

# Hegel without Lacan: on Todd McGowan's *Emancipation after Hegel*

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## 0. A note on method

If Todd McGowan's new book on Hegel didn't exist, we would have to invent it. McGowan is the giant of Vermont, the Bernie Sanders of the academy, the Larry David of Lacanian theory.

In my review I make the following argument: desire is algorithmic, and realized in clickbait (*clickbait names Hegel's dialectics*). McGowan's book finds in Hegel a philosopher for the "after theory" era, a philosopher who forbids us from remaining satisfied with particularisms of the left or the right, a philosopher whose theory of contradiction is both universalist and grounded in the singular, a Hegel for whom love and duty are the slamdance of emancipation.

## 1. Getting distracted with Hegel

In her study of the colonial origins of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, Susan Buck-Morss asks what happens when we think of Haiti "as an agent in Europe's construction" asking her reader to approach this question "in the form of a rebus, a picture puzzle, composed of three images."<sup>1</sup> The first image is a 1787 illustration for Voltaire's *Candide* by Jean-Michel Moreau le Jeune, depicting a slave "who has been mutilated by his master",<sup>2</sup> losing a hand and his leg; the second is a dream of

Spinoza's, of "a certain black and mangy Brazilian... [an] Ethiopian who kept appearing with the same vividness again and again";<sup>3</sup> the third is an anecdote of Adam Smith's inveterate snatching at lumps of sugar when at tea. This last anecdote Buck-Morss analyzes as a disavowal of Smith's contradictory knowledge of the "enormous profits of the sugar plantations in – particularly in Barbados and Saint-Domingue – despite the fact that all the work was done by slaves" even as Smith "condemned slavery as an intolerable obstacle to human progress."<sup>4</sup> The word "disavowal" is from Buck-Morss' own lexicon, and indeed she draws on Mary Bellhouse's deeply psychoanalytic reading of the Moreau illustration and, a few pages later, refers as well to Sibylle Fischer's *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Buck-Morss also cops to her own "resist[ance]" to that approach, arguing that "something is lost when the theoretical apparatus of psychoanalysis is mapped directly onto a political analysis of the collective unconscious",<sup>5</sup> and, further, that "[w]e do not need Lacanian theory to interpret, as a second rebus, Spinoza's waking vision in 1664."<sup>6</sup> This may be so, although even the repetition with a difference, in Spinoza's account, of the "Brazilian" and the "Ethiopian," a lexical shift from 17<sup>th</sup> century colonialism to the Biblical, does lend itself to a consideration of how such repetition functions as a way of encountering/shielding oneself from trauma.<sup>7</sup>

But my purpose in beginning so is to consider, as a frame for this review of Todd McGowan's book, whether it is possible to read Hegel without Lacan today. What do I mean by this? In a recent article on "Jameson *avec* or *sans* Žižek," I argued that we can only think of theorists or other figures together (the Lacanian *avec*) if we think of them separately (or *sans*) and, further, that we only think of them *sans* after we think of them *avec*:

Žižek *sans* Jameson or Jameson *sans* Žižek is not simply the appearance of each theorist shorn of any reference to the other, but instead what we think of their work, or read in their work *after* reading them together. AND, that "together" is not a symmetrical reading, but a non-relation (which is to say, is itself dialectical, a dialectical subroutine, let's put it, part of the grand dialectic figured in the quotation from *Valences*), for ... we now have two "togethers," one of which is reading, as I said at the beginning of this paragraph, Jameson *avec* Žižek (to read Jameson in terms of Žižekian theory or reading practices), while the other means to read Žižek *avec* Jameson (to read Žižek via Jameson's interpretive praxis).<sup>8</sup>

My first contention, that reading theorists *sans* each other means “what we think of their work, or read in their work after reading them together,” is well illustrated, I think, by Buck-Morss’s text, where she has first to stage a psychoanalytic reading of her material and then pull back, as it were, from what turns out to be too traumatic, too Lacanian. But this is worth spending a bit more time on, for it will also lead into an argument I make in this review that calls for an attention, when reading Hegel, to media-specificity, and so it is worth considering what Buck-Morss calls the “rebus,” the “picture puzzle, composed of three images”, and specifically, the print-culture nature of the Moreau illustration she decodes with the help of Bellhouse. What is interesting about Buck-Morss’ turn to the illustration is that, on the one hand, it is of a piece with her larger argument in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, which is not simply a call for us to pay attention to the role of Haiti in Hegel’s formulation of the master-slave dialectic (although that is, of course, crucial), but also a demand that we break down of disciplinary boundaries, between philosophy and history, to be sure, as well as, arguably, for the role of media studies in understanding how Haiti may have made its way into Hegel. For Hegel, Buck-Morss reminds us, was an inveterate reader of newspapers, including the abolitionist *Minerva* (giving a new understanding to the phrase “the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the coming of dusk”), from Hegel’s university days in Tübingen to the period in which he wrote the *Phenomenology*.

No one has dared to suggest that the idea for the dialectic of lordship and bondage came to Hegel in Jena in the years 1803-5 from reading the press--journals and newspapers. And yet this selfsame Hegel, in this very Jena period during with the master-slave dialectic was first conceived, made the following notation: ‘Reading the newspaper in early morning is a kind of realistic morning prayer. One orients one’s attitude against the world and toward God [in one case – SB-M], or toward that which the world is [in the other]. The former gives the same security as the latter, in that one knows where one stands.’<sup>10</sup>

So this consideration suggests that Buck-Morss is already rehearsing the argument that in order to understand Hegel one should think about media culture, about philosophy’s place in that media.

## 2. Clickbait without Lacan

One of the through-lines learned from McGowan's remarkable book, the argument that we can best understand Hegelian *emancipation* by considering when we are most on the hook, most trapped, by the "unconscious choice" we make when, in the morass of the digital, we "fall for" clickbait, can be arrived at considering a twin set of passages from the *Phenomenology*. These are the paragraphs where Hegel describes being "torn asunder," and, as luck (which is to say, *tuchê*) will have it, he also mentions "the bait required to awaken the desire to bite."

If we apprehend a demand of this kind in its broader context, and view it as it appears at the stage which self-conscious Spirit has presently reached, it is clear that Spirit has now got beyond the substantial life it formerly led in the element of thought, that it is beyond the immediacy of faith, beyond the satisfaction and security of the certainty that consciousness then had, of its reconciliation with the essential being, and of that being's universal presence both within and without. It has not only gone beyond all this into the other extreme of an insubstantial reflection of itself into itself, but beyond that too. Spirit has not only lost its essential life; it is also conscious of this loss, and of the finitude that is its own content. Turning away from the empty husks, and confessing that it lies in wickedness, it reviles itself for so doing, and now demands from philosophy, not so much knowledge of what it is, as the recovery through its agency of that lost sense of solid and substantial being. Philosophy is to meet this need, not by opening up the fast-locked nature of substance, and raising this to self-consciousness, not by bringing consciousness out of its chaos back to an order based on thought, nor to the simplicity of the Notion, but rather by running together what thought has put asunder, by suppressing the differentiations of the Notion and restoring the feeling of essential being: in short, by providing edification rather than insight. The 'beautiful', the 'holy', the 'eternal', 'religion', and 'love' **are the bait required to arouse the desire to bite**; not the Notion, but ecstasy, not the cold march of necessity in the thing itself, but the ferment of enthusiasm, these are supposed to be what sustains and continually extends the wealth of substance."<sup>11</sup>

And slightly later:

Analysis of an idea, as it used to be carried out, did in fact consist in nothing else than doing away with its character of familiarity. To break up an idea into its ultimate elements means returning upon its moments, which at least do not have the form of the given idea when found, but are the immediate property of the self. Doubtless this analysis only arrives at thoughts which are themselves familiar elements, fixed inert determinations. But what is thus separated, and in a sense is unreal, is itself an essential moment; for just because the concrete fact is self-divided, and turns into unreality, it is something self-moving, self-active. The action of separating the elements is the exercise of the force of Understanding, the most astonishing and greatest of all powers, or rather the absolute power. The circle, which is self-enclosed and at rest, and, qua substance, holds its own moments, is an immediate relation, the immediate, continuous relation of elements with their unity, and hence arouses no sense of wonderment. But that an accident as such, when cut loose from its containing circumference, – that what is bound and held by something else and actual only by being connected with it, – should obtain an existence all its own, gain freedom and independence on its own account – this is the portentous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of pure ego. Death, as we may call that unreality, is the most terrible thing, and to keep and hold fast what is dead demands the greatest force of all. Beauty, powerless and helpless, hates understanding, because the latter exacts from it what it cannot perform. But the life of mind is not one that shuns death, and keeps clear of destruction; it endures death and in death maintains its being. **It only wins to its truth when it finds itself utterly torn asunder.** It is this mighty power, not by being a positive which turns away from the negative, as when we say of anything it is nothing or it is false, and, being then done with it, pass off to something else: on the contrary, mind is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and dwelling with it. This dwelling beside it is the magic power that converts the negative into being. That power is just what we spoke of above as subject, which by giving determinateness a place in its substance, cancels abstract immediacy, i.e. immediacy which merely is, and, by so doing, becomes the true substance, becomes being or immediacy that does not have mediation outside it, but is this mediation itself.<sup>12</sup>

We can see here how the dialectic is first conceived in terms of the contradiction of self-consciousness, the split subject who turns to philosophy (Baillie:

“desires from philosophy”, Miller and Pinkard: “demands from philosophy” – the German is *verlangt*, or “requires”) not so much knowledge – which perhaps is the only thing philosophy can provide, but instead “the recovery through its agency of that lost sense of solid and substantial being.” Hegel here almost can conceive of substance as subject (or substance as divided, as McGowan argues Lacan, in his near-repetition of Hegel, conceives via the lack in the big Other)<sup>13</sup> – “opening up the compact solidity of substantial existence, and bringing this to the light and level of self-consciousness” – but instead he argues that the self-conscious subject mistakes lack for loss, and asks philosophy to “[run] together what thought has divided asunder.” And, further, Hegel crucially argues that the desire for wholeness relies on clickbait: “The beautiful, the holy, the eternal, religion, love--these are the bait required to awaken the desire to bite” (the bait/bite homophony works better in English than in German: Köder/Anbeißen). Clickbait, that is, is akin to the proximate or neighboring Hegelian discourses or figural subjectivities of the *beautiful soul* and *the law of the heart*, which dyad I return to in the penultimate section of this review.

