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First as Speculation then as Emancipation

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This paper engages with Todd McGowan's *Emancipation after Hegel* by changing the perspective regarding the role that contradiction plays in cultivating emancipatory praxis; a curiously novel endeavor, which is to be considered an offspring of the German idealistic tradition, having Hegel as its procreator. Here, my intention is not to indicate an inherent problem with this premise, but to think through an impasse that is embedded in the bowels of dialectical thinking. While McGowan is adamantly advocating contradiction in the name of emancipation, there is an imposing realm left untouched if abridged to just this. As a (ontological) deadlock, emancipation has to be thought as immanently tied to language, which is in Hegel's mind the purest speculative form. Furthermore, in contrast to the contemporary use of speculation as a financial practice, Hegel regards the commitment to a speculative spirit as thinking in the terms of a life worth less than meaning. It is at this conjuncture that I, on one hand, accordingly aim to broaden the debate on emancipation through an unfolding of the framework of contradiction itself, and on the other, to distill the process according to which language is able to form thoughts from empty words.

1. To (not) contradict is to err

Is it possible to deduce an elemental cornerstone emancipatory potential in Hegel's philosophy that wouldn't merely solidify his legacy as being on the right side

of history and neither stand merely as a beacon of hope, but put forth a systematic strategy for emancipatory politics? Numerous interpretations, if not even the majority of readings of Hegel are either perfunctory or generalized, where Hegel himself probably as culpable as the interpreters. Using dialectics as a philosophical paradigm, while misunderstood the basic premise is not a good prospect for political action. And while McGowan did not succumb to any dialectical traps, accomplishing to outline a consistent and comprehensive logic behind Hegel's obscure insistence on contradiction, his consistency also produces a certain deadlock. The necessity of contradiction itself is not regarded as a contingent phenomenon (the actuality of man being ingrained into the shape of his skull-bone). It is necessary to read these two parallel ideas together. To read Hegel as a thinker of the impasse, antagonism, dichotomy and contradiction is unavoidable and necessary, but to think him as a purveyor of emancipation is a radical premise that is worthy to revisit.

Having such a lofty issue at hand, it is essential to stress that the knowledge regarding contradiction as our object of analysis can structurally be only non-subjective. Meaning that by posing a question concerning truth, the subject endeavors to gain suitable knowledge, but in striving to attain an adequate picture of contradiction itself, things can only get more complicated. Since the present object of knowledge is not simply a thing in the external world, but a logical determination, any query regarding truth will inevitably produce a self-referential differentiation. Any attempt to appropriate truth in its bare form despair, since every time that truth is at our fingertips it slips away and we are left with a fistful of nothing. Such an impossible drive for substantial reality can't be resolved by adjusting the approach until the right measure can be found. On the contrary, this stuttering posture of truth turns out to be the truth itself and thus the sought-after knowledge. A failure of anticipated result has to occur to establish as a by-product the true outcome. The difference between the principled fostering of adequation and rational sublation of truth is immanently tied to a change of perspective of what dialectics is trying to establish. When contradiction is regarded as a starting obstacle¹ in need of a resolution, the furthest we can arrive to are Kant's antinomies, for example, to ascertain the problem of free will in relation to necessity, which arise when we apply categories that overstep our finite knowledge. Conversely, contradiction is absolved of such limitations by introducing an ontological negation, let say, into the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Contradiction is their common denominator and thus acts as the constitutive principle of society. Hence, the ironic queries, tea or coffee, yes, please (or, freedom or terror, yes, please), do not

undermine the opposition of elements, but instead, by inserting a contradiction, offset the preordained meaning and offer a different significance. This kind of tension is not a disturbance, but an immanent principle, whereby, “a dialectical advance, as Hegel conceives it, is a step in the direction of absolute contradiction, not a progressive movement toward the elimination of contradiction.” (McGowan, 2019: 21) After Marx, it is almost impossible to rescind such a postulation.

Irreducible contradiction is therefore “not a way of not knowing but a way of knowing, the way of knowing that Hegel associates with reason.” (Ibid: 61) The whole process is namely inseparable from thought itself, more specifically, from reason (*Vernunft*), which has anatomically a contradictory stature. But there is a question that remains. Why is thought the vehicle of contradiction? Perhaps the simplest answer is also the most obvious one. By having the insight about the impossibility to think a beginning without falling into contradiction, a premise that is since Kant unavoidable, inasmuch as an impossibility must be inscribed into being itself. If such an impasse “weren't possible, obviously, we couldn't even think it,” (Ibid., 96) an argumentation that is further expounded with the conclusion that thought, “has the ability to reconcile itself to contradiction. (Ibid: 97) However, merely making a claim without any justification is a halfway measure or a romantically infused definition, since it still neutralizes thought.

