativization of all forms of life), but the full confirmation of a certain impossibility: after a real historical break, one simply cannot return to the past, or continue as if nothing had happened – even if you do, the same practice will take on a radically changed meaning” (Žižek 2013: 193). At first instance Žižek establishes this principle of impossibility in relation to the course of historical events; however, he rhetorically asks: “is not Hegel’s speculative idealism the exemplary case of such a properly historical impossibility?” (ibid.: 194).⁶ If, as Žižek says, Hegelian philosophy is possibly the best example of that impossibility, the problem is related to but somewhat different from that of Engels’

When Carla Lonzi criticizes Hegel for the patriarchal character of the spirit of the *Phenomenology* (1974: 28) we are faced with a problem analogous to Moishe Postone’s criticism of the capitalist character of the Hegelian *Geist* (2003: 75). What Lonzi and Postone claim is that the Hegelian spirit is capitalist, colonial and patriarchal, and what Žižek implies is that it could not be otherwise. The affirmation of a different possibility would paradoxically dismantle the power of criticism of capitalism, coloniality, and patriarchy both by assuming a self-sufficiency of the formulation of criticism through language, and by producing a representation without concrete content. The question should be how vanishing the patriarchal fiction of modernity is, assuming of course that behind the fiction there is no originary proto-phenomenon, no *Urphänomen*.

When Hegel says in the *Phenomenology* that, “it is manifest that behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless *we* go behind it ourselves, as much in order that we may see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen”, (Hegel 1979: 103) he emphasizes the vanishedness and the effectiveness of phenomena, which translates into assuming the constitutive and alienated weight of social fictions. Hegelian philosophy can be read in this sense as a radically

6 This change is obviously expressed in the course of Hegelian philosophy itself: “The big political shift in Hegel’s development occurred when he abandoned his early fascination with the Romantic vision of the non-alienated society of Ancient Greece as a beautiful organic community of love (as opposed to the modern society of the Understanding, with its mechanical interaction between autonomous egotistical individuals). With this shift, Hegel began to appreciate the very thing that had previously repelled him: the ‘prosaic’, non-heroic character of modern societies with their complex division of professional and administrative labor, in which ‘no one simply could be heroically responsible for much of anything (and so could not be beautiful in action)’. Hegel’s full endorsement of the prose of modern life, his ruthless dismissal of all longing for the heroic old times, is the (often neglected) historical root of his thesis about the ‘end of art’: art is no longer an adequate medium for expressing such a ‘prosaic’ disenchanting reality, reality deprived of all mystery and transcendence” (Žižek 2013: 241).

realist philosophy because in its form and content it seeks to express the long and contradictory process of substantiating the experience of historical reality. If someone reads in the substantiating an exercise of *legitimation* of reality as it is, as Engels did, he is perfectly within his rights to do so although that is precisely what Hegel criticized his contemporaries as non-philosophy for. The request is equivalent in both cases, even if the answer is completely different and in the long run imponderable: is the civilizing project of modernity capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal? Yes, of course, but not only that, that same project only gets its concrete sense from the post-modern anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and anti-patriarchal horizon of the speakable and possible, of reality *as if*. Nonetheless, the coming into existence of as-if reality is not that of present reality as-it-is, but instead of what Hegel called the *Bestimmungsglosigkeit* of historical transformation (Hegel 1981: 125). This is the historical importance of the relation between identity and non-identity of Hegelian logic, and as a narrative statement here Hegel stands beyond Kant and one can read this *Bestimmungsglosigkeit* as the post-modern moment of Hegel's logic *par excellence* – a total break with the past without any (religious) premonitory or (Kantian) anticipatory really existing *state of affairs*.