This clickbait then may be what is meant in the second passage, when Hegel unwittingly provides a title for Žižek: *tarrying with the negative*.<sup>14</sup> That is, to paraphrase Hegel, Spirit is not the power that closes its eye to the clickbait, as when we say of something that it is nothing, a mere distraction, and turn away. *I'm not a sucker, I don't fall for that*. On the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the clickbait in the face, and clicking on it. *Tarrying with the negative* is clicking on clickbait. The immediacy of resisting clickbait – being present, not being distracted – this is “the immediacy which barely is, and thus is authentic substance.” And we know what Hegel thinks of authentic substance.

### 3. McGowan without Clickbait

In McGowan’s study, there are numerous pitfalls that bedevil readers of Hegel. This is a major conundrum for any present-day student of Hegel, from Pippin and Jameson and Comay to Buck-Morss and Brandom and McGowan: on the one hand, how to read Hegel without his various commentators but, on the other, how to account for their mis-readings of Hegel.<sup>15</sup> The problem with the first strategy is the lure of immediacy, the fantasy that we can encounter a text “fresh”, for its own sake. The problem with the second strategy is stolen enjoyment. For Brandom, this paradox comes down at some points to a worry about how “normative attitudes are instituted by normative statuses [or] the idea that statuses that are to begin with merely virtual, as the objects of attitudes of attributing and acknowledging them,

become actual when those attitudes are suitably situated in such complex constellations.”<sup>16</sup> Which is to say, Brandom’s reading of Hegel – really, his translation of Hegel into academic American philosophy qua pragmatic semantics – entails taking a “merely virtual” Hegel and acknowledging and attributing the superior or master discourses of, say, John McDowell or Wilfrid Sellars.<sup>17</sup> Buck-Morss, asking why the topic of Hegel and Haiti has been neglected, charges that “Not only have Hegel scholars failed to answer this question; they have failed, for the past two hundred years, even to ask it”, adding that this is a puzzle about how the “Hegel establishment” has neglected Pierre-Franklin Tavarès’ exploratory work on “Hegel, philosophe anti-esclavagiste” as well as her own (14).

Pippin and Jameson battle it out in their respective footnotes, with Pippin, in his pamphlet on chapter four of the *Phenomenology*, arguing against “allegorical or figurative interpretations in both Brandom’s and McDowell’s accounts,” after, in reply to Brandom’s contention that Hegel’s struggle unto death is an allegory of commitment, suggesting that “[b]eing willing to lose one’s job, for example, could be another commitment.”<sup>18</sup> This notion of the struggle to death in the master-slave dialectic as flirting with unemployment brings to mind, of course, the final pages of Jameson’s *Representing Capital*, where he argues not only that Marx’s *Capital* is a book about unemployment, but that this can only be thought of via the dialectic of domination (in its Foucauldean or anarchistic guises) and exploitation. This last, an *economic* condition, then we will return to in our concluding remarks on the *emancipation* in McGowan’s book and its title. But Jameson also warns us, in his short book on Hegel, that Pippin’s own project, for all its rigorous philosophizing (or perhaps because of it; here we follow Jameson in seeing Theory as having superseded philosophy in the postmodern), is merely another “rescue operation,” with the object of making “Hegel respectable and allow[ing] him re-entry into the fraternity of professional philosophers,” a pragmatic Rortyanism, a “modest lowering of the volume of Hegel’s dialectical claims” that also tries to update Hegel into a philosopher of modernism.<sup>19</sup> And yet, curiously, the clutter of other readings – or its repression – returns in Jameson’s readings of Hegel and language. Commenting on how, for Hegel, language means less than it says (first, in the general notion, of the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*, that “we ourselves directly refute what we *mean* to say”),<sup>20</sup> Jameson argues that language is more correctly “an index of error or contradiction. Language, in other words, is more revealing for what it cannot say than for what it does manage to say: and this will clearly also mark the kinship of this moment of Hegel, not only with contemporary theory, but also with modernism in

literature, where failure is so often more significant than success, and where the limits of language become the paradigm for the limits of representation as such.”<sup>21</sup> For Comay, in *Mourning Sickness*, published contemporaneously with *The Hegel Variations* (2011 and 2010, respectively), Hegel both is and is not a modernist, to mimic the language of her conclusion: “Hegel does not, then, or does not only reproduce the standard German response to the French Revolution ... the ‘revolution in poetic language’ that marks the seemingly one-way street from modernity to aesthetic modernism.”<sup>22</sup> The marked and unmarked citations point to Kristeva and Benjamin, and the passage from modernity to German Idealism rehearses the argument with which Comay begins her study – that Hegel marks the gentrification of the revolution from the social to thought.

McGowan indulges in such deck-clearing in two distinct ways: his opening arguments that both the defenders and attackers of Hegel have missed the point, and his continuing engagements throughout the text with commentators from Comay to Dolar, Deleuze to Pippin. Interestingly, he stresses that divergent readings of Hegel are not so much due to mistakes among the critics, but rather are due to something intrinsic to Hegel’s own writing. To understand that, we require a more robust theory of clickbait. And for *that*, we need to read McGowan (and Lacan).

#### 4. Clickbait without Hegel<sup>23</sup>

When I began reading McGowan’s book, I came across a passage from *Encyclopedic Logic* – the so-called “lesser Logic” – where Hegel writes that “a human being is nothing other than the series of his acts” (*EaH* 43). This formulation, McGowan assures us, is “not just Hegel’s critique of hypocrisy, but his recognition that what we do manifests our desire in a way that our thinking cannot.” Now, I have a student working on hypocrisy and the Victorian novel, so I cut and pasted that passage from the PDF of McGowan’s book and emailed it to her as a way into thinking about her project via psychoanalysis. As I was doing this, I noticed an email from the *New York Review of Books* about an article by Anthony Appiah on irrationalism, and clicked on the link. This was the Easter weekend, when the Žižek-Peterson debate took place, and so when my browser opened, I noticed a Twitter feed I had open on the debate, and started checking it – there were more than 1000 comments – and I came across a thread in response to Peterson’s having posted a *Toronto Star* article on the debate. What interested me was @leaih’s post, “News with no depth, I think we have all become overly used to this low level click bate [sic] journalism. Is there any recommended journalists that convey news articulately and

accurately?"<sup>24</sup> Judging from her twitter bio and feed, @leaih is a British, pro-Trump, pro-Brexit, Islamophobic fan of Jordan Peterson and Christopher Hitchens, who posts a great deal of so-called click bait on her twitter feed, which sounds, and is, tautological.

Click bait is like how Terry Eagleton characterized ideology: your hyperlink is clickbait, mine is "articulately accurate." This circular anecdote – clickbait leading me from McGowan's book to, well, the disavowal of clickbait, is a way of illustrating that clickbait functions as the gateway to our unconscious, that we can understand it via Lacan's concept of the lure, and, (this is entirely due to McGowan's book) that we need to think about the digital unconscious in a dialectical fashion, to navigate between the Scylla of digitalphilia (it's all great, whether online activism, millennial self-presentation, identitarian expression or corporate utopias and mommy blogs) and the Charybdis of digital phobia (which is often just millennial racism, phones are making us stupid, why are people texting while they drive/walk/watch movies/have sex).

McGowan's emphasis on the dialectic helps us to understand how clickbait works as the gate to our unconscious: when we click on a hot link, we click on our desire. This is clear when he writes that "the unconscious is not concerned with what is good but with what is satisfying. The good serves as a lure for consciousness that enables the unconscious to satisfy itself by undermining the subject's conscious intentions," (*EaH* 42) following it up with a citation from Lacan's *Seminar VII*: "There is no other good than that which may serve to pay the price for access to desire", McGowan adding that "the only role of the good is to be sacrificed for the sake of our unconscious desire."<sup>25</sup> Now, one of the primary ways in which we think about the internet, or clickbait, is as a kind of *plague of distractions*, what which pulls us away from our concentration (whether this last is thought of in terms of academic work or middlebrow mindfulness, watching the kids, or driving, reading Hegel or enjoying nature). Just to flesh out distraction vs immersion or concentration, we can usefully recall Walter Benjamin's exhortation that architecture is best appreciated in a state of distraction, his class-critique of concentration as a bourgeois fetish (distraction is for the masses, he wrote). But if we think about it, surely *the good of immersion or concentration simply exists for its contradiction, for the unconscious desire qua distraction*.