Each direct approach to understanding contradiction will result in a similar failure, so a different outlook is needed to grasp its inner workings. We're namely dealing with what Adorno named, “a hardened scar (*die verhärtete Narbe*) of an unresolved problem” (Adorno, 1974: 11) that doesn't just testify to courageous efforts, but continuously reminds us of their failed nature. In this incrustated and inert form, the repetitive confrontation with it nevertheless produces conceptual vitality, as the repeated attempts do not indicate the same identical matter, but to a greater extent the practice of reproduction.² Contradiction itself³ is best exemplified in the notion of concept (*Begriff*) as Hegel defined it. It is superfluous to mention that a concept does not facilitate a subjective stance that is in accordance with a perceived object. There is namely no trace of Platonism in this idea, but neither is it useful for grasping the Kantian thing-itself. Both of these seek to grab some sort of solid core of meaning. Hegel was never overly interested in this. On the contrary, the advent of concept was premeditated on a predicament; how to signify something that doesn't refer to anything while at the same time actively intervening into the world by imposing some sort of rule. Hegel was namely interested in the manner in which truth begets its form, which he accomplished by marking a constitutive empty frame of meaning.

The Hegelian subject has a constitutive stipulation and can only appease it by surrendering himself to the “absolute suffering” of thinking, in which he has to persevere to the very breaking point of thought. While he gains nothing, this nothing is not the last word, since thinking has to continue, thus the Hegelian subject must retain this agony as a positive experience. In brief, the subject is established by contact with the lack of meaning, when touching (*greifen*) the lack of real being simultaneously produces comprehension (*begreifen*). While initially the purpose may be to discern the truth of a determinate object, it quickly becomes clear that the object of comprehension cannot be identical with itself, since the approach itself changes the initial object. The insight into the discrepancy of the object with itself is *Begriff*.

But, work needs to be done to achieve this, a dialectical grind. There is a persistent idea that Hegel has a common-sense strategy in mind when using the dialectical method. Positing a thesis, positive declaration (fascism is in an authoritarian reign of the word that enchanted the population), which has to have its own antithesis (fascism is a consistent practice of subordinating state economy to capital needs), while their contradiction is sublated (*Aufgehoben*) in a synthesis of both (certain aspects of both rationales define fascism). At the same time, it was never intended to be a method for resolving disputes by consensus. Such a rough and improper reading can't be found in any of Hegel's work, although some ambiguous wording on his part, such as the restitution of identity, may have misled the early readers and contributed to this logical derivation. If we need to refer to such a *ménage à trois* of theses, where none is neglected, then the dialectical reversal has to be perceived as a renunciation of the starting position. Consequently, thesis and antithesis lose their common ground, as the synthesis is to release antithesis from the context of thesis.

Dialectic is commonly regarded as an external and negative activity which does not belong to the thing itself but is rooted in mere conceit, in a subjective obsession for subverting and bringing to naught everything firm and true, or at least as in resulting in nothing but the vanity of the subject matter subjected to dialectical treatment. (Hegel, 2010b: 35)

There is no amicable return to a simple, transparent idea of fascism, since the synthetic conclusion is to give a voice to antithesis, free of the thesis. Synthesis thus functions as an emancipation of structural necessities or simply a “change of perspective”. And it is paramount to understand this change of perspective to understand the inner working of contradiction. At all cost should the reasoning that

the principle drive lays in removing a divide between two excluding positions be dismiss. This shift of perspective is more aligned with Hegel's idea of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*). As clearly emphasized by McGowan, "through the act of reconciliation, thought adopts a relationship to contradiction that being cannot attain. It doesn't overcome contradiction but grasps its necessity." (2019: 97) This irreducibility of contradiction ties dialectics into the differentiation of reason (*Vernunft*) from understanding (*Verständ*).

