

Presentation

Slavoj Žižek in Our Time: Outline of the Intellectual Trajectory of a Philosophical Monument

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In his article “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, Quentin Skinner asked: “What are the appropriate procedures to adopt in the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the work?” (1969: 3). Elsewhere, Slavoj Žižek stated: “It is crucial to move from true propositions to the truth itself which speaks” (2006: 387). So we start with both quotations with the purpose of re-appropriating both, the question and the statement, and we will dare to ask: What is the appropriate procedure that will bring us closer to that truth¹ that speaks for itself in the work of the philosopher Slavoj Žižek?

In attempting to answer such a complex question, we get into a complex quagmire in which we must take some risks. It is necessary from the outset to identify and evidence the fundamental impossibilities before any attempt

1. On the notion of Truth, Žižek (2006) makes a critical distinction to that proposed by Alain Badiou (1988) in his text *L'Être et l'Événement*: “Badiou identifies four possible domains in which a Truth-Event can occur, four domains in which subjects emerge as the ‘operators’ of a truth-procedure: science, art, politics and love. Do not the first three truth-procedures (science, art, and politics) follow the classic logic of the triad True-Beautiful-Good – the science of truth, the art of beauty, the politics of the good? So, what about the fourth procedure, love? Does it not stick out from the series, being somehow more fundamental and universal? Thus there are not simply four truth-procedures, but three plus one – a fact that is perhaps not emphasized enough by Badiou (although, regarding sexual difference, he does observe that women tend to color all other truth-procedures through love). What is encompassed by this fourth procedure is not just the miracle of love, but also psychoanalysis, theology and philosophy itself (the love of wisdom). Is not love, then, Badiou’s “Asiatic model of production” – the category into which he throws all truth-procedures which do not fit the other three modes? This fourth procedure also serves as a kind of underlying formal principle or matrix of all procedures (which accounts for the fact that, although Badiou denies religion the status of truth-procedure, he nonetheless claims that Saint Paul was the first to deploy the very formal matrix of the Truth-Event). Furthermore, is there not another key difference between love and other truth-procedures in that, in contrast to others which try to force the unnamable, in “true love” one endorses/accepts the loved Other because of the very unnamable X in him or her. In other words, “love” designates the lover’s respect for what should remain unnamable in the beloved – “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one should remain silent” is perhaps the fundamental prescription of love (p. 406)

to capture, analyze or systematize a system of thought: it is not possible to take a zero point; that is, to look with absolute objectivity² at the lines of thought in question, just as it is extremely difficult to make a distinction between Žižek's "fundamental concepts".³

On the other hand, we can only partially skirt the analysis of his ideology or what has been identified as "the Žižekian paradigm" (Žižek and Daly, 2004: 2). We will even, in trying to study his work, betray Žižek himself as a desperate method of trying to overcome the essential emptiness and an unshakable truth: we cannot access the totality of his thought.⁴

To think about the work and intellectual trajectory of Slavoj Žižek is to stand in front of a philosophical labyrinth. That is, it is to assume the risk of failing in the face of the inevitable obstacles that start with the fiasco of drawing a distinction between "inside" and "outside"⁵ (Kelley, 2002b: 2); disillusionment in aiming to classify his theories under the division "internal or external"⁶; and absolute disillusionment with what we will call "Žižekian ideary".

Terry Eagleton (1997) said of Žižek that we are in the presence of "the most formidably brilliant exponent of psychoanalysis, indeed of cultural theory in general, to have emerged in Europe for some decades" (p. 4). What he forgot to add is that Žižek is not only an exponent of "Lacanian psychoanalysis" (Žižek, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1997, 2022), he is primarily a Hegelian-Lacanian philosopher (Žižek, 1993, 2000, 2022) who has a system of thought like a Borromean⁷ knot, with three clear rings: psychoanalysis, philosophy and politics. With this broad theoretical framework he has managed to bring to the masses complex legacies of other eras, making the best of the theory of the

