Hegelian Christology: from Kojève to Žižek

Gabriel Tupinambà

"It is only when one no longer believes in the "absolute aspect of Christianity" - and when one doesn't even understand that Hegel based his thought on this belief - that the scholar's alternative of historicism/ Absolute can be born, and there also arises the anachronous image of a gifted dialectician that, however, since he was an incorrigible metaphysician, made eternity prevail over becoming"[1]

§1 Hegel and the Christian Event

The practically infinite field of commentaries and interpretations of Hegel's philosophy is a background against which the opposition between Žižek and Kojève could dissolve into a mere comparison of two different, but equally valuable, readings. However, some of the underlying similarities between the left and right-wing interpretations of his philosophy - well illustrated by the solid foundation Fukuyama found in Kojève's Marxist reading of Hegel to support his own neo-liberal thesis - are enough to incite a certain doubt into this accumulative infinity of perspectives, which tends towards a neutralisation of the radicality of Hegel's thought.

The objection could be raised, of course, that there is no such thing as a sole perspective on a philosopher's thought, and that the multiplicity of possible approaches is a sign of the strength of a particular philosophy. But to this we must reply that Hegel's thought is positioned in a rather unique place: the concepts of *totality* and *infinity* play such central roles in his system that a rigorous reading of his philosophy must account for its own place in the totality of its interpretations. Hegel himself was very clear in differentiating *bad* from *true* infinity - the infinity of an endless accumulative *series* from the infinity which, being a principle of *self-difference*, cannot be figured as *one more* nor as *the One*[2] - and, with this essential distinction, the philosopher himself presented the criteria through which we should measure our readings of his philosophy. To properly understand Žižek's return to Hegel we must have the courage to measure it by such a standard.

1 Lebrun 2004, p. 239

2 Hegel 1991, p. §94-§95; 1989:§272 - See also Žižek 2008

At the beginning of *The Monstrosity of Christ*, after quoting Chesterton's *The Oracle of the Dog*, Žižek puts forth a fundamental axiom, which simultaneously addresses the above mentioned issue and supports his own reading of Hegel:

"The axiom of this essay is that there is only one philosophy which thought the implications of the four words ["He was made man"] through to the end: Hegel's idealism— which is why almost all philosophers are also no less frightened of Hegel's idealism."[3]

Let us advance, then, the following presentation of this axiom: *Hegel is the only philosopher to think through the consequences of the Christian Event*. This proposition can also be developed into at least two corollaries. From the affirmation that "there is *only one* philosophy", the Hegelian one, which developed the consequences of the Christian Event, as summarised by the four words "He was made man", it follows that: *after Hegel the consequences of the Christian Event have been obliterated by the post-metaphysical philosophies.*

However, the fact that this axiom *can be enunciated at all* also implies that it is possible to occupy a position from which the difference between the fidelity to Hegel, and the disavowal of his philosophy, can be perceived. By relating the first statement to the place of its enunciation, we can present a second corollary: *Žižekian thinking occupies a position within contemporary philosophy, which includes the conceptual apparatus necessary to distinguish transmission from obliteration.*

These propositions clearly instruct the following passage, in which Žižek answers simultaneously to the two main threads in contemporary philosophy, the one which strives to "forget" Hegel, and the other which sets out to revise and adapt his philosophy to the contemporary demands:

"something happens in Hegel, a breakthrough into a unique

3 Žižek 2009, p.35. The stress on the uniqueness ("the only position") of this stance in relation to Christianity can also be found in *The Puppet and the Dwarf:* "My claim here is not merely that I am a materialist through and through, and that the subversive kernel of Christianity is accessible also to a materialist approach; my thesis is much stronger: this kernel is accessible *only* to a materialist approach—and vice versa: to become a true dialectical materialist, one should go through the Christian experience" Žižek 2003, p.6

CRISIS & CRITIQUE VOL. 2 ISSUE #1

dimension of thought, which is obliterated, rendered invisible in its true dimension, by post-metaphysical thought. This obliteration leaves an empty space which has to be filled in so that the continuity of the development of philosophy can be reestablished—filled in with what? The index of this obliteration is the ridiculous image of Hegel as the absurd "Absolute Idealist" who "pretended to know everything," to possess Absolute Knowledge, to read the mind of God, to deduce the whole of reality out of the self- movement of (his) mind—the image which is an exemplary case of what Freud called *Deck-Erinnerung* (screen-memory), a fantasy-formation intended to cover up a traumatic truth."[4]

Similar accounts of this obliteration can be found throughout Žižek's work - already in *Hegel the Most Sublime of Hysterics* the introductory remarks begin by stating the centrality of this thesis to his philosophical project.[5] Even so, this particular presentation of the disavowal is very pertinent to our enquiry, not only because it is the most explicit assertion by Žižek of the centrality of Hegel's Christology to the totality of his philosophical project, but also because the reference to the Freudian notion of *Deck-Erinnerung* allows us to expand our understanding of what is explicitly stated in our second corollary. Žižek's diagnosis of the Hegelian break is directly informed by the conceptual frame of psychoanalysis, which, since Freud's earliest writings, is concerned with accounting for the distinction between the empty space of trauma and the associative logic that, driven by this empty space itself, incessantly attempts to cover it up.

If we refer now to the problem we mentioned before - the issue of comparing different readings of Hegel against the background of the over-abundance of comments and interpretations - we can see how Žižek's return to Hegel is not opposed to any particular reading, but to the very field which supports these different perspectives, to their common trait. Therefore, to refer to an obliteration of Hegel's thought is ultimately to refer not to an interpretation, but to something which *was not* - or rather, that *could not* - be interpreted.

4 Žižek 2009, pp.35-36

5 Žižek 2011, p.14

However, if we accept that there is a reading of Hegel which addresses concomitantly *all* possible approaches to his thought - a position which holds on to the *impossible* as a guarantee of truth, rather than to the *possible* - then the inclusion of the impasse of interpretation into the totality of interpretations shifts the very axis of opposition, allowing us to directly address the "scarecrow image of Hegel" which serves as the negative support for the very background of most contemporary readings of his philosophy.

In its minimal form, this new opposition cutting across the field of interpretations distinguishes itself by contrasting different concepts of totality - an asymmetrical one, undoubtedly, for this so-called "democratic" totality is fundamentally a *spuriously infinite* one, always ready to accommodate a new perspective and to dissolve it into the homogenous multiplicity of the possible. The position defended by Žižek, on the other hand, unearths in Hegel the consequences of there being a *self-different* infinity, a position grounded on the affirmation that *failure* is a fundamental category of Hegel's system.[6] From this standpoint, one is capable of accounting for the very opposition between the notion of totality and its irreducible spectre of *totalisation*, against which post-metaphysical thought affirms the necessity of forgetting, or "deflating" Hegel's thought.

As we shift our axis of interrogation from the multiplicity of 'Hegels without Hegel' - to paraphrase Žižek - to the direct confrontation with the absurd stand-in, which endows the continuity of post-Hegelian philosophy with an aura of correction and "anti-totalitarianism", the figure of Alexandre Kojève springs forth, standing at a double intersection.

Firstly, Kojève's reading of Hegel is a direct articulation of the 'total' or circular notion of totality, a solid base for the argument that Hegel would be the philosopher who claimed to 'know [the] All'. Simultaneously, his reading is based on a radical dismissal of certain dimensions of Hegelian philosophy, especially regarding Hegel's reading of the Christian Event, the pivotal example of Hegelian concrete universality.

6 Jarczyk 2004, p.310

CRISIS & CRITIQUE VOL. 2 ISSUE #1

The second, and superimposed, intersection has to do with the political consequences of this interpretation. Here too Kojève seems to play a double role: he was deeply concerned with bringing Hegel and Marx closer - of bringing Hegel closer to Marx, to be more precise. His reading of Hegel was incredibly influential on many of the most important left-wing French thinkers of the last fifty years,[7] but, at the same time, Kojève's explicitly leftist thesis found its way to the core of the neo-liberal ideology, where it seems to reside comfortably today. Fukuyama's famous work, *The End of History and the Last Man,* might be many things, but a bad reading of Kojève is certainly not one of them.

We will now attempt to sketch some of the fundamental elements of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, focusing especially on the relation between the Hegelian Concept and the emptying out of the Christian 'overtones' of his philosophy - a movement which amounted, as we will see, to the disavowal of the dimension of what would be later known in psychoanalysis as the death drive, and which is strictly connected in Hegel's philosophy with his account of the Christian Event. Our main interest here is to present the Kojèvian figure of Absolute Knowledge which, following the Žižekian axiom previously stated, offers itself as the perfect alibi for the dismissal or revision of Hegel's project. This investigation will also serve us as the starting point for the formal presentation of the Žižekian reading of the Absolute Knowing.

§2 An anthropology without incarnation

Kojève's work notoriously stands out because of its two famous, and interrelated, central theses: the fundamental role played by the Hegelian dialectic of the Lord and the Bondsman in the structuring of the individual and the collectivity, and the consequence that he draws from this first thesis: that the overcoming of this dialectical opposition amounts to the coming to an end of history.

However, rather than focusing on those two points, we would like to turn our attention to what we believe to be the truly symptomatic point of his approach to Hegel - the idea that man can become Christ. This particular statement allows us to approach a nodal point in Kojève's reading, one which forcefully binds together Hegel and the post-

7 Drury 1994; Devlin & Roger 2004; Jarczyk & Labarrière 1996

metaphysical thought through a simultaneous (imaginary) exacerbation of knowledge and deflation of the (real) Absolute.

Let us begin our presentation by considering the following paragraphs from the *Introduction to the reading of Hegel*. In the pages immediately prior to this fragment, Kojève described the historical underpinnings of the dialectical movement of Self-Consciousness - beginning with the dialectics of the Master and the Slave, through the Stoic and Skeptic societies, finally arriving at the Judeo-Christian one - let us quote this long passage in full:

"Hence Christianity is first of all a particularistic, family and slavish reaction against the pagan universalism of the Citizen-Masters. But it is more than that. It also implies the idea of a synthesis of the Particular and the Universal - that is, of Mastery and Slavery too: the idea of Individuality - II.e., of that realization of universal
values and realities in and by the Particular and of that universal recognition of the value of the Particular, which alone can give Man *Befriedigung*, the supreme and definitive "satisfaction."