2. Dialectics without speculations

While reason is the preferred form of thinking and internalizing contradiction, it is necessary to emphasize that understanding or "non-speculative thinking also has its right" (Hegel, 2018: 40), because reason is simply understanding brought to its logical conclusion. Hence, reason shouldn't be regarded as an exclusive or even private practice that preclude its use from certain human beings, as it is, on the contrary, available to "anyone at whichever level of education and mental development they may find themselves." (Hegel, 2010a: 132) To take understanding seriously means having the capacity to think contradiction, or more specifically, reason "can only define itself on the basis of its antagonism to understanding." (Simoniti, 2018: 228) The realm of reason is predicated on dialectical procedure, but for all intents and purposes it also encompasses the effects of the speculative force. We have to be aware that there are two principals at work.

A dialectic maneuver is not synonymous with speculation.⁴ Hegel himself is clear about that. In Encyclopedia, he minutely unfolds the structure of his logic, and in doing so outlines three equally relevant sides: "abstract side or that of the understanding (*Verständige*)," (Hegel, 2010aL: 125) which we briefly addressed and contextualized above; "dialectical or negatively rational" (ibid.), reconciliatory mechanism that we looked at in detail and "the speculative or positively rational" (Ibid.). The latter is of particular interest, as it unfolds the form of contradiction into a new field, however, there is no set logical order, where one side is privileged over another. But to uphold the truth of an arbitrary concept, let us consider for instance the economic category of capital as a convenient one, is essential to keep the triad intact.

With understanding, a thought determination of an existent phenomena against others is made. This would suggest that in capitalism, capital appears as a universal constant that relies on its opposite in the form of communism, whereby it establishes its own particular distinctness or identity among all others – hardly an acceptable definition that would do the contemporary maxim justice. However, in

practice, it is impossible to circumvent such determinations, given that things have to be seen in isolation to be made suitable to use. As already mentioned, understanding has its "rights and its merits" (Ibid: 126) and shouldn't be viewed as a redundant clog in the struggle to grasp speculative truths. Incidentally, Goethe's advice to know how to limit ourselves and not want everything was certainly not a wisdom uttered in passing. This is especially evident in professions, which must be pursued with understanding. The familiarity with work tasks has to be upheld.

Understanding capital simply as a collection of wealth or other assets for purpose of spending or investing may be narrow-minded, since it is necessarily missing the contradiction that will lead to its fall. But it is also obvious that human proceedings are structured around such an understanding of capital. This first position is directly contrasted by Marx's analysis, according to which capital is "not a thing", but has to be regarded as a "definite social relation [...] which is manifested in a thing and provides this thing a specific social character." (Marx, 2004: 789)⁵ Thereby the means of production and all other kinds of commodities in the hands of the bourgeoisie are made into the means of exploitation of the workers. How to show this turn inward? Critique of commodity fetishism tries to achieve just that, establish the right conditions under which it would be conceivable to comprehend the error embedded into commodity fetishism.

A familiar, but limited understanding of a notion, in our case capital, denoting an asset capable of generating an income stream for its owner, logically has to transition into its opposite. Capital itself, by valorizing assets, conditions the inversion of the perspective. Suddenly, the same capital is "dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him." (Marx, 1991: 209) Conceived in this way, the moment when the thesis is sublated into the opposite is also the moment that dialectical movement is introduced. At first, seen from the perspective of understanding, the dialectical contains mere negation, but in reality, it unfolds "the proper, true nature of the determinations of the understanding, of things" (Hegel, 2010a, 128) by going "beyond [such determinacy]." (Ibid: 129) In Marxist context, the worker isn't endowed with privileged knowledge regarding his being or with the idea of an ultimate emancipatory goal that will help him see the exploitive underbelly of capital. The worker achieves to invert the form of understanding capital through "what he is forced to do historically, in accordance with his being." (Marx, 1920: 80) Hegel would add, "wherein the one-sided and limited character of the

determinations of the understanding” of capital “presents itself as what it is, namely as their negation.” (2010a: 128) To be a worker therefore entails the demand to separate oneself from oneself, to instill a difference between me and myself. We can say that a worker becomes alienated (*Entfremdung*), but has to reconcile himself with such a prediction together with all the implications.