And we can see the contradiction at work here if we think of an episode of the television show *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (late in the second season), where one of the characters, Gina, is deep into her phone & everyone is trying to distract her, blowing

an airhorn by her head, playing dance music, etc. Then, one character, Terry, succeeds: Gina suddenly looks up and calls his name. How did he *distract* her from her phone, you ask? His method is devilishly clever: he changes his Facebook relationship status to "it's complicated."<sup>26</sup> Terry is supposed to be a happily married man – one of the counter-intuitive (which means, on television, counter-stereotype) things is that he is a very well-built black man who is “dulling and uxorious”, as Ezra Pound wrote, who “loves love,” who is always going on about his twin daughters Cagney and Lacey.<sup>27</sup> So changing his relationship status to “it’s complicated” tells his social media friends that something is up, – in the digital vernacular, “it’s complicated” takes what you would say to a friend IRL (in real life) when they ask you how your love life or dating life is, something you would say as a kind of euphemism or disavowal of a disaster etc., and transforms it (transforms the phrase “it’s complicated”) into a master signifier. This is no doubt very obvious to many of my readers but I just want to work through the logic of the situation on the television show: that is, you distract someone from their phone (the instrument of the “plague of distractions”) *via the phone*, via the immanent contradictions in the phone--such signals as a friend’s relationship status changing “grab us by our lack” and makes us engage IRL. Clickbait functions in the same way: qua distraction, qua our desire. To digitize Lacan, the only role of the good, of our concentration, is to be sacrificed for the sake of desire, for clickbait qua distraction.

To further develop this argument, I want to return to McGowan’s claim that “the unconscious is not concerned with what is good but with what is satisfying. The good serves as a lure for consciousness that enables the unconscious to satisfy itself by undermining the subject’s conscious intentions,” (*EaH* 42). I am interested in the concept of the “lure” here. McGowan is drawing on Lacan’s summing up towards the end of *Seminar VII* (in the final lesson, titled by Miller as “The Paradoxes of Ethics, or Have You Acted in Conformity with your Desire?”), where he says “There is no other good than that which may serve to pay the price for access to desire – given that desire is understood here, as we have defined it elsewhere, as the metonymy of our being”, and continuing with the assertion that this desire has to do with “what we are as well as what we are not” and “that which is signified in an act passes from one signifier of the chain to another beneath all the significations”.<sup>28</sup> I’ll come back to this “what we are as well as what we are not” shortly.

Of course, throughout his work Lacan relies on metaphors as well as actual references to cybernetic and other features of what we would now call universal telecomputation – *Vorstellungsrepräsentanzen* as signifying network, the antinomies

of searching and finding and the lost object & *das Ding*, or (still restricting ourselves to *Seminar VII*), “Never act except in such a way that your action may be programmed”, the last perhaps expressing “in the language of electronics and automation” what is undoubtedly the key Lacanian meme of the seminar, “do not give up on your desire” (*ne pas céder sur son désir*).<sup>29</sup> I argue that Lacan’s concept of the lure, especially, can help us to understand the contemporary digital practice of *clickbait* in its full dialectical splendor. For clickbait works simultaneously at the register of the oral (it is bait, also known as *thirst traps*), at the visual (we see it), and at the haptic (we click). And the lure (or *leurre*: lure, decoy, bait, allurement or enticement<sup>30</sup>) is a concept Lacan turns to again and again in *Seminars VII* and *XI* especially, arguing that the lure functions as a structure, an imaginary capture, telegraphed most succinctly with the famous example of the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius. Just to recap this episode, which is as important to my theory here as *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and Facebook status updates, we all remember the contest between the two painters, where each is to render the more life-like painting. Pliny the Elder tells us, in *Natural History*, that Zeuxis paints a bunch of grapes, which are so realistic that a bird flies at them and tries to eat them. A lure indeed! Parrhasius, when it is time to display his work, has a curtain drawn across a wall. Zeuxis asks for the veil to be drawn back, and of course the curtain or veil is itself the painting: where Zeuxis tricked a bird, Parrhasius has tricked an artist, or rather, tricks his eye (true power, to cite another text by McGowan, lies with the veiled phallus<sup>31</sup>). If painting, as Lacan says elsewhere in *Seminar XI*, entails laying down the gaze, then clickbait *grabs us by the lack in our gaze*, a gaze which has no power, or, rather, a clickbait that triumphs over the eye. Like the lure, like Parrhasius’ painting, clickbait makes us think there is something beyond the link.

And so, if clickbait seems to be a matter of the obscene underside of digital (like trolling, dick pics, sexting), this is to mistake where the obscenity lies: not in the content (clickbait or Reddit) but in the form – our split as manifested in signifiers. For clickbait, we are told, is the mechanism by which social media restricts us to our echo chamber. Clickbait, we are told, is the method whereby Russian malfeasance threatens American democracy. Clickbait, we are told, is the millennial media tool *par excellence*, responsible for listicles, trending vapidness, and the plague of distractions. As my Facebook and Jordan Peterson examples make clear, I trust, I am interested in thinking about clickbait not simply as a synonym for banal online journalism but in its broadest sense; too, as I have read Lacan via McGowan, I want to think about a dialectical reading of clickbait via McGowan and Hegel (but also Lacan). As I quoted

earlier, in *Seminar VII*, Lacan declares that desire has to do with “what we are as well as what we are not,” recalling McGowan’s anti-identitarian reading of Hegel, where “being itself is contradictory,” citing the *Science of Logic*, “Such talk of *identity ... contradicts itself*,” going on to add that “Identity depends on what negates it” and that “Hegel’s challenge to the law of identity is inseparable from his questioning of the principle of noncontradiction” (*EaH* 6,7). If we agree with Hegel and McGowan, then we can ask: does clickbait contradict itself? Or, even more scandalously, does McGowan’s text? I think the answer to the first question is yes, because clickbait reveals our unconscious. Where is McGowan’s unconscious?

### 5. Hegel without the Hegelians

As I noted before my excursus on clickbait, McGowan discusses the readings from which he seeks to distinguish his interpretation in two fashions: he begins with a gesture of deck-clearing that cunningly situates the mis-readings of Hegel in the narrative of McGowan’s discovery of contradiction. Hegel has suffered, he remarks, a “posthumous catastrophe” (the title of the first section of McGowan’s preface) with, first, the split of Hegelians into Left and Right – a well-trodden path, to be sure, but with McGowan’s innovation that the left’s appropriation of Hegel’s dialectics and historical consciousness has turned out to be a dead end. Lukács and Sartre are irrelevant, consigned to the library stacks of academic Marxism, and “[e]ven Adorno’s critical theory appears outdated in an epoch that no longer has a place for his form of theoretical resistance to the hegemony of the popular” (*EaH* 2). As if to drive this point home, McGowan then offers an analogy from *Star Trek* by way of arguing that the most unfashionable elements of Hegel (his theories of Christianity and the state which, jettisoned by Marx, have become such important *topoi* for Badiou and Žižek) are crucial to Hegel’s relevance today:

Hegel’s posthumous situation parallels that of Captain Kirk (William Shatner) in an episode of the original *Star Trek* television series entitled “The Enemy Within.” In this episode, a malfunction with the device that teleports Kirk back from a planet to the starship causes him to split into two separate beings – one embodying his kindness, generosity, and sense of justice, the other embodying his aggression, cruelty, and lust. The incident occurs unbeknownst to the other members of the crew and even to Kirk himself. Each version of him experiences himself as Kirk, just as both Left and Right Hegelianism experience themselves as the real Hegelianism. When the split becomes evident, the members of the crew treat the gentle Kirk as the authentic version

and the violent one as a counterfeit. But it soon becomes clear that Kirk cannot function as the captain of the ship without this capacity for violence. The most unappealing traits are precisely those that render him an effective starship captain. (*EaH3*)

Two Kirks: soon enough we will have two Hegels, and other splittings of the subject. Evidently this excursus on *Star Trek* is as much a demonstration of the outdatedness of Adorno's mandarin disdain for popular culture (although, as I argue elsewhere, we need to view such disdain dialectically, along with the unreflective valorization of the popular – *and that this contradiction should not be reconciled*) as it is a set-up for one of McGowan's most important arguments early in his book: that Hegel's theories of the state and Christianity are "the linchpin" for his (or at least McGowan's) theory of emancipation. But this staging of left versus right Hegel is also the terrain on which McGowan begins to work out his other key tenet: the question of contradiction, and its relation to the split subject. McGowan reads Hegel as a Lacanian *avant la lettre*: rescuing both Christianity, as a doctrine of the "divine as a divided subject" (*EaH3*) and the state, as that which is necessary "to rip subjects out of their attachment to the illusions of their private world" (*EaH5*).