In other words, Christianity finds the solution to the pagan tragedy. And that is why, since the coming of Christ, there is no longer any true tragedy - that if inevitable conflict with truly no way out.

The whole problem, now, is to realize the Christian idea of individuality. And the history of the Christian World is nothing but the history of this realization."

Kojève continues:

"Now, according to Hegel, one can realize the Christian anthropological ideal (which he accepts in full) only by "overcoming" the Christian theology: Christian Man can really become what he would like to be only by becoming a men without God - or, if you will, a God-Man. He must realize in himself what at first he thought was realized in his God. To be really Christian, he himself must become Christ.

According to the Christian Religion, Individuality, the synthesis of the Particular and the Universal, is effected only in and by the Beyond, after man's death.

This conception is meaningful only if Man is presupposed to be immortal. Now, according to Hegel, immortality is incompatible with the very essence of human-being and, consequently with Christian anthropology itself.

Therefore, the human ideal can be realized only if it is such that it can be realized by a mortal Man who knows he is such. In other words, the Christian synthesis must be effected not in the Beyond, after death, but on earth, during man's life. And this means that the transcendent Universal (God), who recognizes the particular, must be replaced by a Universal that is immanent in the World. And for Hegel this immanent Universal can only be the State. What is supposed to be realized by God in the Kingdom of Heaven must be realized in and by the State, in the earthly kingdom. And that is why Hegel says that the "absolute" State that he has in mind (Napoleon's Empire) is the realization of the Christian Kingdom of heaven.

And concludes:

The history of the Christian World, therefore, is the history of the progressive realization of that ideal State, in which Man will finally be "satisfied" by realizing himself as Individuality - a synthesis of the universal and the particular, of the Master and the Slave, of fighting and Work. But in order to radicalize this State, Man must look away from the Beyond, look toward this earth and act only with a view to this earth. In other words, he must eliminate the Christian idea of transcendence. And that is why the evolution of the christian world is dual: on one hand there is the real evolution, which prepares the social and political conditions for the coming of the ""absolute" State; and on the other, an ideal evolution, which eliminates the transcendent idea, which brings Heaven back to Earth, as Hegel says."[8]

This long, but important, fragment displays the intertwining of some of the most central aspects of Kojève's thought. To begin with, we find here the characteristic mode of historicisation that permeates the Kojèvian reading of Hegel's figures of Self-Consciousness, giving primacy to the "concrete" elements of the examples used by Hegel over the dialectical operations at stake in such stagings. This choice is

8 Kojève, 1980, pp.66-67

most visible, and most criticised, in relation to Kojève's account of the dialectics of the Lord and the Bondsman,[9] which, by such standards, is understood as the historical battle between Masters and Slaves, the fundamental driving force of History itself.[10]

From this 'historical reification' of Hegel's logic, which proposes that the only temporality at play in Hegelian philosophy is the historical one,[11] follows a second fundamental point -also clearly present in the above-mentioned passage - which has to do with the idea of an "overcoming", in the sense of an ascent, or a return to Man of something previously allocated in the Beyond. The passage from Christian individuality to actual freedom is signaled here as the "'overcoming' of the Christian theology" through the consolidation of Napoleon's Empire, as the passage from a transcendental to an immanent Universal, the "absolute" State. The Beyond, the last figure of mastery over the individual, would have been *potentially* overcome with the event of the French Revolution, giving rise to the end of History.[12]

The idea of an "overcoming" of the Christian Beyond, the central theme of the passage we are dealing with, is very telling of the particular intercrossing of Kojève's ontological and political projects. As we mentioned above, the emphasis given to historical time as the *sole* temporality of the Concept, together with the claim that History itself is put in motion through the struggle between the Master and the Slave, seems to directly echo the first lines of *The Communist Manifesto*, in a supposed homology between class struggle and the struggle for recognition.

But if his political aim was to bring Hegel closer to Marx, hopefully breathing into the Slave the horizon of his own liberation,[13] Kojève was nevertheless willing to simplify the Hegelian ontology in some essential points, the most important one concerns the nature of the

9 Jarczyk & Labarrière, 1992

10 Kojève 1980, p.43

11 Ibid. p.133

12 Fukuyama would later turn this potential into the new index of social inequalities in the world. See the preface for *The End of History and the Last Man*

13 Kojève 1980, p.23

Christian Event - which clearly did not stand, according to Hegel's later writings, as an example of a Man who became "fully and perfectly self-conscious",[14] as it is the case with the Kojèvian figure of the Wise Man, the transparent Self-Consciousness who could appear once history would supposedly have ended.[15]

The individual freedom that Kojève mentions as the outcome of the descent of "Heaven back to Earth" relies on the premise that, by 'looking away' from the Beyond, the recognition which was first given only to the Master, then to the Slave, by being enslaved to God, could transparently be returned to the individual - to a man who would himself be the perfect synthesis of the Particular and the Universal: "Christian Man can really become what he would like to be only by becoming a man without God - or, if you will, a God-Man".

It is not difficult to see that, in directly opposed terms to those of Chesterton and Žižek, Kojève understands the Christian Event to represent four very different words: *Man was made God*. To "become Christ", as he says, is to achieve Man's satisfaction, to encounter oneself at the end of a process Kojève refers to as a circular knowledge,[16] which is, or, at least, can be, a *total* knowledge of oneself.

The Kojèvian 'four words' can be traced back to the two theses for which he is famous: if man can become God - that is, if man can arrive at a knowledge which consistently and coherently answers the question 'Who am I?'[17] without the destructive struggle with an alterity which alienates man from this knowledge - then, to put it in a Hegelian terminology, History would be understood as the process of Man alienating himself (Master) from himself (Slave), and then returning to himself (Wise Man), now in possession of a knowledge of his own position (Absolute Knowledge), constructed through the labour he endured along his alienated path. History would be the place of struggle of Masters and Slaves, and thus would come to an end once Man could

14 Ibid. p.76

15 For an expanded reading of this point, please refer to Nichols, James H. (2007), Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History (20th Century Political Thinkers), (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers).

16 Kojève 1980, p.104

17 Ibid p.75

finally grasp himself as the Wise Man, the one who does not need God, for he himself has risen to a place in which such obstacles to recognition - Masters, Gods - have been lifted.

In this sense, by turning into *constituted* obstacles the otherwise *constitutive* dimension of alienation itself, Kojève's Heideggerian-Marxism could be grasped as the shift from Spirit to Man, for it brings to the historical, anthropological dimension, in a sort of strange promethean movement, an antagonism which Hegel had first placed *not only* on earth, but in the heavens as well. Instead of universalizing the restlessness which alienated the subject from himself, Kojève saw it fit to get rid of the Beyond as the place which imposed such alienation and thus to affirm its overcoming to be possible within History itself, or rather, at its end.

The consequences of this shift, we argue, is the obliteration of Hegel's essential insight into the de-centering of the subject, returning to the Cartesian-Heideggerian frame of reference, which might work with an evanescent, and punctual, subjectivity that does not coincide with the individual as such, but which does not account for the material left-over that is clearly presented as a constitutive dimension of Self-Consciousness by Hegel - not only in the last figure of the dialectics of Self-Consciousness, the Unhappy Consciousness,[18] but essentially in the very form of what he called "infinite judgment".[19]

If Kojève's 'four words' have the paradoxical nature of simultaneously bringing Man up to God and supposedly having done with God and theism - and if, as we briefly sketched, they serve as the support for his two famous theses - then what is the conceptual support of this very particular reversal of the opening axiom of Žižek's *The Monstrosity of Christ*?

§3 The circular relation of Time and Concept

Kojève began his course of 1938-39 with two lectures on the figure of the Wise Man or Sage, and then went on to deal in more general terms with the last chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, famously titled

18 Hegel 1979, p.§230 See also the chapter "Self-Consciousness is an object" in Žižek 1993

19 See Mladen Dolar's "The Phrenology of Spirit" in Copjec, Joan (1994), Supposing the Subject, (Verso).

Absolute Knowing [Absolute Wissen]. But Kojève, who was aware of the importance of Hegel's presentation of the relation between Concept and Time - which takes on a couple of paragraphs of the last Chapter of the *Phenomenology*, as well as some lines of the *Preface* - devoted three lectures specially to this relation. It is here that we find both the core of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel,[20] and the link which will allow us later on to turn the following unfounded remark into a conclusion: Kojève's reading of Hegel's Absolute Knowledge has the structure of what Lacan called *imaginary phallus.*[21]

Kojève focuses his reading of the relation between "Eternity, Time and the Concept"[22] on Hegel's famous remark that "Time is the being-there of the Concept" [Die Zeit ist der Begriff selbst, der da ist].[23] Kojève praises how Hegel explicitly addressed this point, whereas most philosophers must be analysed in some depth, so one can actually unearth the relation between Concept and Time that is at play in their philosophies[24].

He begins his sixth lecture of that year presenting the four possible relations between Concept and Time:

C=E (Concept is Eternity)
C=E' (Concept is eternal - and Eternity is either outside or inside Time)
C=T (Concept is Time)
C=T' (Concept is temporal)

He then relates the first position to Parmenides and Spinoza, the second - which can be subdivided into two variants, the "ancient or pagan" one and the Judeo-Christian one - to Plato and Aristotle on one side, and Kant on the other. The third possibility is the Hegelian one;

20 There seems to be quite a clear correlation between Kojève's books and his main theses: *Le Concept, Le Temps et le Discours* expands on his reading of the relation between Concept and Time; *La Notion de l'Autorité* develops in detail his thesis on the Master and Slave Dialectics; and *Esquisse d'une Phénoménologie du Droit* presents a philosophy of right suited for the End of History.

21 Lacan 2007, p.697

22 Kojève 1980, p.100

23 Hegel 1979, p.§801

24 Kojève 1980, p.131

and the fourth is not a philosophical possibility, for it denies the idea of truth[25].