If work needs to be done by the worker, the dialectical principle brings to light the internal impulse that motivates the actual activity. The limitation of a notion of work isn't merely externally imposed, but also promulgated from within. For example, while free circulation of capitalist goods is believed to be beneficial to the well-being of the populous, its negative byproducts are brushed aside as something extraneous. We would have missed the point if we thought that the dialectical turn was about a transition from a false definition to a more suitable, truer one. Capital is infused with two particular characteristics that seems separate, a productive principle of society and its downfall; however, their contradictory nature is a reflection of the abstract determination.⁶ The finite properties of capital contradict themselves in themselves, which is the reason that there are no compromises between them. Consequently, their meeting can only result in their sublation. This is why the commonsense understanding of capital is one-sided and limited, but is not wrong. The manner in which it presents itself renders it possible to turn it over into its opposite; now understanding presents itself as what it is, namely as their negation. Does that mean that the mere fact of sustaining the knowledge of this contradictory form would suffice in changing the parameters of exploitation inherent to the capitalist structure? Engels wouldn't be satisfied with such naive strategy of liberation.

Economic production and the structure of society of every historical epoch necessarily arising therefrom constitute the foundation for the political and intellectual history of that epoch; [...] consequently (ever since the dissolution of the primeval communal ownership of land) all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social development; [...] this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time for ever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class struggles. (Engels, 2002: 197)⁷

McGowan might be right to distance himself from the Marxist belief in abolishing contradictory nature of capital, in favor of “a substantial future free from

contradiction“ (2019: 5), since Hegel himself would endorse such an opinion: “What is in play here is already found in all other forms of consciousness and is found universally in experience.” (Hegel, 2010a: 130), a position that is only radicalized in *The Science of Logic*, “All things are in themselves contradictory.” (Hegel, 2010b: 381) However, it is paramount to appreciate the fine line that Engels is trying to walk here. The argumentation is unsurprisingly infused with a dialectical spirit, which means that we shouldn't presume simple answers, such as the “fantasy of a noncontradictory alternative.” (McGowan, 2019: 212) Rather, Engels focuses on unlatching the sewed together categories (proletariat-bourgeoisie, exploitation-production), whereby work and oppression isn't naturally embedded into the structuring principle of society. In this manner, the loss of capital as an exploitative structure wouldn't be naturally regarded as means of accumulating wealth.⁸ The essence of both meanings is not sublated into an inseparable identity, since the sublation establishes a non-relationship – to think proletariat and bourgeoisie together isn't predicated on a neutral frame of reference from which it would be possible to discern a political and economical solution, since both are inseparably tangled together, functioning only in the heart of the other.

This insight into the logic of antagonism shows that even in a completely automated society, the real adversary is the formal relationship at hand and the way in which contradiction structures societal life, operating as the principle that forms society. We will not contest the individual depictions (of capital) that are interdependent by each other, since they have their claim to describe and reflect the true state of things. It is only by experiencing a sort of distance and separation from such an appearance and in its place bring forth the nonsensical and inconsistent elements that hold them together, are we able to see what is produced in their encounter. As Marx put it, this is the “solution” that is present in the material conditions, the addition that magnetizes the field around it. Despite having the key to think contradiction at arm's length, neither Marx nor Engels were faithful to this premise.

In the last instance, the inherent contradiction is expressed through the emptying of meaning⁹, since every idea resides primarily on the premise of understanding, which fixates relations between things and thoughts without leaving any negative remainder. The most noteworthy example of such a constitutive paradox came about when Hegel travelled to the Alps; he stared at the dead endless masses and simply exclaimed, “*Es ist so* (It is so).” No grand meanings, sublime things or truth, just mere presence, expressed as a negative foundation, which needs to be filled in

with practical activity by providing reality with a retainer. Absence of meaning together with the exposition of antagonism embody a twofold foundation that forms what we have defined as Hegel's concept (*Begriff*). By separating the subject from itself, contradiction and meaninglessness produce alienation, but alienation that is manifested exclusively in language, which appears here in its characteristic form of concept. The concept itself namely extends through the thing (*Sache*) and language (*Sprache*) and let us not forget that language is for Hegel the highest form of the speculative spirit.

3. From contradiction to language and back

With understanding and dialectics, we have drawn up two edges of logic leaving us to take a closer look at the third side, the prospect of speculation. A modern reading of speculation is almost impossible to not associate with the specifically risky, but at times profitable financial activity, however, Hegel's time had a similar predicament as the notion was "used in a very vague and at the same time subordinate sense, as, for instance, when one speaks of speculations concerning marriage or commerce." (Hegel, 2010a: 132) Both adoptions have much more to do with Hegel's use of speculation than it may seem at first glance. All of the examples given namely reveal how the immediacy of the presented content passes into its otherness. Marriage based on love quickly turns into a formal expression of assorted rights and obligations. Commerce, as one of the "antediluvian forms of capital" (Marx, 1991: 150), is obviously the exchange of goods and services, but such a definite determination excludes the fact that slave trading was principally the most profitable of commerce enterprises. These particular opposite, one-sided determinations express a logical contradiction of the things as they are in and for themselves. While commonsense convictions would assert that such contradictions reflect the incompatibility of particular properties, they overlook that their very existence is predicated on them.