McGowan will nonetheless return again and again to do battle with other interpreters. Thus Hegel's politics occur the morning after, and yet their immanent contradiction portends a more radical politics than the "rightist deviations" of Marx, who made the mistake of trying to change the world, rather than interpret it. "Emancipation," McGowan writes, "involves making explicit and embracing contradiction, whereas conservatism aims at repressing or eliminating it" (*EaH213*). The problem – but also the great insight – of such analysis is that it holds the left's feet to the fire. Or consider McGowan's comments on Gillian Rose, which punctuate his tenth chapter, on "Emancipation without Solutions." Here McGowan confronts the dilemma that the later Hegel seems to have betrayed his youthful support for the French Revolution, because, as he declared in the *History of Philosophy*, "The *ultimate* aim and *interest* of philosophy is to reconcile thought or the concept with actuality." For McGowan, Rose's mistake is to not give up on the contradiction between the actual and the theoretical; for Hegel, the Absolute turns out to be an absolute contradiction, a mess, a total failure. Rose wants to set the world straight – the fantasy of left and right – and Hegel, or McGowan, are happy to let it be an #epicfail. And this contradiction between the youthful, revolutionary Hegel and the state-loving elder is another contradiction that has to be preserved: it has to be preserved not by sp(l)itting (on) Hegel, but by comparing Hegel to the Beatles.<sup>32</sup>

## 6. What if Hegel never existed?

Here we might ask if the young Hegel would have been a Young Hegelian (that is, a left Hegelian). McGowan's discussion of Hegel and love (which I turn to later in this review) suggests as much, as does, of course, the young Hegel's biography of that period--not only his chafing against the servitude of being a private tutor or *Hofmeister* in Berne and Frankfurt, and his enthusiasm for the French Revolution (for all of which, see Pinkard's biography), but also his early writings. Consider the translation (from the French) of an anti-aristocratic pamphlet by Jean-Jacques Cart (Hegel was at that time a *Hofmeister* for the Berne notable Captain von Steiger), in the commentary for which Hegel argued that tax relief for the people of the Vaud (the French-speaking oppressed peasants in and around Berne), in compensation for loss of freedom, was too little and too inadequate; Hegel inveighed against those for whom "it is still very generally believed that enjoying no civil rights at all counts for much less than having a few less Thalers yearly in one's wallet,"<sup>33</sup> which analysis is no doubt pertinent in today's discussions (of reparations for slavery in the U.S., or compensation for residential school victims in Canada: see the final section of this essay for the latter).

Too, with respect to the theme of reconciliation, so vexed in any reading of Hegel and central to McGowan's conception of contradiction (spoiler alert: for McGowan, Hegel's reconciliation, or *Versöhnung*, involves being reconciled to contradiction, to the irreconcilable), this is first broached, Lukács argues, in Hegel's Berne-period manuscript "The Positivity of Christian Religion."<sup>34</sup> Hegel's critique of religion and reconciliation is almost Nietzschean in its sarcastic takedown of the success of early Christianity in the Roman Empire:

A people ... must welcome a religion which exalts the dominant spirit of the age, its moral impotence, the dishonour it endures through being trodden underfoot; such a religion is sanctified in the name of 'passive obedience' which makes it appear as honour and the loftiest virtue, an operation by means of which men might gaze in wonder and pleasure at the transformation of the contempt of others and their own sense of disgrace into pride and peace of mind.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, since this text was not published during Hegel's, or indeed Nietzsche's, lifetime (it first appeared in Herman Nohl's edition of *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* in 1907), it can hardly be said to have influenced Nietzsche, but that thought experiment, like the one that opens this section (was the young Hegel a

Young Hegelian?) is very much to McGowan's taste, I would think, since one of his most powerful readerly moments in *Emancipation after Hegel* comes in the chapter "Hegel after Freud." There he argues that the vocabulary and concepts of German Idealism (Kant, Schelling, Hölderlin, Fichte) are not sufficient to Hegel's reason, resulting in a "torsion" in his language.<sup>36</sup> This follows yet more brush-clearing by McGowan, who opens the chapter by arguing that Hegel is the most misunderstood of modern philosophers (it is as if Marx were read as an apologist for capitalism, or Nietzsche for Christianity, he remarks), so much so that even his defenders disagree, and even more so than they do from his attackers (Pippin's Hegel is more different from Comay's, to be sure, than either are from Deleuze's).

But if we can think of a "Hegel after Freud" – that is, find a proto-notion of the unconscious in the subject qua contradiction, as McGowan argues – which is to say, to read Hegel as if Freud existed, can we think of a Hegel without Hegel? This is the argument – not with respect to Hegel, but the Beatles – of the recent film *Yesterday* (Danny Boyle, 2019). In this film, what Badiou calls an Event has taken place – an Event of subtraction: a 12 second global electrical brown-out has left everyone on the planet, with one exception, unaware that the Beatles ever existed. Our hero, Jack Malik, does remember the songs, however, and thus singularly – a mistake that is beholden to the mythology of Romantic genius – he becomes the messiah of pop music, the greatest musician of all time, or, as the kids say today, GOAT. "Messiah," as Emmanuel Carrère reminded us in *Kingdom*, means the anointed one, and Jack has indeed been anointed by the historical forgetting of the Beatles. The contradiction, to bring us back to McGowan and Hegel, is this: the Beatles can only be great in a world in which the Beatles do not exist.<sup>37</sup> Or, rather, their songs only sound so good if we haven't heard them a million zillion times (as a character says about pop music in *Reservoir Dogs*). Who can hear *Here Comes the Sun* or *Help!* or *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* or *Eleanor Rigby* without groaning?

The film therefore calls for an argument for and against a historicism of the Beatles. We can see how the film confirms my thesis that "historicism is an academic Thing which unwittingly reveals or revels in the irruption of the Real via the contingent."<sup>38</sup> On the one hand, the film is ludicrous, Adornoan critics argue, because the Beatles aren't universally great; but then, the McGowanite fans argue back, the Beatles are great not because of context, but rather because of how they have affected history: "[a] masterpiece is not a work of art which transcends its time but one that changes the symbolic coordinates of its time."<sup>39</sup> Finally, that very historicism is undone by its own premise – that the Beatles had to exist in order for us to now

think they were great; like Hegel, they always out of synch (Comay) arriving too early (as McGowan argues Hegel's philosophy did vis-à-vis Freud) and too late to do anything concrete (the Owl of Minerva, and so on).

Finally, and this is crucial to the film, it mixes up early and late Beatles, the simple pop songs with the more trippy hippie period – as if one were to perform a short circuit on Marx or Freud and go directly from the Paris Manuscripts to *Capital*, to fuse the *Entwurf* with *Moses and Monotheism*. In the same regard, I argue, not only is McGowan's reading of Hegel only possible in a post-Freudian, post-Lacanian critical context, *Hegel is only possible because of psychoanalysis*.

### 7. This is the thanks I get for writing this review? McGowan without Burnham

McGowan finds in Hegel's early writings on love an ethic that may be both Badiouan and Lacanian: love scales reconciliation “down” from the social to the couple-form (but also scales “up” from thought); further, the thinking of love enables, McGowan argues, Hegel to make his break with Kant and Fichte (but also, surely, Schelling?) via the “contradictory identity” of identity and difference, where that last is not thought of in today's Deleuzean multicultural *doxa*, for “Love ... enables the subject to translate difference--the difference between the lover and the beloved--into contradiction” (*EaH*, 99). McGowan expands on this relation between love and contradiction with the chapter's bravura reading of *Casablanca*:

Rick falls in love without regard for his own interest. The contradiction of love destroys the stability of Rick's life. But this contradiction also animates Rick's subjectivity by giving his life a value it otherwise wouldn't have. The disruption that love causes derives directly from its contradictory status. Love forces the subject to recognize that it is not a self-identical being but a being whose identity is out there in the other. (*EaH* 112).

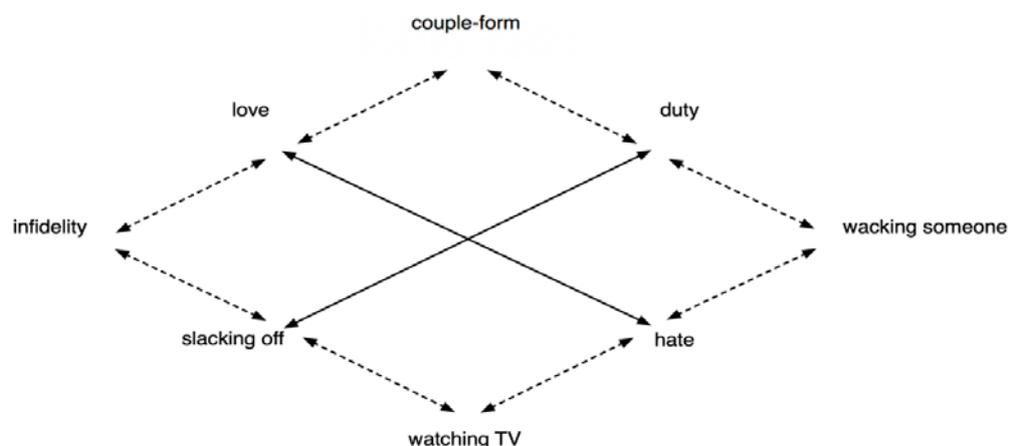
But to truly understand McGowan's argument here with respect to love and contradiction, we have to backtrack, on the one hand, to Hegel's break with Kantian notions of duty and then leap forward to *The Sopranos*. This means thinking duty along with love, but also that the key to understanding *The Sopranos* lies not in the action but what they are watching – *in what is distracting the characters and the viewers* (and the characters as viewers). So too Hegel is not self-identical but “out there” – in clickbait.