In *The Communist Postscript*, Boris Groys discusses how the fundamental gesture of modernity consists in subordinating the world of language – of politics – to the world of calculation – of economics. The Soviet Union, Groys says, was not a modern or accelerated modernization experience precisely because it subordinated economics to politics, or calculation to language. The multiplication of decrees and provisions on the most everyday aspects of daily life in the Soviet Union recall, on the one hand, the typification and codification of feudal behavior and, on the other, that the instrumental rationalization of reality is executed precisely against codification. But, if “politics functions in the medium of language”, it operates “with words – with arguments, programs and petitions, but also with commands, prohibitions, resolutions and decrees”, and thus, “the communist revolution is the transcription of society from the medium of money to the medium of language. It is a linguistic turn at the level of social praxis” (Groys 2009: xv). Conversely, “in capitalism, the ultimate confirmation or refutation of human action is not linguistic but economic: it is expressed not with words but with numbers. The force of language as such is thereby annulled” (ibid.: xvi). In a way, the Soviet Union was not only an inefficient State, but an institutionalization of a non-modern inefficient and ineffective *state of affairs*.

Now, Groys calls linguistification [*Versprachlichung*] the process of subordination of economics to politics, of calculation to language or of a flow to codes, for

The critique of capitalism does not operate in the same milieu as capitalism itself. From the point of view of its means, capitalism and its discursive critique are incompatible and therefore can never meet. Society must first be altered by its linguistification in order to be subject to any meaningful critique. Thus,

we can reformulate Marx's famous thesis that philosophy should not interpret the world, but change it: in order for society to submit to critique, it must first become communist. This explains the instinctive preference for communism felt by all those endowed with critical consciousness, for only communism realizes the total linguistification of human destiny that opens the space for total critique (ibid.: xviii).

The question would then be, is not linguistification precisely a gesture of transposing the necessary and the possible, of rendering the possible necessary and really speakable? Or, in other words, is not linguistification the post-modern, post-Cartesian ultimate gesture?

"In no sense", Groys states, "does the total linguistification of social being promise any quietening of social conflicts; on the contrary, it promises to intensify them", i.e. "if communism is understood as the transcription of society into the medium of language, then it promises not an idyll but rather life in self-contradiction, a situation of the utmost internal division and tension. No idyll is discovered when, having once seen the effulgence of logos, the Platonic philosopher returns to the hell of human society" (Groys 2006: 72). Here both English and Spanish admit a distinction, because the problem of *Versprachlichung* will be completely different if we understand it as "verbalization/to verbalize" or "linguistification", for in the first case the problem refers to the limitation or productive insufficiency of language assuming that its representational limit has been exceeded because it would mean recognizing that the formulation of a proposition would suffice to transform reality; but in the second case the problem lies in the field of the transformation of the conditions of representation of reality, i.e. of its experience.

If we go back to Hegel, that reference is only possible linguistically once it has already happened without a name and without any anticipatory dimension. We know that a revolution has happened only once it has already happened, only once the experience of reality cannot go back — or, as we have said, Kant knew the dimension of his revolution just when there was nothing left to do, when Robespierre was already facing the guillotine. Louis XIV, Hegel says, had the legitimate right to resist change because although the historical impulse makes transformation itself a law, it "has met with disfavour both from religions — for example Catholicism — and from States, which claim a genuine right to a *fixed* (or at least stable) position" (Hegel 1981: 125). The problem is that this reaction expresses a scenario in which a transfer and transformation of power or a defeat has already been done, even if the problem of victory is not resolved. The triumphant forces of the Revolution of 1789 showed their definitive face only in 1848, when the ascending bourgeoisie concretized narratives and really existing fictions succeeded — for a moment — in giving themselves their own norms of realization, or when they vanishingly linguistified the verbalization of 1789. So here is where the argument finds its own narrative in a Hegelian sense: as we already said, the problem is not closure, but *fixed* closure. That is why Hegelian historic *Bestimmungslosigkeit* can be read

as a radical *Versprachlichung*, for the “*statarisch oder wenigstens stabil*” state of things ultimately “*bleibt es offen*”, remains open and *unfixed*.