Speculative thought consists only in this, in holding firm to contradiction and to itself in the contradiction, but not in the sense that, as it happens in ordinary thought, it would let itself be ruled by it and allow it to dissolve its determinations into just other determinations or into nothing. (Hegel, 2010b: 383)

What the speculative inference fills out is the empty shell of a thing that is left after the dialectical procedure. Speculation namely insists in such a thing emptied of sensuous content and external referent, since the "empty, abstract nothing" is in

reality a result of “negation of definite determinations” (Hegel, 2010a: 132), which means, an integration of the opposites into a unified concrete thought, while also preserving the “ideal moments within itself” (Ibid: 133). By reiterating the thought determinations, speculation opens up the possibilities of thought. Even though the dialectical movement produces its own positive product in the form of “the negation of definite determinations” (Ibid.), which transition into their opposites, speculation encompasses the leftovers of this operation as something affirmative, a shift into something else, a change that brings about something new.

Here it seems that a more graspable emancipatory technique is already at hand. But while speculation can be regarded as a rational force that “makes the night of reason from noon of understanding” (Simoniti, 2008: 71), thereby establishing a form of thinking that oscillates between two opposing nothing, which allows thought determinations to be written anew, an essential aspect of speculation moment is present somewhere else. Just as importantly, as hollowing out of meaning is Hegel’s specific reasoning, according to which thought arises from naming: “it is in names that we think¹⁰.” (Hegel, 1979: 278) What Hegel is referring to is a peculiar consideration on the provenance and imposition of thought. Thoughts are present to us only when we imprint into them the form of objectivity distinguished from the inwardness, “that is, the form of externality, and of such an externality, which at the same time is wearing the stamp of the highest inwardness. Such an inward externality is by itself the articulated tone, the word.” (Ibid: 280) To think without words is namely unreason(able). According to Hegel, such a stance can only lead to insanity, while words “give thoughts their most dignified and true existence¹¹.” (Ibid.) The more that we grasp words, familiarize ourselves with them, the more their objectivity and meaning fade away, leaving subjectivity as an empty container for words that can externalize thoughts. Such a radical reading, where thought can persevere only through words that are resolved of meaning, is also the reason why Hegel defined speculation in the following manner: “the dialectical movement [...] is the actual speculation, and only the enunciation (*Aussprechen*) of this movement is the speculative exposition.” (Hegel, 2018: 40) Obviously, Hegel held language in high regard, considered it to be the only actual speculation, however the first instinct is that thinking emerges from a more personalized apprehension.

Phenomenology of Spirit may begin with a plethora of various sensory certainties, which introduces us to the immediacy of the present. But their presence does not enable distinction to accumulate, neither is there room for subjectivity or identity to prevail, since it only functions as a phantasmatic arche-scene. Sensible

experience is not a fundamental precondition for the work of conceptualization to commence. Even more damning, Hegel regards those who insist in it to “trample the roots of humanity underfoot.” (2008: 65) To do the latter is to be solely bound to a particular stance, which is to stand firm with the meaning we mean. This is why Hegel puts forth an option, in the form of a contradiction, between what we mean and what we say.

However, as we see, language is the more truthful. In language, we immediately refute what we *mean* to say, and since the universal is the truth of sensuous-certainty, and language only expresses this truth, it is, in that way, not possible at all that we could ever say what we *mean* about sensuous being. (Hegel, 2018: 43)

The role of an emancipatory principle is therefore entrusted to language, since it is language that conditions the sense apparatus to be receptive to externality of the world in the first place and not the other way around. Furthermore, to be able to touch the otherness of itself, it is obligatory to be first embroiled in language.