There is a paper to be written on the role of television-watching in *The Sopranos*: the History channel versions of World War II that Tony eats ice cream in front of, the girls watching a film in Tony's man-cave when he and Carmela have separated, and of course the references to *The Godfather*. The intermedial status of the television set or big screen frames an intertextual reference for the narrative, akin to an aside or quotation; or they may function as historical reference, as Toscano and Kinkle argue for the financial crisis qua TV news coverage in bar scenes in *Killing Them Softly*.<sup>40</sup> In a Christmas scene in season 6 of *The Sopranos*, we see a brief clip from Alasdair Sims in *Scrooge*, then, after a few channel switches, *Casablanca* plays in the background for a few clips: a fight scene between a German and a French soldier, Rick telling them "you better leave off politics or get out," refugees' repeated toasts "to America," and a German officer saying "in Casablanca, life is cheap."<sup>41</sup> Reading *The Sopranos* avec McGowan entails turning, then, to how McGowan contrasts Hegel's theory of love with Kant's philosophy of duty.

In McGowan's reading of Kant, the conception of duty and moral law is a breakthrough for Hegel and Fichte: "When Kant deduces 'can' from 'must,' he shows that the bare existence of the moral law – in whatever form we articulate it--testifies to our freedom... Our ability to formulate the moral law proves we are free" (*EaH* 110). But this moral law, McGowan argues, disallows any externality or otherness: morality is "inner," like a vulgar Freudian notion of the unconscious; for Hegel, "Through love, the world ceases to be an externality on which the subject acts."

How does this work for *The Sopranos*? Here we can venture a semiotic rectangle of love and duty.

Figure 1:



*The Sopranos* – especially in this episode, where Christopher anguishes over whether or not to tell Tony that he is seeing Juliana, a woman Tony tried to date – often thematizes or emplots conflicts of love and duty. The citation of *Casablanca* foregrounds this concern even more so. Love and duty are in some way oppositional, antinomic, or a dialectical non-relation. The very difficulty Tony has throughout the series with being faithful to Carmela is evidence of this; even more so, is his complaining to Dr. Melfi that “the thanks he gets” for doing precisely that (being faithful) when tempted by Juliana is to have to witness Juliana’s liaison with Christopher. His would-be protégé is stealing his enjoyment, even as Christopher’s infidelity (Juliana is his *goomah* in the *Sopranos*’ vernacular – he also has a pregnant wife) is so sanctioned by the mobsters that they wonder why he hasn’t brought her around. Christopher’s affair is a double dereliction of duty: both from that of the couple-form *and* the mob (the latter doubles down: as the footnote to the episode wiki-page explains, Christopher at first tells Tony he’s not bringing his new girlfriend around because she is black – this imaginary girl’s name adorns the episode – and of course the real reason is because she, Juliana, was once the object of Tony’s affections). Just as the opposite of duty is slacking off, the opposite of love is hate (although some might argue indifference), and so a dutiful hate is a mob-sanctioned hit, or murder. But even for Kant, duty is less something you hide behind like the archetypal Nazi, Eichmann;<sup>42</sup> *The Sopranos* manage the impossible task of reconciling Kant and Hegel. A dutiful marriage is never quite satisfying (“this is the thanks I get?”), and so too a dutiful hit (the more exciting murders in the series are either unexpected – as when Tony finds an ex-mobster in witness protection in the first season – or *verboten*, as with the murder of Fat Dom, a made guy from another crew in the final season). A dutiful hit is never really enjoyed. Finally, the dystopian bottom of the rectangle: slacking off *avec* hate: this is watching TV. In this episode in particular, we view one of the unacknowledged uses of television viewership: Bobby’s children are not really watching TV to enjoy it, they look more begrudging. Watching TV is a *chore*, but at least it isn’t as bad as helping to set the table or any of the other myriad micro-deeds the American family inflicts on its children.

### 8. Beautiful soul and law of the heart: or, what is Pippin doing in here?

Here a brief side note from Robert Pippin’s review of Žižek’s *Less than Nothing* may be germane: “... the first sentence of Žižek’s conclusion [“The Political Suspension of the Ethical”] – ‘What the inexistence of the big Other signals is that every ethical and/or moral edifice has to be grounded on an abyssal act which is, in

the most radical sense imaginable, political,” Pippin writes, “makes zero Hegelian sense. Something understood by an agent as an ‘abyssal’ act is a delusion, the pathos of self-inflating and posed heroism, and the gesture belongs in the Hegelian zoo along with The Beautiful Soul, The Knight of Virtue and especially The Frenzy of Self-Conceit.<sup>43</sup> In a Lacanian sense (or a Lacanian misreading of Hegel), Pippin here repeats (although – or *because* – he has already admitted that Lacan is “above his pay grade”) Lacan’s misreading of Hegel’s distinction between the beautiful soul and the law of the heart. In “The Freudian Thing,” Lacan argues that the former “is said to live ... precisely off the order it denounces” and goes on to speak of “the delusion of presumption to which Hegel applied it, remaining caught in the trap offered by the mirage of consciousness to the /infatuated with its own feeling, which Hegel turns into the law of the heart.”<sup>44</sup> That is, as Žižek argues in *Tarrying with the Negative*, Lacan errs “by condensing two different ‘figures of consciousness.’”<sup>45</sup> More pertinent to Pippin’s dismissal of the Žižekian act as a “delusion,” a gesture that belongs in the Hegelian zoo along with the Beautiful Soul and the Frenzy of Self-Conceit (or Law of the Heart) is how he repeats Lacan’s condensation. Pippin’s is a weak repetition, one might argue, for he does not so much confuse the two as merely list them (along with the Knight of Virtue), but his diagnosis of Žižek’s delusion suggests we can follow up on the Lacanian taxonomy of the hysteric versus the psychotic that Žižek suggests applies to the beautiful soul and the law of the heart, respectively. That is, if we think delusion as a symptom of the psychotic, then this seems to appertain to how Hegel describes self-conceit: where reality is therefore “a law by which the particular individuality is oppressed, a violent ordering of the world which contradicts the law of the heart.”<sup>46</sup> Or, as Žižek puts it, “‘The Law of the Heart and the Frenzy of Self-Conceit’ ... clearly refers to a *psychotic attitude* – to a self-proclaimed Savior who imagines his inner Law to be the Law of everybody and is therefore compelled, in order to explain why the ‘world’ (his social environs) does not follow his precepts, to resort to paranoid constructions.”<sup>47</sup>

Here two comments seem to be pertinent: first that the Law of the Heart would seem to apply quite well to such figures as Trump-bemoaning Republicans, for whom Trump has perverted the dignity of the office and the G.O.P. *and* to legacy press figures and media scholars who wave their fingers at clickbait for its propensity to distract readers from meaningful journalism. Second, *contra* Žižek (and McGowan, whose digital breadcrumbs to “The Freudian Thing” and *Tarrying with the Negative* I gleaned from his and Engley’s podcast), perhaps Lacan’s and Pippin’s respective condensations of the Beautiful Soul and the Law of the Heart are symptomatic? Not,

rest assured, that I am arguing the concepts are self-identical, but rather that their very propensity to be confused suggests “the desire called reconciliation” that haunts post-Hegelian theory. Just as we can only have a *sans* after an *avec*, so too we can only have a (con)fusing of two Hegelian concepts if we also have a splitting of Hegel.

### 9. Reconciliation without contradiction: the crude intrusion of the political

This leads to a final theme in my reading of McGowan’s book: how he opens up the concept of reconciliation. We can think of this – we can *tarry with reconciliation* – in terms of, first, how Hegel thinks of theory, or philosophy, as necessarily following the political act (which may be the abyssal that so frightens Pippin); as he puts it in the second lengthy quote from the beginning of this essay:

the life of mind is not one that shuns death, and keeps clear of destruction; it endures death and in death maintains its being. *It only wins to its truth when it finds itself utterly torn asunder.* It is this mighty power, not by being a positive which turns away from the negative, as when we say of anything it is nothing or it is false, and, being then done with it, pass off to something else: on the contrary, mind is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and dwelling with it.<sup>48</sup>

That is, the mind “utterly torn asunder” is the split subject qua consciousness (“what thought has put asunder” in the earlier quotation which Hegel has warned us cannot be reconciled.<sup>49</sup> Now, this split subject, which McGowan argues Lacan inherits from Hegel, also has its colonial or even Indigenous origins. But to understand these origins, and their role in Lacan (and our reading of Hegel), we have to briefly dwell on problems with McGowan’s theory of contradiction.

If, as Engley and McGowan opine somewhere, it is the very restrictions that allow for freedom in Hegel, we can perhaps say the same thing with respect to a failing that McGowan criticizes Hegel for, and which turns up in McGowan’s own theory: a propensity of overly *Just so* logic, airtight arguments: “If we look at the case of cloning, this becomes clear,” (*EaH* 100) or, when discussing Hegel and Freud: “It is impossible for the subject endowed with an unconscious to live in harmony with itself. This impossibility parallels exactly Hegel’s recognition of the inevitability of contradiction” (*EaH* 42). There are two problems with these features of McGowan’s text (and with my reading of them). First, is the problem of reifying contradiction.<sup>50</sup> For contradiction functions in *Emancipation after Hegel* rather like original sin (or

enjoyment for Lacanians): “As Hegel sees it, to refuse to accept that contradiction is not only thinkable but also possible would leave us unable to account for the act of thinking itself, which requires the involvement of non-identity within every assertion of identity” (*EaH9*). Contradiction does not lack, it is absolute substance. But while this may be the enunciated statement of McGowan’s theory, his enunciation of that theory – which is to say, his development of that, turns out to be anything but reified. We can see this by returning to the colonial notion of the split subject. My method here is guided by Buck-Morss (but also Comay): first, by Buck-Morss’ argument that Hegel’s concept of the master-slave dialectic owes at least some of its origins to the Haitian revolution, and second, to both Buck-Morss and Comay’s methods, which are to consider philosophy in a broader discursive and social context.