This affirmation of Hegel entails a double background: on the one hand, to assume that there is no transcendental dimension that assures or glimpses this same realization – there is no providence, neither theological nor secular: that’s why freedom is never assured, and why the outcome can be even worse than the previous regime. On the other hand, to assume that freedom is the liberation of the one who liberates himself, means that freedom does not stand in a supra-signifying order, but rather in the self-determination of the conditions of representation and realization of the subject’s experience, which implies circumscribing the previously hegemonic otherness to the conditions of historical change.⁷

The bourgeoisie frees itself from feudalism, Protestantism frees itself from Catholicism, capitalism frees itself from protectionism, etc., and in this process the vanishing hegemonic moment that follows is transformed into an otherness that is realized under the conditions to which it is now circumscribed. This was the debate between Soviet and Yugoslav economists in the 1960s regarding the control of unsatisfied desire. How to prevent someone from having two cars? The first possibility is to rely on the disengagement of the post-revolutionary subject, the second was to decree the impossibility of the second car. What happened was something different, there was simply no second car available. Beyond the verbalized debate, what happened linguistically was that it was in fact impossible to satisfy that particular need even if the desire for the automobile did not disappear by reason or decree. Lacanian readings of Hegel have insisted on the infinite character of desire and the unrealizable character of the *jouissance* of the object, and on the regression of desire by desire; however, this infinity for Hegel is purely formal precisely because concrete infinity is realized in the particular object. Although someone might cry out in front of Lenin’s Mausoleum in 1960 that he *truly* desires a second car, that desire is purely formal and therefore empty – a useless fiction. As an abstraction, everyone desires the empty X, but as a concrete relation the former Russian, Ukrainian, Kazakh, etc. bourgeoisie began eventually to desire “sovietly”. By the same time, the workers of the former Latin American protectionist States

7 This is why Badiou’s position regarding Hegel is so inconsistent, because he seeks to place him at the beginning of an original sin of the really existing processes of, if not liberation, of the verbalization of the contraction: “The long-term effects of the Hegelian origins of Marxism are evident in this short-circuiting. For Hegel in fact, the historical exposure of politics was not an imaginary subjectivation, *it was the real as such*. This was because the crucial axiom of the dialectic as he conceived of it was: ‘The True is the process of its own becoming’ or – what amounts to the same – ‘Time is the being-there of the concept’. As a result, in line with the Hegelian philosophical heritage, we are justified in thinking that, under the name of ‘communism’, the historical inscription of revolutionary political sequences or of the disparate fragments of collective emancipation reveals their truth: to move forward according to the meaning of History” (Badiou 2010: 241).

began to desire concretely in a neoliberal way in the last quarter of the 20th century. That is the great counterpoint that Groys points out.

Hegel, unlike Kant, assumes that the pulse of universal history tends not toward the best but toward indeterminacy: the concept of perfectibility in the philosophy of history lends itself to ambiguity precisely because of its literalness, although it refers to something almost as indeterminate as the concept of variability itself. However, that realization of freedom is indeterminate does not mean that it has no determinations, but that these determinations do not exhaust the possibilities of experience. Here the radicalism of Hegelian logic lies in bringing to the constituent limits of reality what in Kant appeared as an impossibility of conceptualization of reality, in a “shift of perspective which turns failure into true success” (Žižek 2006: 27). This failure, unlike the insufficiency of verbalization, does not appear as a limitation but as a limit from which something is what it is by virtue of what it is not. The internalization of what something is not shapes the reality of what it is, or in other words, it is the disposition of otherness as a condition of possibility of identity. In the case of universal history this could well mean that the radicalism of its formulation is its own failure to signify what it represents – a necessarily existent and necessarily failed communist attempt in the best sense of the word, a realist *wirkliche Bewegung*.