But language enables man to conceive of things as general, to attain the consciousness of his own universality, to express (*Aussprechen*) the I. This comprehension of his selfhood is a most important point of the child's spiritual development; with this point, it begins to reflect itself from a state of immersion (*Versenktsein*) into the outside world. (Hegel, 1979: 80)

This is to say, language isn't a medium of direct representation; it is even less a bridge beyond appearances; however, it also doesn't discern an adequate picture of reality or truth. It is more so the trigger that configures the difference between me and myself, but it is also what is common to these positions. Language, in other words, animates contradiction. The above passage is nevertheless not definite, as it allows several alternative interpretations. For instance, Gramsci assigned a central role to language, as a “totality of determined notions and concepts” (1992: 323), in the conceptualization of hegemony; altogether opposite reasoning can be found in Graeser, who advocates the possibility to “wordlessly invoke the immediacy of relationship of knowledge” (2006: 49); Jameson offers an intriguing insight, understanding language “as an index of error or contradiction,” (2010: 35) while disregarding a positive account of language in Encyclopedia as simplistic, endowed with an “Aristotelian spirit” and thus not really worthwhile for further analysis. But he

invested a particular interest in the alienating (*Entfremdung*) effects of language that are explicated especially in *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the chapter on *The World of Self-alienated Spirit*, an essential characteristic to which we will return shortly.

When humanity is at stake, it is sufficient to understand language as “communality of consciousness” (*Gemeinsamkeit der Bewußtsein*) (Hegel, 2008: 65), but the perspective on the immediate use of language is of no interest to Jameson. The moment when the first mumbled syllables emerge, a child has already transgressed the principle of non-contradiction. The structure of language takes care that the universal aspect of communality trumps over individual caprices. The speaking being becomes himself by enunciating and thereby surrendering to the universality of language. This occurs as an emptying (*kenosis, Entäußerung*) of himself, of meaning, but in particular, of his own structural place. It is nothing else, but the conservation of this contradiction. Such an ordeal of emptying isn't superseded by a “replenishing with practical activity” (Simoniti, 2008: 48), which is “in itself indifferent” (Hegel, 2008: 595). A universalization of self, a knowing and willing self that is only “actual in language.” (ibid.) The result is at first perplexing and probably still best elaborated through Epistle to the Philippians: “But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are” (2:7 NJB). Not without reason, the master (*Herr*) and slave (*Knecht*), or more precisely, servant (*Knecht*)¹² dialectic comes to mind. And Hegel was unequivocally here, stating that “it is the conquered, rather than the conqueror, who is right.” (McGowan, 2019: 171) Portraying the role of slave means the opposite of the usual interpretation, according to which the slave simply subordinates himself to the master. In short, while the immovable master, attached to some “specific determinate being” (Hegel, 2018: 111), is prepared to sacrifice everything for his honor, even himself, the compliant slave is prepared to do even that – sacrifice all, the “being-in-itself” including the name, and still live on.¹³ Only by yielding, is the slave able to express forgiveness to the master, since “forgiveness [...] is the renunciation of itself, of its unreal essential being [...]; or rather it abandons this distinction of the specific thought and its subjectively determined judgement, just as the other abandons its subjective characterization of action.” (Ibid: 387-388)

The true sacrifice is thus the sacrifice of being-for-itself, “sacrificing itself just as completely, as it does in death” and with this radical emancipatory act achieving that “the self as such a self, thereby steps forward and alienates itself.” (Ibid: 294) Going back to the topic of alienation, we have already made it clear that alienation emerges exclusively in language,

“for language is the existence of the pure self as the self [...] so that it is for others. [...] The I that *expresses* itself is brought to a hearing [...] In its being brought to a hearing, its existence has itself immediately become fainter. This, its otherness, is taken back into itself, and its existence is just this: as a self-conscious now, as it is there, it is not there, and through this disappearance, it is there. This disappearing itself is thus immediately its lasting.” (Ibid.)

This insistence in language is the speculative act as such. In contrast to the prevailing idea that only a particular act can bring forth the transformation of reality, it is the practice of speculative thinking that incites newness, which occurs at the moment of declaration. A question remains: a declaration of what? In contrast to the everyday reading, according to which language serves the conformity of concept and thing, Hegel encompasses the ontological scope of the contradictory nature of language in its expressive form. For example, the figure of Hegel is inseparably tied to his famous nightcap. This coincidental headdress sprouted the image of a philosopher of the nightfall, from the owl of Minerva that takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering to the famous eyes of the subject in which we can see the night of the world. Alienation in this contingent object resulted in the de-particularization, emptying of Hegel the subject. However, it was Heine's performative act present in his *Book of Poems*³⁴ that split (*Entzweiung*) Hegel from himself and bound him to the above-mentioned new referent. It is thus in such encounters of contingency and performative that we get the speculative mandate to interfere and reshape being.