Once these four possibilities are presented, Kojève concentrates on Plato's hypothesis, using it as the basis to construct the diagram of Absolute Knowledge, given the proximity of Plato's position to the one of Christian theology.[26] Later on, we will return to the this schema in order to compare the Kojèvian Absolute Knowledge with our findings - so let us now carefully follow this construction step by step,[27] referring to Kojève's own description of each figure as our guideline.

He begins:

"If we symbolize temporal existence (Man in the World) by a line, we must represent the Concept by a singular point on this line: this point is essentially *other* than the other points of the line."[28]

So, we could symbolise 'temporal existence' as a line **t** and the Concept, in this line, as a point **x***:*

(FIG 1)

"Now, for Plato, the Concept is *related* to something *other* than itself (...) being eternal, the Concept must be related to *Eternity (...)* But, Plato says Eternity can only be *outside* of Time."

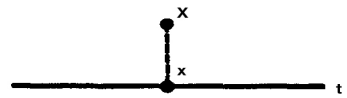
Above the point **x** we should write, outside of temporal existence **t**, the point **X***,* of Eternity:

25 Ibid., p. 102

26 Ibid., p.104

27 The figures we present here are identical to the ones used by Kojève, we have only added the letters, which will later on help us to discuss them in more detail.

28 Ibid., p.104

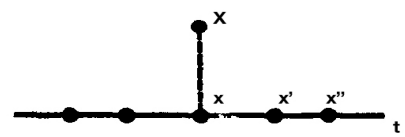


(FIG 2)

Kojève adds:

"In any case, the Concept can appear at any moment of time whatsoever. Hence the line that symbolizes existence implies *several* eternal singular points."

And now we add several other singular points (x', x'', x'''...) to account for the different possible appearances (in t) of the Concept (x):



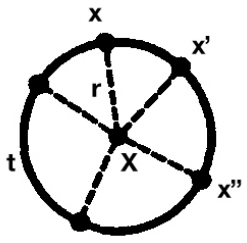
(FIG 3)

Because the relation between Eternity (X) and the Concept's appearances (x, x', x''...) is always the same, Kojève introduces the *circular* aspect of this schema, basing himself on his reading of Plato's *Timaeus:*

"Now, by definition, *Eternity* - II.e., the entity to which the Concept is related - is always the *same*; and the *relation* of the Concept to this entity is also always the *same*. Therefore: at *every* instant of time (of the existence of Man in the World) the *same* relation to one and the *same* extra-temporal entity is possible. (...) Thus we find the schema of the metaphysics of the Timaeus: a circular time, the circularity of which (and the circularity of what, being temporal, is *in* time) is determined by the *relation* of what is *in* Time to what is *outside* of Time. And at the same time we find the famous "central point" that a Christian theology (II.e., in my view a variant of Platonism) must necessarily introduce into the Hegelian circle that symbolizes absolute or circular knowledge."

Two interesting aspects are implied in this step: the first is the *geometrical* understanding of the relation (r) between Eternity (X) and the appearing Concept (x, x', x''...), which gives rise to the circular character of the figure - for it must keep the *same* relation **r** for every **x** - and the second, the remark about the central point of the circle and its importance for the Christian theology, which strangely implies that a circle without a drawn central point *does not have that same centre*.

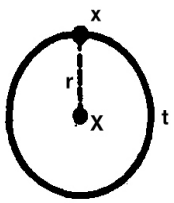
We could thus construct the figure in this way:



(FIG 4)

Now we simplify the figure:

"The Concept *can* be repeated in time. But its repetition does not change it, nor does it change its relation to Eternity; in a word, it changes nothing. Hence we can do away with all the radii of the circle, except for one"[29]

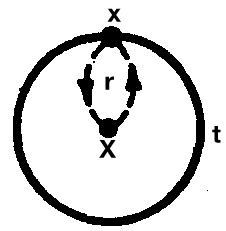


(FIG 5)

Kojève then dwells on the *double* aspect of the relation **r** between **x** and **X**:

"The radius symbolizes the *relation* between the eternal Concept and the Eternal or the eternal Entity. Therefore this relation too is non-temporal or eternal. Nevertheless, it is clearly a *relation* in the strict sense - II.e., a relation between two *different* things. Therefore the radius has, if you will, *extension* (in Space, since there is no Time in it.) Therefore we did well to symbolize it by a line (a dotted line, to distinguish it from the solid temporal line). However, the relation in question is undeniably *double*. Indeed, on the one hand the (eternal) Concept situated in Time - II.e., the Word - *rises* up through its *meaning* to the entity revealed by this meaning; and on the other hand, this entity *descends* through the *meaning* toward the Word, which it thus *creates* as *Word* out of its phonetic, sound-giving, changing reality."

Here, the importance of the classical theory of representation - that is, representation defined as the adequacy between signifier and signified, a relation commonly represented in geometric terms - to his understanding of Plato, and the Concept in general, becomes more evident. And, given that the Word rises to the Eternal entity, which then comes down to the Word, this double relation r must now be written as:



(FIG 6)

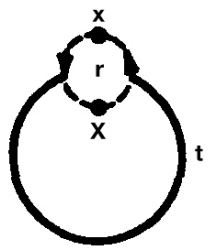
After having established the double nature of this relation **r**, Kojève moves on to emphasise that it is the relation itself which guarantees the *truth*, not the terms **x** and **X**, for without this double relation which binds them together, cutting across Time, there is no Concept and no Eternity:

"Generally speaking, there is a movement from the word to the thing, and a return from the thing to the word. And it is only this *double* relation that constitutes the *truth* or the revelation of reality, that is to say, the *Concept* in the proper sense. And on the other hand, this double

29 Ibid., p.105

relation *exhausts* the truth or the Concept: the (eternal) Concept is related only to Eternity, and Eternity reveals itself exclusively through the Concept. Hence, even though they are in Time, they nonetheless have no relations with Time and the temporal. Therefore the double, or better, *circular*, relation of the (eternal) Concept and Eternity *cuts through* the temporal circle. Change as change remains inaccessible to the Concept."[30]

He then presents the following figure, stressing the primacy of the relation **r** over the point **x** within temporal existence **t** and the Eternal entity **X**:



(FIG 7)

Though the figure seems to displace the point **X** from its centre,[31] this is only a graphical distortion, for Kojève bases himself on this configuration in order to stress that

"all truly coherent theism is a monotheism (...) the symbol of the theistic System is valid for every System that defines the Concept as an *eternal* entity in relation to *something other* than itself, no matter whether this other thing is Eternity in Time or outside of Time, or Time itself."[32]

So, once the construction and significance of the schema of

30 Ibid., p.107

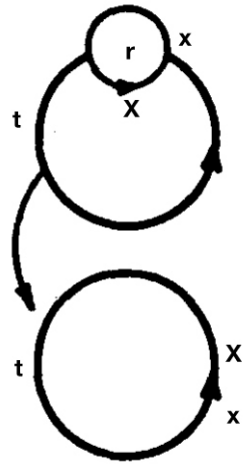
31 We constructed fig.7 according to the figure 7 that can be found on page 105 of Kojève's book. Even so, we believe that Kojève's text is not well represented by his own figure, for he seems to disregard certain conditions that were put forward before (such as the geometrical approach to *r*) and would have to be kept operational in order to maintain some rigor to the schema. As we will demonstrate later on, this inconsistency has to do both with Kojève's reading of Hegel and with the impossibility of fully formalizing Hegel's thought without the help of topology.

32 Ibid., p.121

the monotheistic System is understood, Kojève affirms once more the 'overcoming of Christian theology' mentioned above and claims that "Hegel does away with the small circle"[33] which, according to the relation *r*, ascended to a place outside of Time. In an inverse operation to Spinoza (who, Kojève claims, does away with the *temporal* circle), Hegel would, thus, arrive at an equally "homogeneous closed circle":

"For we see that it is sufficient to deny that the Concept is a *relation* with *something other* than itself in order to set up the ideal of *absolute* - that is, *circular* - Knowledge."

This amounts to the following movement:



(FIG 8)

Kojève explains that this circular schema of Absolute Knowledge, which equates Concept with Time (since, in it, **r** is nothing more than **t** itself), is the only one capable of giving "an account of History - that is, of the existence of the man whom each of us believes himself to be - that is, the *free* and *historical individual*."[34] Only if the Concept is identified with Time, *historical* Time, - "the Time in which human history unfolds" - can

33 Ibid., p.121

34 Ibid., p.132

one account for the Concept as *work,*[35] as the work of Man, as the very existence of Man *as* Time.

To say, thus, that the Concept is *historical* is to supposedly give 'back' to Man a power over that which determines him. If, as Kojève claims, at the very first sentence of the introductory chapter, "Man is Self-Consciousness",[36] and the Concept unfolds itself solely within historical, "human" temporality, then the relation between Man and the Concept is based on a *transparency*, on the possibility of grasping the *whole* of the knowledge of oneself. To become a "God-Man", that is, an "Eternity revealed to itself", is in a certain way no longer to be in historical time (End of History) and no longer to find an obstacle to self-recognition (Mastery, the Beyond):

"It is only *finite* Being that dialectically overcomes itself. If, then the Concept is Time, that is, if conceptual understanding is *dialectical*, the existence of the Concept - and consequently of Being revealed by the Concept - is essentially *finite.* Therefore History itself must be essentially finite; collective Man (humanity) must die just as the human individual dies; universal History must have a definitive *end*.