One of the primary forms of contradiction in McGowan’s reading of Hegel is the notion of the divided or split subject: not only is the subject divided against itself, but so too substance, or God, the absolute. This notion of the split subject is of course pre-eminently Freudian, or Lacanian: we have an unconscious, are castrated by language. And while McGowan warns against a direct genealogy from Hegel, via Kojève, to Lacan (he sees Kojève’s effects as deleterious to the message of Hegel), it is not difficult to see a connection between the master-slave dialectic and the split subject, except that for readers of Lacan today, it is not so much imaginary recognition, or the mirror stage, that compels us, as the real of castration.

I want to suggest, or to make the beginning, of offering another genealogy of Lacan’s split subject, one very much in the spirit of Buck-Morss’ reading of Hegel, and this is by looking at two specific moments in the *Écrits*, from the 1960 talk “Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Presentation” and the 1958 review “The Youth of Gide, or the Letter and Desire.” The question I am asking here, then, is in what way does Lacan’s “split subject,” for instance, extract specifically from Claude Lévi-Strauss’s misreading of Northwest Coast (Kwakwaka’wakw, or Kwakiutl) transformer masks, and generally from his anthropological universalist approach to form. In “Remarks,” Lacan describes how a “figure joins together two profiles whose unity is tenable only if the mask remains closed”<sup>51</sup> and in “Youth,” after referring to Freud on the “*Splattung* or splitting of the ego,” he asks “Must I ...show them how to handle a mask that unmask the face it represents only by splitting in two?”<sup>52</sup> Footnotes to these passages, both from Lacan (for “Youth”) and Bruce Fink (for his translation of “Remarks”), direct the reader to two texts by Lévi-Strauss: his 1943 essay on “The Art of the Northwest Coast,” and the essay “Split Representation in the Art of Asia and America,” which first appeared in book form in 1958.<sup>53</sup> Reading Lacan avec Lévi-

Strauss, then, allows us to trace a genealogy of the split subject, from mask to anthropologist to psychoanalyst – but to what end? In what way can or should we read the theory of the split subject – which evidently owes much, on the one hand, to a structuralist theory of the sign, and the *barre* between signifier and signified, and, on the other, to Freud's *Splattung* and to Lacan's heterodox splitting of the Ideal-Ego and Ego-Ideal--as originating in mask making or colonial anthropology? Am I arguing that Lacan has colonized Indigenous artefacts for his European theory? Or does this reading demonstrate how Kwakiutl art works turn out to anticipate a key tenet of structuralism? Or, finally, does my method here – tracing influence via Lacan and Lévi-Strauss's texts – argue for a textual decolonization of psychoanalysis?

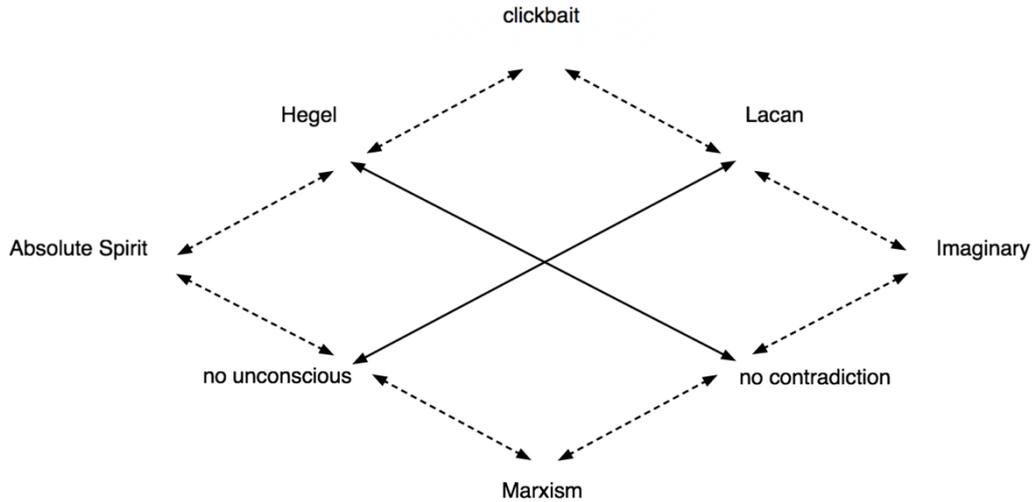
My deliberations here will not, I hope, be taken for equivocations. First, I think that they are very much in the spirit of the contradictory ways in which Buck-Morss' work can be read, signaled by the book's blurbs. In one, Walter D. Mignolo argues that "Buck-Morss shows us that Hegel's spirit is tainted with the blood and suffering of enslaved Africans in the European colonies"; in another, Timothy Brennan writes that "Buck-Morss proves ... that the young Hegel wrote *The Phenomenology* in a passionate defence of freedom." Like the split between the critics and fans of *Yesterday*, this (properly decolonial) split should be maintained, or reconciled to its contradiction.

This is because my suggestion for an "indigenization" of the split subject is also a way into thinking of the strongest form of McGowan's theorizing of contradiction: how he rescues "reconciliation" from the waste basket of liberalism. Reconciliation is throughout *Emancipation after Hegel*, indeed, it plays a starring role in the final paragraph to the conclusion. Reconciliation is not, however, reconciliation with the actual, as Lukács would have it, nor a philosophical quietism. Rather, it is a raising of the level of contradiction from the actual to the contradiction *with* the actual: it is this contradiction itself that reconciliation is reconciled to, or, to put it more bluntly, to the irreconcilable. Reconciliation, in McGowan's reading of Hegel (and one to be found, as he acknowledges, in the Slovenian school – Žižek and Dolar – but also, I wager, in the Adorno of the *Negative Dialectics*), entails "the recognition that contradiction is not a problem to be eliminated but the driving force of all movement in being" (*EaH* 14), which moves towards a unity that rather than eliminating contradiction, accepts it; reconciliation, finally, is the way in which "thought adopts a relationship to contradiction that being cannot attain. It doesn't overcome contradiction but grasps its necessity" (*EaH* 97).

This is not only a concept of reconciliation quite different from the standard branding of Hegel as an ultimately conservative thinker (from which misreading Lukàcs tries to rescue him, half-heartedly) but also from the positive and negative reputations of reconciliation today in the era of transitional justice. Since Archbishop Desmond Tutu helped bring about the Truth and Reconciliation hearings in post-Apartheid South Africa, “reconciliation” has come to do some heavy lifting in terms of post-conflict morality and politics: to reconcile white racists with the ANC, or former victims of the “Dirty War” in Argentina with the junta, or Indigenous peoples in Canada with the 150-year legacy of residential schools and cultural genocide.<sup>54</sup> In these discourses, and specifically in the settler-colonial context of Canada, “reconciliation” does too little and too much. On the one hand, it becomes a band-aid signifier for all matters of government handwaving and milque-toast policies – the politics of recognition, essentially, as pointed out by the Dene theorist Glen Coulthard in his rewriting of Fanon, *Red Skin, White Masks*.<sup>55</sup> This is reconciliation in its bad sense: a happy-ever-after resolution. Closure. On the other hand, the term carries too much expectation, especially from Indigenous people, and grass-roots activists, who use it to push government or corporate entities for real, structural, and significant change. This is arguably a strategic use of the term, and it is proximate to how McGowan reads Hegel. Reconciliation, then, functions as a master signifier that, precisely because it has such a plethora of meanings and uses, deserves to be preserved in our political and philosophical vocabularies.

To turn, in conclusion, then, to what has been my method throughout this review. McGowan argues: “Our conscious striving for the good hides our satisfaction in its sacrifice” (*EaH*, 229n). Here, then, I have sacrificed the good of a “proper” review of McGowan’s book (a *dutiful* recounting of the main philosophical or political arguments, perhaps situating it in Hegel scholarship, or McGowan’s own *oeuvre*) for a plague of distractions, beginning with the discussion of Buck-Morss as a way of asking if we can read Hegel without a Lacanian framework. Obviously, for a straight philosopher like Pippin or Brandom, a psychoanalytic framework is only so much distraction (I am over-stating the case, since Pippin argues that part of the reason Hegel is neglected by academic philosophers in the Anglo-American world is that he brings in too much history.) In my reading, in this review, *Lacan is clickbait that distracts us from Hegel*. Or the other way around: Hegel is what makes it necessary to think of clickbait. Or finally: Hegel avec Lacan = clickbait.

Figure 2.