4. Emancipation with(out) speculation

While McGowan expresses the idea according to which “emancipation [...] occurs through contradiction, not as a result of its overcoming,” (2019: 213) our reasoning deviates from such absolutist notion. Striving for emancipation shouldn't be reduced to simply affirming absolute knowledge as our last horizon, “accepting contradiction as an internal condition of every identity.” (Ibid: 55). While it is necessary to encompass the principle that “alienated unity”, especially the state, holds individual subjects together “through a shared way of being what they are not,” (Ibid: 203) in the last instance that would also encompass Marx's interpretation of capitalism as an antagonistic mode of production. If we don't want to deprive emancipation of the radical demand for a self-determined separation, a slightly different perspective is necessary.

Emancipation is generally identified with releasing a person into self-determination: declared for independent, free and endowed with equal rights. An explanation unmistakably present in the name of the Proclamation 95, The Proclamation of Emancipation, a war measure issued during the American Civil War by the president of the United States, declaring all persons held as slaves to be from then on free. But interestingly, emancipation is a composition *ēx manus capere* (detach from the hand), to establish a divide, a separation from something. From what and for what? Not just from despotism of the other, but more so a separation from ourselves. This rationale is interestingly etymologically inscribed into the notion of emancipation. The Latin word *emancipō* namely signifies emancipation as well as alienation. We have seen that such separation from ourselves is actually the common ground, which bands us together with others.

As already noted, the grabbing (*greiffen*) in the concept (*Begriff*) is not Hegel's trick to establish a meaningful representational framework, but a "life pulse" (2010b: 17) for thought that binds it to the nullity of meaning and otherness. It is the principle that animates thought, but importantly also an instrument for upholding our understanding, manifested in the ordinary consciousness. It has all the empirical wealth of the world except the blindness covers up the constitutive deficit inherent to conceptual thinking. It shouldn't be surprising that in the unlikely partnership between master and slave, we characterized the latter as an emancipatory figure, however, it is likewise essential to take into consideration the gain on both sides. While the master, being merely himself, has all the interesting ideas and witty remarks, understands everything, but doesn't think. Unknowingly to the master, the servant takes on the task of thinking, which requires work. Firstly, fearing for his life at the hands of the master, the servant abandoned his own self-sufficiency and autonomy. However, by experiencing this dread, he also gains a positive lesson in self-determination. By going through the void of fixed, determinate and stable things, the slave was able to freely give up the struggle with the master and win independence. The thin ideological line between knowing that the history is on our side and knowing that the world itself is contingent is the ability to commit ourselves to the freedom of thought.

Emancipation through speculation proceeds by disenchanting the world, which we said is essentially the disenchantment of its meaning. What is then the strategy for emancipatory action? Just as it is a "delight for thought" that language can produce words that carry "not just different meanings, but opposite ones" (Hegel, 2010b, 12), the common societal sphere must cultivate delights for the speculative

spirit that don't need to be novel to thought. But let us take a more basic, linguistic example of homophones. These are words that are pronounced in the same manner, but have a different, contradictory meaning. While reason and raisin may seem foreign, in essence, the spoken word is identical. By separating themselves from permanent significance, such words are able to stay faithful to themselves through utterance: "The word in its wordhood unfurls a new, irreducible dimension even with regard to language as a whole." (Simoniti, 2018: 228) As is true for language, emancipation also requires work, conceptual work. If we don't want emancipation to be pure self-referring differentiation, leaving us with a de-substantialized hollowed out subject, we need a mandate for a rational emancipation while simultaneously preserving understanding as the point of contingent, unreasonable "Es ist so".

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¹ Every start can only be inadequate, an error in judgement, since truth itself is the universal medium in which truth and knowledge are calibrating their accord. But this failure is already handling with the thing itself and thus the truth about which we inquired. Hegel's introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* exhaustively deals with this paradoxical requirement of philosophical inquiry to start with the truth itself.