We know that for Hegel this end of history is marked by the coming of Science in the form of a Book - that is, by the appearance of the Wise Man or of *absolute* Knowledge in the World. This absolute Knowledge is the *last* moment of Time - that is, a moment without *Future* - is no longer a temporal moment. If absolute Knowledge comes into being in Time, or better yet, as Time or History, Knowledge that has come into being is no longer temporal or historical: it is *eternal*, or, if you will, it is Eternity revealed to itself"[37]

§4 Self-Different Negativity

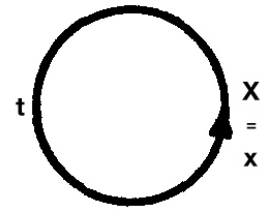
Everything hinges here on the status of one particular point in Time - its *edge* even - which we can find at the junction of **x** and **X**, the "last moment of Time". If we take another look at the Kojèvian figure of

35 Ibid., p.145

36 Ibid., p.3

37 Ibid., p.148

Absolute Knowledge, there are some important elements to be noted concerning this particular point:



(FIG 9)

If **r=t**, that is, if the conceptual work amounts to a *circular* knowledge which arrives at a transparent understanding of **X,** then we must also be able to write that **x=X** at the point where the circle *closes* - another way of stating what Kojève means by "Eternity (X) is revealed to itself (=x)". At this precise point, a certain impediment to Desire's recognition would have been lifted: from that position, a man would be "capable of answering in a *comprehensible* or satisfactory manner all questions that can be asked him concerning his acts, and capable of answering in such fashion that the *entirety* of his answers form a *coherent* discourse."[38] This position - as it was already made explicit by Kojève in the long quote we previously mentioned - has to do with a certain knowledge regarding Death:

"if Man is Concept and if the Concept is Time (that is, if Man is en essentially temporal being), Man is essentially mortal; and he is Concept, that is, absolute Knowledge or Wisdom incarnate, only if he knows this. Logos becomes flesh, becomes Man, only on the condition of being willing and able to die."[39]

We would like to suggest that **x=X** obeys the same logic of the following statement: "I am finite" or "I know (x) that I will die (X)".

Viewed under this light, the idea that Man should "become Christ" must ultimately means that Man must accept finitude, be "willing and

38 Ibid., p.75

39 Ibid., p.147

able to die", in order to find, against the spectre of Death, the perfect return to himself, now that he knows his own horizon. By accepting that Man is not infinite - that is, that *X* is solely and fully inscribed in the historical dimension - Man's finitude becomes *the whole of Man*. Here, we find the perfect transition point between the metaphysical tradition and the post-Hegelian, post-metaphysical currents of thought. The finite as the Absolute - the Idea of the End as the last Idea, or even as the end of the Idea - ultimately means that *to accept this figure of Absolute Knowledge is the same as to simply refuse it,* since the limits of knowledge and the knowledge of these limits directly coincide.

This, we believe, is the precise point where the core of Hegel's philosophy finds its most radical obliteration. Kojève is one of the philosophers most responsible for bringing to the attention of 20th Century French thought the utter importance of the philosophy of Hegel as well as having being the direct influence of Lacan's first theory of Desire. However, a possible reason as to why Kojève's re-affirmation of Hegel also served as an alibi to dismiss him is that the Kojèvian Hegel perfectly fits the role of being the last metaphysical philosopher of the Absolute and simultaneously the first philosopher of finitude - and this is precisely the function served by the Kojèvian figure of Absolute Knowledge: it closes a circle with a negativity, yes, but with a *self-identical negativity.*

We should pause here for a moment to consider a particular symptom of Kojève's reading. In his famous series of lectures, Kojève strangely *skipped*[40] the section on the dialectics of Consciousness titled "Perception: the Thing and deception" - the section in which the figure of a *negativity that coincides with itself* is proven to be equally restless and unstable any other moment in the dialectical economy, being nothing more than "the work of the empty 'Ego', which makes an object out of this empty self-identity of its own"[41].

Similarly, nowhere in Kojève's comments do we find a fully developed interpretation of what Hegel refers to as the moment of

40 We use the complete french edition as reference, the english one is an abridged compilation. See Kojève, Alexandre and Queneau, Raymond (1980), Introduction à la lecture de Hegel : leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des Hautes Études, (Gallimard).

41 Hegel 1979, p. §128 See also Hegel 1991, p. §44

Self-Consciousness in which "the enemy shows itself in its distinctive shape"[42]: the very last figure of Unhappy Consciousness,[43] which attempts to reduce itself to an immediate nothingness, but cannot give away the wretchedness of its own "animal functions" - it is parasitised by its own unessential body which must serve as the support for its essential nothingness.

What these two moments have in common is that, in them, nothingness itself appears in its *constitutive impurity*. In the first case, the last moment of the dialectics of Consciousness delineates a proposition akin to "the Thing is a Veil"[44] - the supposed self-identity of the void is nothing but a product of the veil's own inherent non-coincidence - while in the second case, it could be stated that "Nothingness is Wretchedness"[45]- there is a material obstacle that is both the product and the support of Self-Consciousness' drive to renounce every determination in order to become itself a self-identical void. These two sentences, which have the form of what Hegel calls an infinite judgment, state that the utmost negativity is bound to a material left-over.[46] In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek remarks how easy it is to dismiss the outrageous aspect of such formulations:

"We succeed in transmitting the dimension of subjectivity *by means of the failure itself*, through the radical insufficiency, through the absolute maladjustment of the predicate in relation to the subject. This is why 'the Spirit is a bone' is a perfect example of what Hegel calls the 'speculative proposition', a proposition whose terms are incompatible,

42 Hegel 1979, p. §225

43 The abridged English version contains only a couple of references to the last figure of the dialectics of Self-Consciousness, while the complete version presents an analysis which describes it simply as "Christian" consciousness, reducing it to the same register of an anthropological example as the Stoic and Skeptical ones, without privileging its status as the *truth* of the previous moments.

44 Hegel 1979, p. §165

45 Ibid: §225: "the actual activity of consciousness becomes an activity of doing nothing, and its act of consumption becomes a feeling of its unhappiness. (...) In its animal functions, consciousness is consciousness of itself as this *actual individual*. These functions, instead of being performed without embarrassment as something which are in and for themselves null and which can acquire no importance and essentiality for spirit, are even more so now objects of serious attention. They acquire the utmost importance since it is in them that the enemy shows itself in its distinctive shape. However, since this enemy engenders itself in its very suppression, consciousness, by fixating itself on the enemy, is to an even greater degree continually dwelling on it instead of freeing itself from it."

46 Hegel 1979, p. § 61-63

without common measure. As Hegel points out in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to grasp the true meaning of such a proposition we must go back and read it over again, because this true meaning arises from the very failure of the first, 'immediate' reading."[47]

It is this intricate relation between the infinity of the speculative proposition - the true infinity, the infinity of *self-difference* - and the category of a failure, which extends itself even to negativity as such that is obfuscated in Kojève's interpretation. To exemplify this we could refer back to the fundamental infinite judgment that sustains the Christian Event: "God is Man". If we are to understand it in terms of the *serial infinity* of approximations and accumulations, then it does state that Man's horizon is to become the (immediate) identity of Man and God (**x=X**), a "God-Man". But considered under the light of the true, self-different infinity, "God is Man" is an assertion of God's very restlessness, his uncontrolled entanglement with his own creation. God himself has been marked by the wretched experience of self-estrangement, which defines the miserable figures of self-consciousness: "He was made Man"[48].

Hegel's famous proposition "Time is the being there of the Concept" - which so univocally supports Kojève's reading of the Hegelian edifice - also opens up to a very different approach, one that is not based on the overcoming of one term through the other, but which states their simultaneous entanglement and incommensurability. Hegel himself made it very explicit, especially in his later works, that Time itself is trapped in a dual logic of the finite and the infinite but Kojève, who did not fail to see this, referred to this duality as Hegel's "basic error".[49]

§5 The Beautiful Soul and Absolute Knowledge

If we now briefly re-consider the importance given by Kojève to the dialectics of the Lord and the Bondsman, a moment which is the outcome of a fight for Life and Death between two desiring self-consciousnesses, we should be able to see that Kojève *repeats the gesture of the Slave*, for he sees in the Slave that which the Slave sees

47 Žižek 1989, p. 207

48 As we will see, we propose that, instead of x=X, concrete universality should be written *x≠x and X≠X,* according a topological twist which binds them together *in their alienation*.

49 Footnote 20 in Kojève1980, p. 133

in the Master: the possibility of pure, independent, self-coincident nothingness, one which would not be attached or parasitised by the *excessive life* which disrupts its willed freedom.

The object of desire never coincides with the promise of infinitude which shines from the Beyond - Kojève made this very clear - but this insight should be further radicalised: the Beyond also fails to coincide with itself, and is caught up in the objects which do not measure up to it. Death itself, as the ultimate name of finitude, cannot serve as Man's final horizon, for this positing implies that *it has fallen over into Life*. That is: not only is the finite different from the infinite, but this difference is so radical that the finite appears as containing that distinction itself - *being-not* the infinite - and not simply as *being* the finite. In this negative sense, something of the infinite must get stuck in the finite objects that present themselves to Man, including Man himself. This is why the total acceptance of death as the self-identical limit of our finitude ultimately consents too little to the Hegelian restlessness of the negative, which, in truth, prevents death from separating finitude and the infinite without any porosity. It is beyond the self-identity of the negative - where Žižek identifies the true outrage of the speculative - that we must come to terms with the constitutive impasse of subjectivity - perfectly formulated by Zupančič in the following statement: "not only are we not infinite, *we are not even finite".*[50]

This is why, ultimately, the historical reification of the figures of the Lord and the Bondsman must be strictly understood as a *fetishisation*[51] of Hegel's logic. Through it, Kojève keeps alive the promise of a fully self-conscious Man, a Man in whom Desire would coincide with itself, like an Heraclitean Fire, which consumes all, but does not itself suffer the radical differentiation that it recognises in everything else:

"As long as one questions solely the fixation of determinations, we will only be moving from an ontology of the inalterable Being to an

50 Zupančič, 2008, p. 53

51 In the Freudian sense of "a reminder of the triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it."- a way of simultaneously defending oneself against the universalization of a principle of non-coincidence and of electing something which we suppose to be beyond such principle. "Fetishism" (1927) in Freud (1971), Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works [vol. 21]], (Hogarth Press).

ontology of a devouring Becoming. Insignificant advantage. Certainly this is a way of declaring that the 'finite' is incapable of integrating in itself the Other - but one remains thinking about the finite 'thing' as a being."[52]

In this sense, we argue that the reading in which *x* should coincide with *X* in Absolute Knowledge, as Man accepts his finitude, requires an homologous operation to the one known in psychoanalysis as *imaginary castration*: one recognises that there is an absolute lack in the Other, but this empty place is still roamed by the spectre of a complete Otherness because of the very univocity of this void.[53] To put it in Freudian terms: the boy has seen that his mother has no penis, but the fantasy that she *could* have one is kept alive through the very partial acceptance of its lacking - even missing, or better, *precisely* as missing, that object still serves as the background of the subject's fantasy, it is still thought as the "*it*" against which everything else is measured or valued - and self-identity remains therefore as the horizon of what can be grasped. Does Death not play a similar role in Kojève's philosophical thought? Does it not serve as the name of the subject's finitude, its irremediable lack, but an *identical* lack nonetheless? It is Death which coincides with itself in **x=X**, in what might be called the first axiom of the metaphysics of finitude.[54]

Kojève's 'four words' - Man can become Christ - silently hovers on the horizon of post-metaphysical thought, for the death of Mastery, taken positively (like Kojève does) or negatively (as his critics do), cannot avoid being the hymn of Death *as the Master*. To put it in the Hegelian terms of the fight for Life and Death, the Slave's mortal encounter with Death, the Absolute Master, as it first seeks to detach itself from Life, to prove its independence, is perversely disavowed in the guise of the Wise Man's final statement, the immediate positing that "death is death". As Hegel makes very clear, the immediate positing of self-coincidence always relies on a hidden economy, which makes its

52 Lebrun 2004, p. 216

53 Lacan 1998, p. 230 See also Lacan's critique of the absolute subject in the (Kojèvian) Hegel in *Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious* in Lacan, Jacques (2007), Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English, (W. W. Norton & Company).