Conclusion

When Susan Buck-Morss says that if we understand the experience of historical rupture as a “moment of clarity in act”, (Buck-Morss 2006: 75), she is pointing at the core of the notion of possibility within the Hegelian *Weltgeschichte*; i.e., the transposition of reality from the dimension of anticipation to that of incalculability. The universality of the non-historical histories that Hegel leaves aside are precisely the moments of lucidity that make explicit the necessary failure of universal history in a Hegelian key, not because they do not exist but because being unspoken, they make possible the existence of universal history. This unspeakable character, of course, does not have a Hegelian heroic or honorific sense, but neither does it have an inverse one. If universal history demands that we liberate ourselves, it does so from the place of interpellation of desire, imagination, experience, expenditure and language, from the system of symbolic references of the ethical fictions of the experience of reality, and in this sense, we can interpret this liberation as a moment of associative dissociation from our selves – to free us from ourselves. If history is always escaping our field of vision moving in unspeakable and incalculable spaces, then the problem is not universality as such but the gaps in the actually existing universality. This means that after the Soviet experience as a non-modern exercise of contestation for universality, neither the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat as categories can mean the same thing. This, we can say, constitutes the radical Hegelian gesture that Vaihinger emphasizes in his own way: fiction is useful not because it will be diluted, but precisely because it has already been diluted.

Hegel refers to this relationship between the vanishing and existence precisely at the beginning of the *Logic* assuming the function of what we have called a useful fiction or a suggestion for an *unfixed closure* of the universality of reality:

The equilibrium in which coming-to-be and ceasing-to-be are poised is in the first place becoming itself. But this becoming equally collects itself in *quiescent unity*. Being and nothing are in it only as vanishing; becoming itself, however, is only by virtue of their being distinguished. Their vanishing is therefore the vanishing of becoming, or the vanishing of the vanishing itself. Becoming is a ceaseless unrest that collapses into a quiescent result. This can also be expressed thus: becoming is the vanishing of being into nothing, and of nothing into being, and the vanishing of being and nothing in general; but at the same time it rests on their being distinct. It therefore contradicts itself in itself, because what it unites within itself is self-opposed; but such a union destroys itself. This result is a vanishedness, but it is not *nothing*; as such, it would be only a relapse into one of the already sublated determinations and not the result of nothing *and of being*. It is the unity of being and nothing that has become quiescent simplicity. But this quiescent simplicity is *being*, yet no longer for itself but as determination of the whole. Becoming, as transition into the unity of being and nothing, a unity which is as existent or has the shape of the one-sided *immediate* unity of these moments, is *existence*" (2010: 81).

It is for this same reason that, since the mid-19th century criticism of Hegelian philosophy was focused on the apparent insistence on the "quiescent unity of existence": from Haym's claim of Hegelian logical absolutism, to modern French philosophy criticism, Hegel's fate was sealed from the "Beginning": from the *Anfang*. With the aim of not saving Hegelian philosophy from itself but rather reading it as a creative possibility with and despite itself, we have proposed a genealogical reconstruction of the representation of the present in modern philosophy to insist on the notion of universality as a critical perspective, allowing us to dialogue with further complementary readings and criticisms: or, as Adorno said, "universal history must be constructed and denied" (2004: 320) in order to fully grasp the contradictions of our time.

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Posle Hegela: Postmoderna genealogija istorijske fikcije

Apstrakt

U ovom članku analiziramo mogući oblik odnosa između modernosti i postmodernosti ispitivanjem transformacije mesta enuncijacije kritike kao filozofskog narativa i njenog korišćenja kao istorijskog i filozofskog kriterijuma. Kako bismo to postigli, prvo se fokusiramo na ključne trenutke u kritičkom diskursu modernosti, a zatim analiziramo ulogu Kantove kritike u formiranju postmodernog imaginarija koji je povezan s pojmovima korisne fikcije i lingvistikacije. Najzad, iz hegelijanske perspektive, razmatramo validnost ideje univerzalne istorije, kao i njene veze s emancipatorskim narativima.

Ključne reči: Kant, Hegel, Grojs, modernost, postmodernost, istorija, jezik.