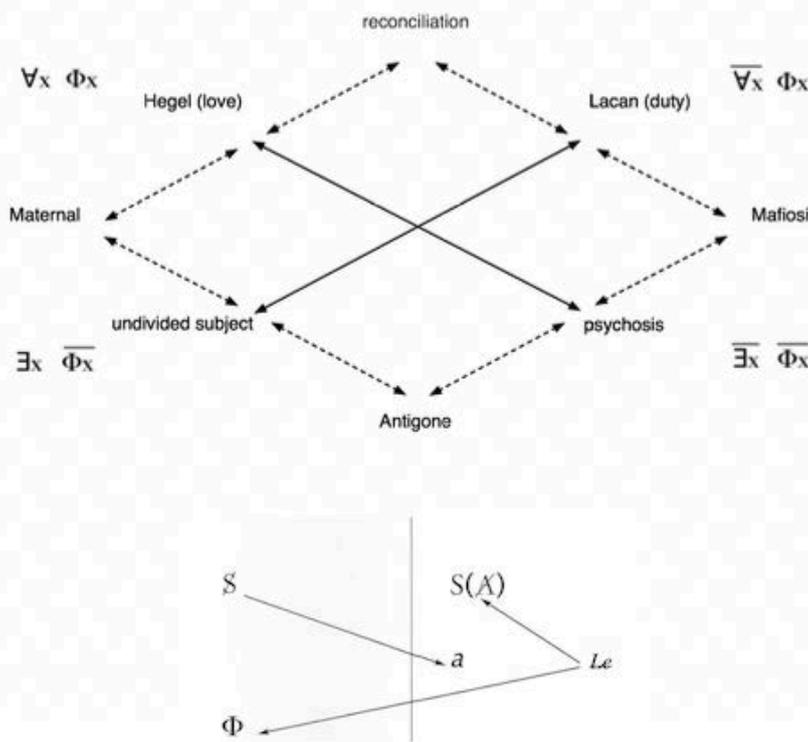
By “clickbait,” here, of course I want to make a “leftist plea for distracted reading,” for a reading plagued by clickbait, for a reading that needs Lacan, but also *Star Trek* and *Casablanca*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *Zeuxis*, *The Sopranos* and *Yesterday*, and finally, clickbait qua method of a social distribution of influence and context. This is the method seen, crucially, for Buck-Morss, in the radical newspaper *Minerva*, which reported on both the French Revolution and the Haitian struggles; and, for Comay, in a print culture reading of German reception of the French Revolution, where “cultural critics across the political spectrum” sounding like today’s critics worried about social media, lamented a “reading disease,” the spectre of *Zeitungsfeber*, or “newspaper fever,” and “the swirl of quickly consumable books and periodicals, whose availability gave everyone an air of easy expertise.”<sup>56</sup>

But to continue around the rectangle: Hegel without an unconscious is the Hegel that is a target for his attackers (Lyotard) and his defenders (Gillian Rose): an Absolute Spirit that is neither divided nor contradictory. Lacan without contradiction is the Imaginary, the Lacan of the mirror stage. And, then, and really this is the bottom of the diagram because I still don’t know what to do with it, if we don’t have an

unconscious or contradiction, this is McGowan's caricature of Marxism, a politics that is overly invested, he argues, in success, in a resolution of contradictions rather than their pursuance.<sup>57</sup>

I'm not happy to leave McGowan with the moral high ground here, so I would like now to layer on the formulas (or algorithms) of sexualization:

Figure 3



The purpose of this final semiotic rectangle *avec les formules de sexualization* is threefold: to sneak Marxism back into the emancipatory project, to loiter with the proposition that women are not a divided subject (viz. Hegel on *Antigone*), and to reassert the priority of clickbait qua algorithmic interpretation. There are evidently three components to this graphic: the semiotic rectangle proper, which itself fuses the Sopranos discussion with the Hegel and Lacan; the combinatorial logic of the upper half of the formula of sexualization (as in my use of the same mash-up in my essay on Žižek and Jameson, the phallic function  $[\Phi]$  is akin to the split subject  $[\$]$  qua economic castration: because Marxism); and the lower half of the formula of sexualization (in which, instead of *La*, or *La femme n'existe pas*, we have *Le*, or the big Other doesn't exist).

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<sup>1</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2009): 80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid: 80.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid: 84.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid: 85-86.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid: 82.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid: 84.

<sup>7</sup> In a slightly different register, Rebecca Comay describes Kant's switching between distant voyeurism and horrified trauma on considering the French Revolution: "Memory is to be transfigured from a mechanical, stammering compulsion into a free act of judgement--it must pass from traumatic repetition to reconciling remembrance". This "mechanical" nature is relevant, as we soon see. R. Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011):152.

<sup>8</sup> C. Burnham, "Jameson *avec* or *sans* Žižek: Psychoanalysis, Marxism, and the Impossible Social Bond." *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 13, no. 1 (2019): 121-145: 124.

<sup>9</sup> Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti*: 65.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid: 49. Comay makes much the same remark for how the French Revolution circulated: "The revolution is constructed as a theatrical event, as a spectacular event, and above all as *a media event*-a drama staged before a distant and diffuse audience brought together through the channels of print communication." Comay, *Mourning Sickness*: 33 (my emphasis).

<sup>11</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 4-5 (para. 7).

<sup>12</sup> This is from J. B. Baillie's translation, from the Marxist Internet Archive. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, Web. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/phprefac.htm> (para 32). Accessed 6 July, 2019.

For the sentence in bold, McGowan helpfully tells us, "the German reads: 'Er gewinnt seine Wahrheit nur, indem er in der absoluten Zerissenheit sich selbst findet.'" Terry Pinkard's English translation, McGowan continues, "like A. V. Miller's before, dilutes this key sentence by failing to indicate the violence of 'absoluten Zerissenheit.'" Pinkard's translation is: "Spirit only wins to its truth by finding its feet in absolute disruption." G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. T. Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 21. Miller's is: "It wins to its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself." Hegel, *Phenomenology* [Miller trans.], 19. McGowan concludes: "This is a clear instance where J. B. Baillie's earlier (and more poetic) translation hits the mark much better. [...] What Baillie captures that Pinkard and Miller miss is that undergoing the violence of being absolutely torn asunder is the necessary condition for spirit to find itself." I have to confess that I do not see how Miller's "utter dismemberment" is any less violent that Baillie's "absolutely torn asunder," but Buck-Morss' mention of Jean-Michel Moreau le Jeune's print, depicting a slave "who has been mutilated by his master", losing a hand and his leg, may be fresh in my mind. Or perhaps I should blame McGowan, who essays his recuperation of Hegel's ontology by characterizing the 20<sup>th</sup> century readings, via Kojève, as an "amputation" (*EaH* 86), in the chapter called "The Insubstantiality of Substance: Restoring Hegel's Lost Limbs."

<sup>13</sup> *Why Theory* podcast, May 28, 2019, T. McGowan and R. Engley.

<sup>14</sup> “Tarrying” in Miller’s translation, that is. Baillie translates *Verweilen* as dwelling; Pinkard as lingering. Perhaps loitering is the best?

<sup>15</sup> McGowan discusses Pippin, and to a lesser extent Brandom, in his chapter on Hegel’s ontology. T. McGowan, *Emancipation after Hegel: Achieving a Contradictory Revolution*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019): 83-97 (hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as *EaH* followed by page number). He also makes a quick reference to Buck-Morss (*EaH* 189).

<sup>16</sup> R.B. Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019): 313.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Brandom’s discussion of normativity and statuses, where he moves from Sellars to the master-slave dialectic. Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust*: 663-666.

<sup>18</sup> R.B. Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011): 14-15n12.

<sup>19</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*. (London: Verso, 2010): 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology* [Miller trans.]: 60 (para. 97).

<sup>21</sup> Jameson, *The Hegel Variations*: 35.

<sup>22</sup> Comay, *Mourning Sickness*: 152.

<sup>23</sup> This section of the review is based on a paper delivered at the LACK III conference at Clark University, May, 2019, and at the Canadian Communication Association conference at the University of British Columbia in June of that year. It has been revised for this publication. My thanks to the conference organizers.

<sup>24</sup> Twitter, accessed 21 April 2019.

<sup>25</sup> J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-60*. Trans. D. Porter (New York: Norton, 1992). Ctd. in *EaH*: 229n. McGowan adds, in his endnote: “Our conscious striving for the good hides our satisfaction in its sacrifice.”

<sup>26</sup> An unconscious spectacle of black hypermasculinity? A PhD. student working with me, Alois Sieben, in a chapter for his dissertation in progress, argues that *The Social Network* showed men as inept at using social media.

<sup>27</sup> Even better: Terry then suddenly receives a phone call from his irate wife, wondering why he changed his status; he stutters, “my thumb slipped”. The digital unconscious? As in much of the series, which is incessantly referring to other TV shows (including, in the most recent season, *Game of Thrones* and *Westworld*), Terry’s daughters’ names harken back to the 1980s’ show *Cagney and Lacey*, which featured two female cops. Of course, Wu-Tang Clan’s Raekwon also references *Cagney and Lacey* in his remix (on *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx*) of their song “Can it be all so simple”: “Spades tried to bag me, like Cagney and Lacey/Chef had that bitch Stacey slippin in Macy’s.”

<sup>28</sup> Lacan, *Seminar VII*: 321.

<sup>29</sup> Reading Flisfeder’s article for this issue, I engaged with him on this question. As I read Lacan’s *Seminar VII*, the meaning of “do not give up on your desire” (*ne pas céder sur son désir*) is indeed do not stop desiring what you desire. But Flisfeder’s innovation here is to say that this ethic is about proceeding with negation. The problem with the normative reading of that demand--what about bad desires, the Lacan driver who went on to be an orchestrator of genocide in Rwanda, or even normal everyday bad desires – is that it doesn’t proceed with the negation, with the contradiction, which would lead you to say – the solution is to have better desires!

<sup>30</sup> See the translators’ note to *Seminar XI*. J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964-65* Trans. A. Sheridan. (New York: Norton, 1978): 281.