54 We use the term as it is articulated in the title "Physics of the Infinite against Metaphysics of the Finite" in Zupančič, 2008

restlessness spring forth somewhere else - and the name of the figure of self-consciousness associated with this transparent self-knowledge is, in fact, the *beautiful soul.*[55]

§6 Incarnation, alienation and appearance

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel addresses the difference between the propositions "Man can become God" and "God was made Man" through a comparison between Socrates and Christ. The philosopher begins the chapter on Christianity by quoting the famous biblical passage "When the time was fulfilled, God sent his Son"[56] and emphasising the Trinitarian structure of this statement, which encapsulates the arrival of the Christian Religion:

"God is thus recognized as Spirit only when known as the Triune. This new principle is the new axis on which the World-History turns. This is wherefrom and whereto History goes. [Bis hierher und von daher geht die Geschichte] "When the Time was fulfilled, God sent his Son" is the statement of the Bible. This means nothing other than: Self-Consciousness had risen to the moments which belong to the Concept of Spirit, and to the need of seizing them in an absolute manner"[57]

It is important to note that Hegel chose a very particular verb - *erfüllen* - to express the moment of Christ's coming - he paraphrases the biblical verse a couple of pages later, again referring to a *fulfilling* of Time.[58] The time of Christ does not simply 'come' as if it was a particular moment *in Time*, rather, something of Time itself is at stake in the Christian Event - something *of Time* is fulfilled.

Hegel goes on to present some essential traits that constitute the Greek, Roman and Jewish Spirits - in an abridged and slightly distinct manner from the famous chapter on religion in the *Phenomenology of*

55 Hegel, 1979, p. §668

56 Galatians 4, 4 in God (2011), ESV Study Bible, (Crossway Bibles) - Hegel translated this passage as "Als die Zeit *erfüllet* war, sandte Gott seinen Sohn" - a different translation from both 1545's *Luther Bibel* and the *Hoffnung für Alle.* See http://www.biblegateway.com/

57 Hegel, 1995, p. 271 We also refer the reader to the original text - the second chapter in Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1986), Werke in 20 Bänden und Register, Bd.12, Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, (Suhrkamp).

58 " The identity of the subject with God came into the World when the Time was fulfilled." Ibid., p.274

Spirit. After having outlined the path from the Greek law of Spirit - which could be summarised in the statement "Man, know thyself"[59] - to the wretchedness and boundless longing of the Jewish people, whose Spirit is "refined to Universality, through the reference of it to the One," Hegel introduces the arrival of Christian Religion in the following manner:

"The infinite loss [of the Jewish Spirit] is countered only by its own Infinity, and thereby becomes infinite gain. The identity of the Subject with God came into the World *when the Time was fulfilled*: the Consciousness of this identity is the manifested God in His Truth. The content of this Truth is Spirit itself, the vital movement itself. God's nature, being pure Spirit, is *manifested to Man in the Christian Religion*."[60]

The passage from Judaism to Christianity - encapsulated in the sentence "the infinite loss is countered only by its own Infinity, and thereby becomes infinite gain" - is explained through a reference to the narrative of Original Sin, the "eternal myth of Man":[61] in the Old Testament, it is told as the story of a Fall, an infinite *loss*, but, in Christ, it is transformed into infinite gain through the restless Infinity of its own negativity. Man does not rise up towards the Other, the inaccessible One: the negative Beyond itself, for it is *infinite*, cannot be simply self-identical, and thus manifests itself. The shift from infinite *loss* to infinite *gain* must, in this sense, be understood as the shift from a God who is a lost object to Man to a God who is himself *loss as an object.*[62]

If at first Man fell from God, alienated in his wretched existence from the transcendental Oneness, which lay beyond his nostalgic longing, in the Christian Event *God himself falls from Heaven*. The crucial declaration of the Christian Event, which directly echoes the Chestertonian "four words", is thus: "Christ has *appeared* [Christus ist erschienen]".[63]

59 Ibid., p.271

60 Ibid., p.274

61 Ibid., p.273

62 The distinction between the lost object and the loss as object is a crucial point of Lacanian theory. See Žižek 2006, pp. 63-66

63 Hegel, 1986, Bd.12:, p.393

However, Hegel is very clear in distinguishing the consequences of this Event from the idea of a direct and immediate identity of Man and God: God has not revealed himself to have been always 'just' Man himself, who up until then failed to grasp himself as such. On the contrary: it is the same wretchedness which alienates Man from God in the Jewish Spirit - the impossibility of reducing oneself to nothingness,[64] and thus achieve self-identity in pure Subjectivity - which is now *the very condition of Man's reconciliation with God*:

"Man himself therefore is comprehended in the Idea of God, and this comprehension may be thus expressed – that the unity of Man with God is posited in the Christian Religion. But this unity must not be superficially conceived, as if God were only Man, and Man, without further condition, were God. Man, on the contrary, is God only in so far as he annuls the merely Natural and Limited in his Spirit and elevates himself to God. That is to say, it is obligatory on him who is a partaker of the truth, and knows that he himself is a constituent [Moment] of the Divine Idea, to give up his merely natural being: for the Natural is the Unspiritual. In this Idea of God, then, is to be found also the *Reconciliation* that heals the pain and inward suffering of man. For Suffering itself is henceforth recognized as an instrument necessary for producing the unity of man with God."[65]

Man's alienation from himself is precisely what Man shares with God.[66] Hegel emphasises this essential point by further distinguishing Christ from the great figures of the Greek World:

"Our thoughts naturally revert to the Greek anthropomorphism, of which we affirmed that it did not go far enough. For that natural elation of soul which characterized the Greeks did not rise to the Subjective Freedom of the I itself – to the inwardness that belongs to the Christian Religion – to the recognition of Spirit as a *definite positive being.* – The appearance of the Christian God involves further its being *unique* in its kind; it can occur only once, for God is realized as Subject, and as

64 Hegel,1995, p. 272-273 See also Hegel, 1979, p. §225

65 Hegel,1995, p. 274-275

66 On this precise point, see Žižek's "Il n'ya pas de rapport religieux" in Ayerza, J. (2001), Lacanian Ink 18, (The Wooster Press).

manifested Subjectivity is exclusively One Individual." [67]

In contrast to the exemplar individuals of the Greek world - as well as the Lamas and higher religious figures of the East, which are supposed to return many times throughout History - the coming of Christ is an unique Event, for "subjectivity as infinite relation to self, has its form *in itself*, and as manifested Subjectivity is exclusively One Individual". This individuality cannot be repeated. But Hegel goes even further and claims that, though Christ was One, one misses the point of the Christian Event if he is considered to be "merely" the appearance of a *perfect* Man - the man who would be a godly or whole Man: "if Christ is only taken as an exceptionally fine individual, even as one without sin, then we are ignoring the representation of the speculative idea, its absolute truth."[68]

Christ is One, but if we are not to ignore the absolute truth of God's manifestation, we cannot simply take him for the "impeccable" One, because "the sensuous existence in which Spirit is embodied is only a transitional phase. Christ dies; only as dead is he exalted to Heaven and sits at the right hand of God: only thus is he Spirit". The fulfillment of Time mentioned above is, thus, properly distinguished from a 'culmination', it cannot be accounted for in the measurable sense of a series of qualities that, by a miracle, touched upon the Beyond. It belongs to a different register: only by counting *the One together with its own negativity* - by including Death *within* Christ - can we grasp Spirit as such:

"Christ – man as man – in whom the unity of God and man has appeared, has in his death, and his history generally, himself presented the eternal history of Spirit – a history which every man has to accomplish in himself, in order to exist as Spirit, or to become a child of God, a citizen of his kingdom"[69]

Again, Hegel puts forth a very precise claim: not only is the Christian Event defined not by Christ's 'perfection', but by the inclusion

67 Hegel, G W F (1995), p.275

68 Ibid. p.275-276

69 Ibid. p.277-278

of Death as part of the Event itself. Hence, one should also not strive to 'accomplish himself' Christ's act - one should actually accomplish it '*in himself*' [die jeder Mensch an ihm selbst zu vorbringen hat].[70] In this sense, Christ's gift to mankind is to allow Man to name a Death which takes place *within* Life - not only a *future* Death, like the one mentioned by Kojève, which would determine the horizon of History, but a *present* one. In the words of the priest Antonio Vieira, in his famous sermon of Ash Wednsday, from 1672:

"Two things preaches the Church to all the mortals: both are great, both are sad, both are fearful, both are certain. But one is in such a way certain and evident, that it is not necessary any understanding to believe it; the other is in such a way certain and difficult, that no understanding is enough to grasp it. One is present, the other future: but the future one, the eyes can see; the present one, understanding cannot reach. What two enigmatic things are those? *Pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.* You are dust, and into dust you shall convert. You are dust, that is the present one; Into dust you shall convert, that is the future one. The future dust, the dust we shall become, the eyes can see it: the present dust, the dust we are, neither can the eyes see it, nor can understanding grasp it."[71]