² In this mechanism, it is possible to discern the inner structure of capitalist reproduction, whereby capital has to pass through a paradoxical point at which the role of capitalist and worker becomes inverted. The latter have to contribute as much as the capitalist, since any surplus value can be realized only with the help of the workers themselves, by acquiring their own produced items: "consumption, which is conceived not only as a terminal point, but also as an end-in-itself, actually belongs outside economics except in so far as it reacts in turn upon the point of departure and initiates the whole process anew." (Marx, 1993: 89) A contradictory relationship that is self-fecundating. The side of consumerism therefore seems very suitable for proletarian interventions; however, any thoughtless impetus, which is always present in such situations, may quickly change into illusion according to which that it is possible to expel antagonism as such from society.

³ In Lacan's *imaginarium*, the phenomena of contradiction is exemplified by the axiom "there is no sexual relationship."

⁴ While Hegel's idea of speculation isn't synonyms with dialectics, the same cannot be said of mysticism. This mystical character shouldn't be regarded as something unthinkable and incomprehensible, but mystical in the sense of going beyond mere understanding.

⁵ Just to avoid misunderstandings, capital itself is not synonyms with exploitation, and neither is capital an all-encompassing principle. Marx clearly understood this: "a cotton-spinning machine is a machine for spinning cotton." Only under certain conditions does it become capital. Torn away from these conditions, it is as little capital as gold by itself is money, or as sugar is the price of sugar. (2006: 28)

⁶ Hegel describes the emergence of contradiction in the following manner: "the self-subsisting determination of reflection excludes the other in the same respect as it contains it and is self-subsisting for precisely this reason, in its self-subsistence the determination excludes its own self-subsistence from itself. For this self-subsistence consists in that it contains the determination which is other than it in itself and does not refer to anything external for just this reason; but no less immediately in that it is *itself* and excludes from itself the determination that negates it. And so it is *contradiction*." (2010b: 374)

⁷ Engels continued his thought by attributing this "basic thought" to Marx who deduced a more radical alternative as a simple non-contradictory future: "Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation." (1970: 21)

⁸ An emancipatory portrayal of wealth can be discerned in Saint Paul's universalism: "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth." (1 Cor 10:24 KJB) Wealth of a man is not expressed through himself, but by virtue of committing to the community and the commons.

⁹ Hegel uses a reading of skepticism, which doesn't equate skeptical outlook with the insistence to doubt, but rather the insight into "the nothingness of all things finite." (2010a, 131) To be consistently doubtful just means that such an individual is led by a consistent fantasy of a true and stable fundament at the end of the path. On the contrary, as a skeptic it is necessary to surrender to despair, to despair about everything that is firm in understanding.

¹⁰ An identical reasoning can be found in Hegel's *The Science of Logic*: "The forms of thought are first set out and stored in human language." (2010b: 12)

¹¹ This doesn't predicate that in every occasion when words are exchanged, we can be calmly characterized as rational. More often than not, words are used without grasping the matter. But Hegel doesn't put the blame for this on words, but unreasonables of inane and stolid thinking.

¹² The interpretations around the participants in Hegel's quintessential dialectical relationship is still a matter of dispute, however, the relationship between lord and bondsman has become well-established. It is of course questionable to argue for the term slave as a proper translation of Knecht, since Hegel himself uses *Sklave* or slave to differentiate the modern phenomena from Roman role of slave, who is legally cannot be regarded as man. In *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel is very clear: "very status of slave indeed is an outrage on the conception of man," as such opposes free will and is entrapped at the level of mere consciousness. Only by encountering each other, do the master and bondsman establish the conditions for freedom to emerge. A convincing argument for the use of lordship and bondage can be found in Cole, Andrew (2014), *The Birth of Theory*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Nonetheless, a claim in favor of slavery has validity, since Hegel's motive is clearly to present the "general relation of domination and subordination" and not "to search for a determinate historical reference." (Kobe, 2015:842) Such a reading is exemplary presented in Ottmann, Henning (1982), *Herr und Knecht bei Hegel. Bemerkungen zu einer mißverstandenen Dialektik*, *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung*, 35 (3/4), and Kobe, Zdravko (2015), *True Sacrifice. On Hegel's Presentation of Self-Consciousness*, *Filozofija I društvo* XXVI (4).

¹³ "The true sacrifice of being-for-itself is thus solely that in which it surrenders itself as completely as in death, yet in this renunciation it no less preserves itself." (Hegel, 2018: 294)

¹⁴ The well know verse goes as follows: "With nightcap and dressing-gown scraps for material. He chinks up the holes in the universe." See Heinrich Heine (1972), *Werke und Briefe in zehn Bänden. Band 1*, Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag:133.