

# Introduction: The Oeuvre of Slavoj Žižek

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Slavoj Žižek is alive and he lives to think. This is why his is an oeuvre, an oeuvre of thought. This is the axiom of this issue of *Crisis and Critique*. We affirmatively start from the assumption that whatever Žižek and his work might appear to be, it is and needs therefore to be conceived of as thought. And it is in the domain of thought that Žižek has shown us a mastery of a rare and also of a peculiar kind. Without doubt, the maybe most prominent philosopher there ever was, Žižek, the thinker, makes his thought manifest in different forms (quite short and very long) and different media (from podcasts through books to films and public conversation). He has disproved the intuitive assumption that thinking and more specifically philosophical thought can never have mass appeal or relevance for the so-called real world. Žižek is the living proof that one should better not trust one's intuition. Žižek produces – and always has produced – new legibilities, new intelligibilities – for potentially everyone. He looks awry at the world, the universe and more and certainly at also much much less, and the world, etc. looks not simply back, but it shows itself in a new and different light. It creates a new form of immanence and the present issues attempts to construct and participate in the immanence that is the thought of Žižek. It seeks to explore and exploit some of its extension, expansion and ever-surprising richness.

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Žižek, renowned for his productivity, suffers from the peculiar fate of having possibly as many texts, books and articles published on his work as he himself has written - if not more. Whenever one hears the name Žižek, one associates it with all sorts of monikers and sometimes even accusations: he is variously called a charlatan of theory, the Elvis of cultural theory, the giant of Ljubljana, or capitalism's court-jester, a covert Nazi, and an anti-Semite. This collection of non-praises is highly selective but if one seeks to detect a conceptual aspect in these critiques, it lies in the critique of contradiction Žižek appears to embody, rehearse, and practice. Those contradictions do not only matter on the level of his writing, but for his thinking *tout court*. If one looks at the critiques with this lens, what comes into view is his actual philosophical endeavour, notably his attempt to reinvent "dialectical materialism." Despite its association with the names of Engels, Lenin and Stalin, Žižek seeks to develop a dialectical materialism that clearly 'deviates' from its Soviet instantiations.

Žižek vehemently rejects the position Lenin takes in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and this is one background against which one can read his engagement with quantum physics. But his philosophical anti-Leninism is in radical contrast with his politics, where he remains thoroughly Leninist. There can thus seem to be a contradiction between philosophy and politics inbuilt in Žižek's approach; concepts do not always live up to their conceptual actuality (without this saying that this

is what concepts generally do). This is why, contradictions in thought, be they performative or not, are not indicators of a mishap or of a flaw. They are rather constitutive of thinking itself. Performing performative contradiction is not a weakness, but the enduring principle of a form of thought. Žižek is also often accused of being a pop-philosopher. But, as we know from an early text by Hegel (on scepticism), to be popular is not necessarily bad. It is only bad if we start with popularizing. That is to say, popularizing philosophy is good if the fundamentals are worked out properly. The symptom of our age is therefore not – only – the prominence of Žižek, but probably also what Hegel has addressed as *Unphilosophy*, which can today be recognized in the attempts to philosophize on blogs, in Twitter-tweets, podcasts, or tik-toks. This cannot but raise the question: what is the system that allows Žižek to popularize? It is what one can see from *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, until his latest publication to date, that is *Christian Atheism*. He followed a systematic line of thinking in philosophy, psychoanalysis, political thinking that even sometimes forced him - out of principle - to change his position. Are all of his texts part of the system? All in the same manner? Is it just all one book and he just cuts off a stream of thought now and then (as some sources tell us)? We are proud to present to you an issue on Žižek's thought that seeks to answer some of these questions and provide answers to questions not yet raised.

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