Christ's exception, thus, consists in being the One in which *one* Death was simultaneously inside and outside of Life. This is why Hegel claims that Christ's death *is his resurrection:*

"Christ's death assumes the character of a death that constitutes the transition to glory, but to a glorification that is only a restoration of the original glory. Death, the negative, is the mediating term through which the original majesty is posited as now achieved."[72]

After Christ, Death itself has been split into two - the present and the future death - and in the spiritual life of the community, founded

70 "What belongs to the element of representational thought, namely, that absolute spirit represents the nature of spirit in its existence as *an individual spirit* or, rather, as a particular spirit, is therefore shifted here into self-consciousness itself, into the knowledge that sustains itself in its *otherness*. This self-consciousness thus does not therefore actually *die* in the way that the *particular* is represented to have *actually* died; rather, its particularity dies away within its universality, which is to say, in its *knowledge*, which is the essence reconciling itself with itself." Hegel, 1979: §785

71 Vieira, 2009, p. 260 (my translation)

72 Hegel, 2008, p. 325-326

upon this division, Christ lives on as the Holy Spirit - as a *real* presence, not a merely future presence[73] - which affirms Death's submission to non-coincidence:

"The followers of Christ, united in this sense and living in the spiritual life, form a *community* which is the Kingdom of God. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," (that is, in the determination of that which I am) - says Christ - "there am I in the midst of them". The community is the real and present life in the Spirit of Christ"[74]

The idea of a Death that is itself split into two, and therefore of a Life that "bears death calmly, and in death, sustains itself",[75] leads us back to Galatians 4:4 - "when the Time *was fulfilled,* God sent his Son" - allowing us to grasp in this return the true dimension of the 'fulfillment' of Time: the founding of a new temporality which does not simply move *towards* the end, but which contains that end *within* itself, in its very constitution.[76] In minimal terms: after Christ, one is allowed *to die before one dies.*[77]

Concluding the above-mentioned sermon, priest Antonio Vieira affirms the fundamental dimension of this death within life:

"Now I have finally understood that difficult advice given [to Hezekiah] by the Holy Spirit: *Ne moriaris in tempore non tuo .* Do not die in the time that does not belong to you. *Ne moriaris*. Do not die? Thus, to die is within my hand's reach: *In tempore non tuo*. In the time that does not belong to you? Thus, there is a time that is mine, and a time that is not mine. And so it is. But which time belongs to me, in which it would be good to die, and which time is not mine, in which it would be wrong for me to die? Mine is the time before death; the time after death does not belong to me. And to withhold or to wait for death, for the time after

73 Ibid,. p.322

74 Hegel, 1995, p. 278

75 Hegel, 1979: §32

76 Arantes, 1981, p. 303

77 Hence Žižek's remark in "Il n'y a pas de rapport religieux" that "if one conceives of the Holy Spirit radically enough, there is simply no place in the Christian edifice for afterlife" (p.92 - in lacanian ink 18)

death, which is not mine, is ignorance, is madness, foolishness (...); but to anticipate death, and to die before life is over, in the time that belongs to me, this is the prudent, the wise and the well understood death."[78]

The Holy Spirit, thus, reminds us that man can serve himself of death - there is a death that *falls within life*. Catherine Malabou, in her seminal work *The Future of Hegel*, carefully develops how the Hegelian reading of the Incarnation is centered around the arrival of this new temporality:

"A fundamental temporality, in it very concept irreducible to no other, arrives with the Incarnation. (...) By dying, Christ reveals to the Western world a new relation between spirit and finitude, in which death is the limitation (borne), the end of a linear series of moments linked one to the other."[79]

The full weight of this passage can only be appreciated under the light of the distinction between *limit* (Granze) and *limitation* (Schranke), as it is made by Hegel in the *Science of Logic*: "In order that the limit which is in something as such should be a limitation (Schranke), something must at the same time in its own self transcend the limit. It must in its own self be related to the limit as to something which is not".[80] That is, to have death as a *limitation* means that it must transcend its own self, it can not be understood as a separate dimension, simply 'outside' of Life, but one that names the limit *from within* that which it is not.

This reference to the arrival of a new temporality allows us to turn the distinction made above between Socrates and Christ into the fundamental distinction between the Greek and the Christian temporalities. Hegel's solution is to present the latter as that which reconciles the inherent duality of the first - the duality between the time of Man and the eternity of the Gods[81] -, the crucial point, however, is that it overcomes this duality without having to dismiss any of the

78 Vieira, 2009, p. 273 - a very similar point is made by Brecht in his Baden Baden play on Consent. Žižek presents a brilliant reading of it at the end of *The Monstrosity of Christ* (p.299)

79 Malabou, 2004, p. 120

80 Hegel,1989, p. 132

81 See Malabou, 2004, p. 65

two terms: the solution is *to shift the accent from the duality to the gap that separates them*[82]. As Malabou writes, "Hegel's God (...) is situated *at the crossroads of time"*[83] Or, to put it in the terms used by Hegel himself, the "infinite loss" of their distinction is itself grasped as "infinite gain": that which separates Man from Eternity is becomes that which *simultaneously constitutes both realms*: "the non-being of the finite is the being of the Absolute".[84] We see, thus, that this conception of overcoming is radically distinct from the one implied by the Kojèvian 'Man can become God'. To paraphrase Mao Zedong's famous retort to the Americans: the coming about of a perfect Man - the actualization of an impeccable individual who would be the culmination of the horizon set by the Greek Spirit - might even be a major event for the solar system, but it would hardly mean anything to the universe *as a whole*.

The "completion" of cyclical Time would do nothing more than to ground what was already *possible* to think - since, in a way, perfection was already *thinkable* - on actuality, but it would not change the conceptual coordinates of the world, let alone of the universe as such. The logic of Incarnation, on the other hand, the manifestation of God *as appearance* - under the Law of appearance, that is, the Law of self-difference[85] - brings about precisely such an Universal Event: through it, *negativity as such* can be grasped. Impossibility itself - the impossibility for Man *and for God*, to coincide either with each other or themselves - is born into the world as a Concept, as Holy Spirit.

This distinction, we argue, perfectly demonstrates how Hegel's position is not simply 'different' from its Kojèvian presentation: it encompasses the previous position and solves the *negative* inconsistency of placing finitude as a self-consistent realm by affirming the conceptual centrality of a *positive* inconsistency, a certain "logical writing of death"[86] which immerses the infinite into the finite, in a movement that disrupts both realms. This radical inconsistency, we believe, is only truly recuperated with Žižek's Lacanian conceptual

82 On this point, see Lebrun, 2004, p. 250 and Agamben, 2005, pp. 65-68

83 See Malabou, 2004, p.130

84 Hegel, 1989, p.290

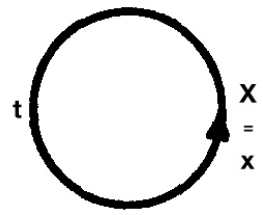
85 Hegel, 1979: §160-165 and 1989, p. 499 - 511

86 See Jarczyk, 2002

framework and is the pivot of his Christian atheism - or, to put it in Hegel's terms, the pivot of the shift from the *historical* to the *speculative* Good Friday[87].

§ 7 The Žižekian Circle of Circles

In our presentation of the Kojèvian figure of Absolute Knowledge we focused on the immediate coincidence between the Concept (**X**) and its becoming-in-Time (**x, in t**) that occurs at the point where the circle of knowledge closed on itself (**X=x**):



(FIG 9)

However, in order to properly account for Žižek's fidelity to Hegel and for the emptying out of this scarecrow image of the "philosopher of total knowledge", we must not only criticise the Kojèvian reading, but rather attempt to develop a new figure of Absolute Knowledge, one in which the shift from the Kojèvian point of immediate identity (**X=x**) - let us call it "absolute wisdom" - to the Žižekian point of the incarnation of non-coincidence (**x≠x; X≠X**) - which we will call "absolute knowing*"* - would allow us to demonstrate how Žižek's reading of Hegel also encompasses the previous, Kojèvian interpretation. If the Kojèvian absolute wisdom supposedly takes place at the threshold of History, announcing its End, the figure of absolute knowing must be grasped as the way this End itself falls into History. It has the End of History as its *beginning*.

As we briefly mentioned in our analysis of Kojève, Hegel related the notion of a transparent self-knowledge with the figure of

87 Hegel, 1977, p. 190-191

the beautiful soul - and at the beginning of the chapter on Absolute Knowledge, he returns once more to this point:

"The unification that is still lacking is the simple unity of the concept. This concept is also already on hand in the aspect of self-consciousness, but, just as it previously come before us, it has, like all the other moments, the form of a *particular shape of consciousness*. – It is that part of the shape of self-certain spirit which stands path within its concept and which was called the *beautiful soul*. The beautiful soul is its own knowledge of itself within its pure and transparent unity – the self-consciousness which knows this pure knowledge of *pure* inwardly-turned-being as spirit – not merely the intuition of the divine but the divine's self-intuition. – Since this concept steadfastly holds itself in opposition to its realization, it is the one-sided shape which we saw not merely disappear into thin air but also positively empty itself and move forward."[88]

Thus, the unification that is missing here, distinguishing the beautiful soul from the figure of Absolute Knowledge, is precisely the one which would *include its own blind spot* into the totality of knowledge, for "self-consciousness is the concept in its truth, that is, *in the unity with its self-emptying*":

"It is the knowing of pure knowledge not as abstract *essence*, which is what duty is – but the knowing of this pure knowledge as an essence which is *this* knowing, *this* individual pure self-consciousness, which is therefore at the same time the genuinely true *object*, for this concept is the self existing-for-itself."[89]

We see, thus, that a 'totality' requires a radical a step beyond the configuration of a 'whole': it requires us to include ourselves in the picture as an unsurmountable hiatus which stands for the impossibility of immediately grasping our own position of enunciation. This inclusion opens up "a perspective of historical reality not as a positive order, but as a 'non-all', an incomplete texture which tends to its own future. It is this inclusion of the future within the present, its inscription as a

88 Ibid §795

89 Ibid §795

hiatus within the order of 'what there is' that makes the present into an ontologically incomplete 'non-all'".[90] In this sense, to quote the heading of a sub-chapter of one of Žižek's books, we must affirm that *a totality is done with failures.*

Rather than dismissing the 'End of History' or resisting it, Žižek's position is that we always speak from the end of history simply because *we are in History*. And, as we have already seen, this *abandonment* in history is what we share with God - this, in fact, is the reason why

"in history proper (...) the universal Principle is caught into the 'infinite' struggle with itself, i.e., the struggle is each time the struggle for the fate of the universality itself. (...) it is not that a temporal deployment merely actualizes some pre-existing atemporal conceptual structure—this atemporal conceptual structure itself is the result of contingent temporal decisions."[91].