<sup>31</sup> T. McGowan, "The Signification of the Phallus." In S. Vanheule et al., eds., *Reading Lacan's Écrits: From 'Signification of the Phallus' to 'Metaphor of the Subject.'* (London: Routledge, 2018): 1-20.

<sup>32</sup> McGowan argues that women, or at least second-wave feminists, "constantly pointed out the contradictory status of women in the patriarchal world" (*EaH* 81 – thanks to Matt Flisfeder for reminding me of this passage). And yet for all his cataloguing of such critique, McGowan's argument seems to suggest that women have an unproblematic access to theorizing their oppression; too, he neglects to mention critiques of Hegel from within feminism. But engaging with that critique would lead us in very productive questions with respect to split subjectivities. For instance, while Carla Lonzi, in her pamphlet *Let's Spit on Hegel*, cites the passage in the *Phenomenology* where Hegel notoriously relegates women to the familial, of course this is his unannounced reading of *Antigone*. Hegel, *Phenomenology* [Miller trans.]: 274-275 (para. 457). But consider these lines from that passage: "The difference between the ethical life of the woman and that of the man consists just in this, that in her vocation as an individual and in her pleasure, her interest is centred on the universal and remains alien to the particularity of desire; whereas in the husband these two sides are separated; and since he possesses as a citizen the self-conscious power of universality, he thereby acquires the right of desire and, at the same time, preserves his freedom in regard to it." Here Hegel argues precisely the opposite of the Lacan of the *Encore* seminar: now it is the male who is divided, has two forms of *jouissance*, that of desire and of universality (as citizen). Whereas the female is a unitary, undivided subject: which would support McGowan's view of contradiction: who better to spot contradiction than an undivided subject? (I'm just kind of trolling McGowan here, because I know nothing pisses him off more than the fantasy of an undivided subject. He argued bitterly against my and Flisfeder's essay on *Her* for precisely this reason.) And if the male is divided, perhaps he (qua big Other) does not exist (see my concluding algorithm in this review).

<sup>33</sup> T. Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 56.

<sup>34</sup> McGowan notes that "[a]s Lukács conceives it, the reconciliation that occurs with absolute knowing is a betrayal of what leads up to it" (*EaH*: 258n).

<sup>35</sup> Cited in G. Lukács, *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics* Trans. R. Livingstone. (London: Merlin, 1975):70. See also, for a different translation, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings by Hegel* Trans. T.M. Knox. (New York: Harper, 1961): 165. In this latter translation, the passage appears in section called "How a Disinclination for Military Service Helped the Success of Christianity"; alas, the Nietzscheanism here is too perfect: like Jacques-Alain Miller's annotations of Lacan's seminars--chapter and section heads--this was added by the translator. See Knox's prefatory note: vi.

<sup>36</sup> As Comay argues, this torsion of Hegel's language can be seen especially in the *Phenomenology*: "Hegel repeatedly anticipates Freud's terminology as he investigates Enlightenment's inquisitorial agenda: disavowal (*Verleugnung*), perversion (*Verkehrung*), splitting (*Trennung, Entzweiung*), isolation (*Isolierung*), the stubborn forgetting (*Vergessen*) of the lost object." Comay, *Mourning Sickness*: 64.

<sup>37</sup> This is the problem a review has with the film in *Variety*: "The filmmakers reduce the Beatles to a kind of karaoke kitsch epiphany. In "Yesterday," there's no mystery to these songs. The whole joke is what cosmically known quantities they are." (Rottentomatoes.com, accessed 4 July 2019). But that's the point. Of course this is an industry review: interestingly, on Rotten Tomatoes, the gap between fan (90%) and critic (61%) ratings may indicate the bulletproof nature of the film's premise.

<sup>38</sup> Burnham, "Jameson *avec* or *sans* Žižek,": 135.

<sup>39</sup> T. McGowan. "The Bankruptcy of Historicism," in R. Sbriglia, ed., *Everything You Wanted to Know about Literature but Were Afraid to ask Žižek* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017):99.

<sup>40</sup> Current events play a role in the final season when A.J. is unable to turn away from TV coverage of the U.S. wars in Iraq and Aghanistan. For *Killing Them Softly*, see A. Toscano and J. Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Alesford: Zero Books, 2015). Discussed in my *Fredric Jameson and The Wolf of Wall Street*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2016): 13.

<sup>41</sup> In the Wikipedia page for this episode, some more tenuous connections are drawn: "reference to the film could be when Blanca admires Carmela's house ("casa" in Spanish or Italian). Additionally, romantic relationships [are] the main theme of this episode. Also, when Christopher Moltisanti lies to Tony about his 'goomah', he tells that she's 'black' (African American) and tells her name as 'Kaisha' (also the name of the episode). He says that she might get racist comments from Paulie and so hadn't introduce his goomah to the gang. The other non-white female character introduced in the episode is 'Blanca', who does get racist comments. That's Kaisha Blanca."

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaisha\\_\(The\\_Sopranos\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaisha_(The_Sopranos)).

Accessed 3 July 2019.

<sup>42</sup> As Judith Butler argues in "Hannah Arendt's challenge to Adolf Eichmann." *The Guardian*, 29 August 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/29/hannah-arendt-adolf-eichmann-banality-of-evil>.

Accessed 3 July 2019.

<sup>43</sup> R. Pippin, "Back to Hegel?" *Mediations* 26 (Fall/Spring 2012-13). Web. Accessed 18 June 2019.

<sup>44</sup> J. Lacan, *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006): 345. Elsewhere in *Écrits*, in the Rome discourse, Lacan stages the beautiful soul and the law of the heart as a dialectic. Lacan, *Écrits*, 242. Or, discussing *Dora* in "Presentation on Transference," Lacan remarks on Freud's "*first dialectical reversal*, which in no way pales next to Hegel's analysis of the claim made by the 'beautiful soul' who rises up against the world in the name of the law of the heart." Lacan, *Écrits*:179. See also Molly Macdonald on the dialectic as figure for psychoanalysis but especially for a discussion of the beautiful soul and narcissism. M. Macdonald, *Hegel and Psychoanalysis: A New Interpretation of The Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Routledge 2014): 144-45, 132-34. It is important to note that for Lacan, the status of the beautiful soul itself must be conceived, in the analytic situation, dialectically, which is not simply a keyword or watchword--that is, is not simply reified, as the following argument, in his response to Hyppolite on *Verneinung*, makes clear: "The reversal of intention that Freud has taught us about again earlier today no doubt leads to something, but it does not lead to objectivity. In truth, if we can be sure that it is in no wise useless to alert the beautiful soul, who is revolting against the disorder of his world, to the part he plays therein, the opposite is not at all true: we should not assure someone that he is not in the least bit guilty just because he accuses himself of bad intentions." Lacan, *Écrits*: 329. Similarly, in "Direction of the Treatment," he remarks, "I have long stressed the Hegelian procedure at work in this reversal of positions of the beautiful soul in relation to the reality he accuses. The point is not to adapt him to it, but to show him that he is only too well adapted to it, since he assists in its very fabrication." Lacan, *Écrits*: 498. My point in this lengthy citation is not to play *gotcha!* with Lacan's uses and abuses of Hegel, but rather to support McGowan in his reading of Hegel avec Lacan, and to make the argument that in how Lacan's use of the concept of the beautiful soul works out the dialectical logic of the *Begriff* via the clinical situation.

<sup>45</sup> S. Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 267n.

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<sup>46</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology* [Miller trans.]: 221 (para. 369).

<sup>47</sup> Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 267n.

<sup>48</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology* [Bailie trans.], Web.

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/phprefac.htm>

(para 32). My emphasis. Accessed 6 July, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology* [Miller trans.]: 5 (para. 7).

<sup>50</sup> In a texting discussion, “reifying” was auto-corrected to “regifting” – suggesting that, for the digital unconscious, reification has already been reified. But that is what Jameson suggested in his Adorno book almost 30 years ago.

<sup>51</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 562.

<sup>52</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 633.

<sup>53</sup> “The Art of the Northwest Coast” appears in revised form in the opening chapter, “Enigma of a Mask,” in C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks*. Trans. S. Modelski (Seattle: University of Seattle Press, 1982). 3-14. “Split Representation” is in Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. C. Johnson and B.G. Schoepf. (New York: Basic, 1963): 245-268.

<sup>54</sup> Here I draw on Steven Rita-Procter’s Ph.D. dissertation, *Narratology, Rhetoric, and Transitional Justice: The Function of Narrative in Redressing the Legacy of Mass Atrocities*. York University Department of English, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> G.S. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> Comay, *Mourning Sickness*: 53. This is all too comparable to how we disparage the acquisition of knowledge from digital sources and social media today, of course, and, indeed, Buck-Morss, in a more positive tone than Comay’s sources, remarks that the countless newspapers reprinting articles on Haiti from *Minerva* was “a situation of cosmopolitan and open communication, despite intellectual property restrictions, that has perhaps not been matched until the early Internet.” Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti*, 43. Without clickbait, Hegel would never have conceived the master-slave dialectic. McGowan teaches us that that Hegel without Lacan, like Hegel without clickbait, is unthinkable.

<sup>57</sup> I am glad I read Flisfeder’s article when the substance of my essay was complete, because I think he is absolutely right to argue that we need Marx, as well as Freud/Lacan, to read Hegel. Hegel without Marx is a decaffeinated Hegel, a Hegel qua CBD. But that is another essay.