What we encounter here, once more, is the logic that ties together truth and the real through the concrete engagement with the impossibilities of a field of knowledge. This can also be stated in the following terms: as we struggle with and for an Idea, the Idea itself struggles, with and for us.

By focusing on the importance of the emptying out of self-consciousness in the figure of absolute knowing, Žižek reminds us that Hegel's configuration of the relation between the Concept and Time, as elaborated in the notion of concrete universality, requires of us an engagement that is postulated upon this irremovable hiatus at the core of history itself:

"not only did Hegel have no problem with taking sides (with an often very violent partiality) in the political debates of his time; his entire mode of thinking is deeply 'polemical', always intervening, attacking, taking sides, and, as such, as far as possible from a detached position of Wisdom which observes the ongoing struggles from a neutral distance,

90 Žižek's "The Idea of Communism as a Concrete Universality" in Badiou, Alain and Slavoj Žižek (2011), L'idée du communisme : Volume 2, conférence de Berlin 2010, (Nouvelles Editions Lignes). p.308

91 Žižek in Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman, 2011, p. 211

CRISIS & CRITIQUE VOL. 2 ISSUE #1

aware of their nullity *sub specie aeternitatis*. For Hegel, the true ('concrete') universality is accessible only from an engaged 'partial' standpoint."[92]

Let us now follow Žižek's formulations in *For they know not what they do* and "risk a topological specification of the Kant-Hegel relationship" focusing on the relation between finitude and totality.

Žižek begins:

"The structure of the Kantian transcendental field is that of a circle with a gap, since man as a finite being does not have access to the totality of beings"[93]

This first figure already varies from its Kojèvian version, since Kojève's account of Kant's "skepticism and criticism"[94] has marked over this gap with a dotted line, which "hypothetically"[95] closes the circle of knowledge. Kojève, as we have already seen, did not theorise how negativity as such could be part of the restless economy of determinations - in Kant's case, how finitude could be "ontologically constitutive" - choosing instead to explain Kant's transcendental constitution as an hypothetical realm, filled with abstract determinations, rather than one which constituted reality precisely in its inaccessibility.[96]

Žižek's account of Kant's position should be presented as the following:[97]

92 Ibid. p.214

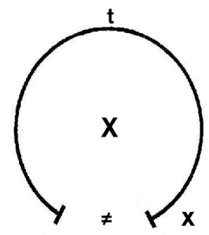
93 Žižek, 2008, p. 218

94 Kojève, 1980, p. 119

95 Ibid. p.128-129

96 Kant, 2002, p.184; See also Žižek, 2006, pp.22-23

97 Again, the figure itself is presented here as it is in the author's work, but we have added the letters (X;x;t) and operations (=;≠) to it.



(FIG 10)

In which the transcendental horizon (**X**) appears as a "missing link" that separates (≠) the noumenal from the phenomena (**x, in t**). Žižek continues:

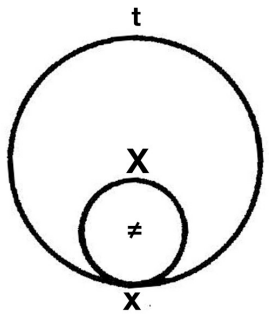
"However, contrary to common view, the passage from Kant to Hegel does *not* consist in closing the circle.

If this were the case, Hegel would simply return to pre-Kantian, pre-critical metaphysics. Hegel does indeed "close the circle", but this very closure introduces a supplementary loop transforming it into the "inner eight" of the Moebius band.

In other words, Hegel definitely *maintains* the gap around which the transcendental field is structured: the very retroactivity of the dialectical process (the "positing of presuppositions") attests to it. The point is just that he *displaces* it: the external limit preventing the closure of the circle changes into a curvature which makes the very closed circle vicious."[98]

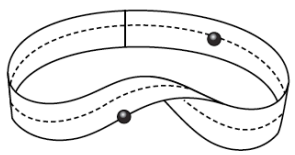
Accordingly, the philosopher presents a figure that is no longer *geometrical*, but properly *topological*, since it is no longer defined by the geometry of its centre, but by the invariance of a hole. In it, the gap (≠) that prevented the closure of the circle is displaced to the very curvature of the figure, binding its beginning and its end through the twisting of the line:

98 Žižek, 2008, pp. 218-219



(FIG 11)

In fact, the most precise definition of this figure is that it is the bi-dimensional representation of the border of a Moebius Strip:



(FIG 12)

At first, in Kojève's account of Plato's "monotheism", **X** was the "other side" of **x**, and their relation **r** cut across the circle **t.** Then, in the Kojèvian absolute wisdom there was no relation **r,** but an immediate identity of **X** and **x** at the end of history. Here, in this first presentation of the Žižekian absolute knowing, we return to the platonic distinction between **X** and **x,** but with a (literal) twist: **X** and **x** do not coincide, and yet, there is no inner/outer duality in the circle. Lacan, who introduced the use of topology in the structuring of the Freudian theory of the drive, summarises this precise point very clearly in an "Escherian fable" presented in his 10th Seminar:

"the insect who moves along the surface of the Moebius strip (...) this insect can believe that at every moment, if this insect has the representation of what a surface is, there is a face, the one always on the reverse side of the one on which he is moving, that he has not explored. He can believe in this reverse side. Now as you know there is not one.

He, without knowing it, explores what is not the two faces, explores the single face that is there: and nevertheless at every instant, there is indeed a reverse."[99]

Žižek's presentation of Hegel's Absolute Knowledge thus solves a representational issue we had encountered before, since it no longer requires us to account for the geometrical centre which gave rise to the duality between **X** as ineffable beyond or as immanent coincidence with its manifestation. As made clear by Lacan's explanation, in the Moebius band **X** is always the "other side" of **x,** but this non-coincidence is supported by the curvature of the strip, which, at a more fundamental level, brings **x** and **X** together.

The most important point, however, as highlighted by Zupančič is that this figure remains strictly within the Kantian universe, because it does not do away with the hiatus of finitude in favor of a continuous circle, on the contrary, it *universalises* the missing link:

"The value of the topological model of the Möbius strip lies in the fact that the structural or constitutive missing link is precisely not something that one could see as a missing link or a lack. After all, the Möbius strip presents us with nothing more than a smooth continuity of the same surface, with no interruptions, lacks, or leaps. The leap, the paradoxical distance between its two sides, is "built into" its very structure; it is perceptible only in the fact that we *do* come to change sides, even though we never actually change them."[100]

Furthermore, the inner eight of the Moebius strip shines a new light on Hegel's famous mention of a "circle of circles" as the proper figuration of the dialectical method, at the end of *Science of Logic:*

"By virtue of the nature of the method just indicated, the science exhibits itself as a circle returning upon itself, the end being wound back into the beginning, the simple ground, by the mediation; this circle is moreover a circle of circles, for each individual member as ensouled by the method is reflected into itself, so that in returning into the beginning

99 Lacan, Jacques (2004), Le séminaire, livre 10 : L'angoisse, (Seuil) - class of 30/1/63

100 Zupančič, 2008, p. 56

it is at the same time the beginning of a new member"[101]

However, we are still to understand how to articulate the concept of parallax within this figure of absolute knowing. In the preface for the second edition of *For they know not what they do,* written eleven years after the book, Žižek remarks that the "philosophical weakness" of his first international publications - *The Sublime Object of Ideology* especially - lies in having missed the "ridiculous inadequacy" at play in the articulation of the object a with the Kantian-Lacanian notion of Real qua Thing.[102]

This 'inadequacy' - echoing Hegel's "*Unangemessenheit"* - is the (monstrous) name of the object that is caught up in the dialectical reversal of the positing of presupposition into the presupposing of the posited: it names that of essence (**X**) which gets caught up in its material support (**x)**. Moreover, marking a veritable shift of position in Žižek's philosophical project, this inadequacy came to be the very pivot of Žižek's concept of parallax, in which Lacan's later elaborations on the notion of the Real are evidently at play.

Thus, though the Beyond (**X)** is no longer conceptualised as the ineffable centre of the circle of Appearances (**x**), it remains to be presented how the "missing link" which constitutes the torsion of the Mobius band relates to the indelible semblance of the beyond that remains operative in it. Even though the real is now "extimate" to the concept, we must still account for the way the Beyond itself is *split* and caught up in the restlessness of Appearance.

As we previously discussed, regarding Hegel's logic of appearance, the negation of the Essence must be doubled, otherwise we simply return to our immediate positing in the guise of a reflection. It is not enough to grasp the Beyond separately from Illusory Being: one must include in this external positing the very split between Illusory Being and Essence, only when the very obstacle to the Absolute is

101 Hegel, 1989, p. 842 For a very compelling use of knot theory, which resonates deeply with Lacan and Žižek's take on Hegel, as well as gives another interesting twist to the idea of a "circle of circles", refer to Carlson, 2007

102 Žižek, 2008, pp.xii-xviii

understood as partaking in the Absolute itself[103] - that is, when the pure negativity is itself caught in a material element - do we truly grasp the determinate reflection. Accordingly, Žižek states that the Real is "simultaneously the Thing to which direct access is not possible and the obstacle which prevents this direct access". The parallax Real can only be properly thought of if we grasp the Real qua Thing as one of its (retroactive) moments:

"the true problem is not how to reach the Real when we are confined to the interplay of the (inconsistent) multitude of appearances, but, more radically, the properly Hegelian one: *how does appearance itself emerge from the interplay of the Real?* The thesis that the Real is just the cut, the gap of inconsistency, the stellar parallax: the traps of ontological difference between the two appearances has thus to be supplemented by its opposite: appearance is the cut, the gap, between the two Reals, or, more precisely, *something that emerges in the* gap that separates the Real from itself."[104]

This shift from Thing to parallaxian object is precisely what we must include in the Žižekian figure of absolute knowing.

The previous figure demonstrated that Hegel remains within the Kantian horizon of finitude (**x≠X**),[105] for we do not have direct access to the infinite **(x=X)**. What is left to be properly presented - and here Žižek's increasing emphasis on Hegel's account of Christianity appears as a way of articulating this second step - is how to include in the figure of absolute knowing the way something eludes both the Beyond (**X≠X**) and the Appearance (**x ≠ x),** thus tying the two together.

X ≠ X, because we have learned from the Hegelian logic of Incarnation that the external positing *is above all the positing of a split within Essence*. **x ≠ x**, because it follows from **X ≠ X** that, when we grasp Appearance, we are not simply "returning" to Being - as if without the spectre of a Beyond, grasping man as a self-transparent individual -, we are also grasping the way an inconsistency, a negativity, is inherently

103 Hegel, 1979: §73-75

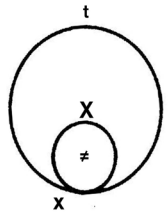
104 Žižek, 2006, pp. 106-107

105 Žižek, 2008, p. 217

CRISIS & CRITIQUE VOL. 2 ISSUE #1

bound to that being, a minimal difference through which "reality turns into its *own appearance*".[106]

Let us take up again the previous figure, elaborated by Žižek in *For they know not what they do.* There, the difference between the phenomena (**x**) and the noumena (**X**) is presented not as that of a gap opening up to another realm, but as the very "curvature" of a temporality (t) that is not reducible to historicism, and which maintains the noumenal always beyond our access without having to constitute it as an independent realm, passive of disclosure or dismissal:

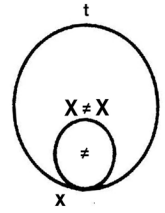


(FIG 13)

However, as we have seen, the noumena itself is caught up in the distortion that it ensues over the phenomena. So to speak, once we have completed the "walk" from one side to the other of the Moebius strip, though we do not encounter the "other side", for it does not strictly exist, we do not simply retreat into our own "one-sidedness": something of that other side is caught up in actuality. In this sense, not only does *x* not have access to **X**, but **X** does not coincide with itself:[107] it *appears* as the very negativity of phenomena - as the inconsistent quality of appearance qua appearance. So, not only **x≠X** but also **X≠X** - in which the second **X** could be for now understood as an **X** *after* **t**, that is, after we have faced the non-existence of the "other side":

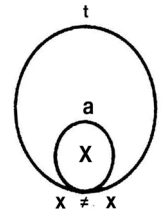
106 Žižek, 2006, p. 28

107 Žižek, 2008, p. 133



(FIG 14)

Now, the difference between Essence and itself (X≠X) - the difference between the essence of appearance and the appearance of essence - is already the new background against which we grasp the determination of appearance as such: the way Essence has spilled over into Appearance amounts to the determinate reflection not coinciding with its immediate positing (**x≠x**). Let us write, then, this inadequate material support of Essence's emptying out as the letter *a.* According to this, the next step of the construction of our figure would be the following:

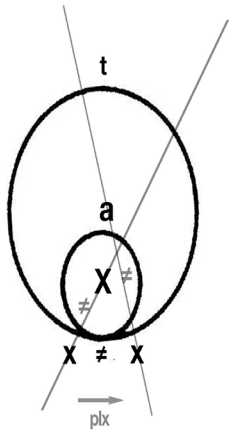


(FIG 15)

In this construction, **X≠X** - not being a "self-sufficient" extension into appearance, but a true inscription of Essence itself into the law of self-difference - can be split into **X**, the first external positing, grasped as such only from the standpoint of *x as immediately posited*, and **a**, the material left-over of the emptying out of **X**, the object which retroactively supports Essence as such.[108] It is with **a** as our object that we can understand what Žižek means by *parallax Real*, which is "ultimately the

108 Žižek, 2008, p. 190

very shift of perspective (**plx**) from the first standpoint (**x≠X**) to the second (**x≠a**)":



(FIG 16)

We can now properly grasp why Žižek, following Hegel's famous remark on the quadruplicity of the method, at the end of the *Science of Logic,*[109] reminds us that a *dialectician should learn to count to four:*[110]

"How far must a Hegelian dialectician learn to count? Most of the interpreters of Hegel, not to mention his critics, try to convince us in unison that the right answer reads: to three (the dialectical triad, and so on) . Moreover, they vie with each other in who will call our attention more convincingly to the "fourth side", the non-dialecticizable excess, the place of death (of the dummy - in French le mort - in bridge), supposedly eluding the dialectical grasp, although (or, more precisely, in so far as) it is the inherent condition of possibility of the dialectical movement: the negativity of a pure expenditure that cannot be sublated [aufgehoben}, re-collected, in its Result."[111]

It is only by conceptualising *a* that we can understand the properly

109 Hegel, 1989, p. 836

110 And why, ultimately, "the overall structure of Logic should, rather, have been *quadruple*" Žižek 2009, p.82 See Carlson 2006.

111 Žižek 2008, p.179

retroactive dimension of presupposing the posited. It is because *a* is not a lacking object, but the lack *as object* - not death as the "outside" of life, but death as that which, within life, marks the utter universality of non-coincidence - that we can retroactively presuppose the place of an Essence which *will have been* self-identical:

"as long as contingency is reduced to the form of appearance of an underlying necessity, to an appearance through which a deeper necessity is realized we are still on the level of Substance: the substantial necessity is that which prevails. "Substance conceived as Subject", on the contrary, is that moment when this substantial necessity reveals itself to be the retroactive effect of a contingent process. (...) The core of Hegel's "positing the presupposition" consists precisely in this retroactive conversion of contingency into necessity, in this conferring of a form of necessity on the contingent circumstances"[112]

We have already mentioned the centrality of Lacan's conceptualisation of the Real as non-coincidence for Žižekian philosophy. If we indulge for a moment in a detour through the Lacanian conceptual framework, we can find a fundamental passage from *The Parallax View* in which the Hegelian logic finds direct resonance with the Lacanian one. Žižek's precise account of the distinction between the object cause of Desire and the object of the drive in Lacan's later thought clearly evokes the logical separation/articulation between *X* and *a* as developed in the Žižekian Absolute Knowing:

"The ultimate lesson of psychoanalysis is that human life is never "just life": humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life in excess, passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things. (...) Consequently, the concept of drive makes the alternative "either burned by the Thing or maintaining a distance towards it" false: in a drive, the "thing itself" is a circulation around the Void (or, rather, hole, not void). To put it even more pointedly: the object of drive is not related to the Thing as a filler of its void: drive is literally a countermovement to desire, it does not strive toward impossible fullness and, being forced to renounce it, gets stuck onto a partial object as its remainder—drive

112 See "How necessity arises out of contingency" in Žižek, 2008, p.126

is quite literally *the very "drive" to break the All of continuity in which we are embedded*, to introduce a radical imbalance into it, and the difference between drive and desire is precisely that, in desire, this cut, this fixation on a partial object, is as it were "transcendentalized," transposed into a stand-in for the Void of the Thing."[113]

We do not intend to develop this point any further, but we believe that the Žižekian conception of a parallaxian Real, when read together with the figure of Absolute Knowing presented above, already points to the fact that we would have to effect some changes in it so that the homology between Hegel and Lacan would be truly preserved. To properly present what is at stake here - without relying so much on the *metaphorical* use of topology - we must go a step further and affirm that Absolute Knowing can only be structured as the topological object known as a *cross cap*, of which a Moebius strip is but a certain cut of the surface - it can also be defined as a "pierced cross cap".[114]

However, the reference to the *extrinsic* dimension - that is, to the dimension in which the topological surface itself is built - which is brought into play when we refer in such a imaginary way to a hole in the centre of the Moebius band can only be rigorously accounted for if we consider the structure of the cross cap, which is itself a *Moebian space.*[115]

In his 20th Seminar, Lacan emphasised that one should not forget that the requirement of cuts and recompositions in order to create a knot out of a piece of string is not valid for any surface. Though a torus cannot itself be turned into a knot without ruptures and mendings, if we have take it to be the space in which we work, then, differently from a spherical or plane surface, one can make a knot without having to cut and recompose a line. Lacan then claims that, insofar as the toric structure allows for the creation of knots, "the torus is reason"[116] - that is, it bears in its very constitution a certain gap which makes it possible for incommensurable figures to be formed without one having to conjure yet another spatial dimension to account for the distortions

113 Žižek 2006, pp.62-63

114 Barr 1989, p.103

115 Granon-Lafont 1999, p.76

116 Lacan 1999

and intertwinings that are proper to language as such. We believe that a further investigation of the Žižekian Absolute Knowing would have to deal with these questions of structure both in Hegel and Lacan in order to develop a reading of Lacan's late teaching which does not require us to abandon certain insights from his most Hegelian moment - around 1970[117].

Even so, in relation to our current comparison between Kojève and Žižek, it is enough to recognise in the above mentioned fragment on the Lacanian theory of the drives how Žižek's account of the monstrous accomplishment of the Sublime within appearances, written in our figure as *a,* presents itself as a "drive [that] is quite literally the very 'drive' to break the All of continuity in which we are embedded", a torsion which simultaneously introduces a discontinuity and prevents it from being thought as a self-identical Beyond. This fundamental split introduced at the heart of the Hegelian edifice confirms our previous claims regarding the double temporality founded by the Christian Event and further stresses that, rather than resisting it, Žižek's return to Hegel simultaneously accounts for the Kojèvian interpretation of Absolute Knowledge and renders it superfluous.

117 As we have said before, we find this thesis regarding the rupture between the mathemic and the theory of knots most explicitly developed in Milner 1998.

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