2. Quentin Skinner (1969) wrote: "it becomes impossible for any observer to consider any such activity, or any instance of it, without having some preconceptions about what he expects to find." (p. 6)
3. For "fundamental concepts," see for example Charles R. N. McCoy (1963).
4. Skinner (1969).
5. Kelley (2002b): "The 'inside' of history treats the words, and so presumably thoughts, of historical agents, while the 'outside' deals with the political, economic, social and cultural environment." (p. 2)
6. A distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' will persist until there is an end to asking questions about the history of concepts, theories, paradigms, revolutions, thematic origins of scientific thought and other decontextualizable epiphenomena which have occupied thinkers for centuries in many contexts and hermeneutical conditions. In fact the opposition between internal and external is deeply embedded in western thought and languages, most obviously and most paradigmatically, perhaps, in Plato's distinction between the true (and inner) world of ideas and the false (and outer) world of appearances. This fundamental dualism was reinforced by the Christian dualisms of body-and-soul and letter-and-spirit, as well as the Cartesian distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, Kant's 'starry heaven above and moral law within', and Nietzsche's rejection of Platonic ideas for the 'truth in appearances' (Kelley, 2002b: 4).
7. Žižek in "For They Know Not What They Do": "The three theoretical circles are not, however, of the same weight: it is their middle term, the theory of Jacques Lacan, which is – as Marx would say – 'the general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity,' the particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it." (p. 2).

twentieth and twenty-first century available to all, in the words of the magazine *Foreign Policy*, which listed him as one of the 100 most influential thinkers in the world, and an author who gives “voice to an era of absurdity”. So, to begin with, who is Slavoj Žižek?

On 21 March 1949, in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, Slavoj Žižek arrived into the world; from this day a silent fissure in history opened up, and a new direction in the social sciences began to take shape. Nothing announced the radical new direction in the history of ideas of our time, or the importance that a legacy that is *still* under construction means for theoretical and philosophical thought; a legacy of our time which will endure as material for exploration and analysis by the historians of tomorrow; writings to which we are privileged to have access. We are direct observers of a philosophical monument that will be remembered as one of the greatest intellectual legacies of the 21st century. In the words of Tony Myers (2003):

Yugoslavia was, then, under the rule of Marshal Tito (1892-1980), one of the more ‘liberal’ communist countries in the Eastern Bloc, although, as Žižek points out, the freedoms the regime granted its subjects were rather ambivalent, inducing in the population a form of pernicious self-regulation. One aspect of state control that did have a positive effect on Žižek, however, was the law which required film companies to submit to local university archives a copy of every film they wished to distribute. Žižek was, therefore, able to watch every American and European release and establish a firm grasp of the traditions of Hollywood which have served him so well since. (p. 6)

We arrive here at what would be a first decision, a first love – the cinema⁸ – that would later be abandoned for philosophy.⁹ Žižek himself, in his book with Glyn Daly *Conversation with Žižek*, says:

The first thing I have to say is that philosophy was not my first choice. An old thesis developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss affirms that every philosopher, every theoretician, had another profession at which he failed and the failure then marked his entire beginning. (Žižek and Daly, 2004: 23)

This first failure, stumbling or abandonment translated into a persistence in continuing on the same path, as a compulsion to repetition that has not stopped. At the age of 20, Žižek would write his first book, before graduating in 1971 with a Bachelor of Arts degree (philosophy and sociology), and opening up an initial, complex path in the academy of his country, which despite the initial

8. Žižek and Daly (2004: 23): “For me, as is clear my writings, it was cinema. I started when I was already about 13 or 14; I remember which movies absolutely fascinated me when I was young. I think two of them left a mark on me: Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and Alain Resnais’ *Las Year* at Marienbad. I saw each of them at least fifteen times. In fact, I was somewhere between cinema theory and cinema practice, because I also had a Super-8 camera (...) But that is a strict state secret! I made a 20-30 minutes amateur film and I think I destroyed it; I am not sure”.
9. Žižek and Daly (2004: 23): “So the original decision was not to be philosopher; this was a kind of a secondary choice, the second best thing”.

obstacles, managed to break free of its European borders and position itself globally.

The knot between philosophy, politics and psychoanalysis developed from the hand and pen of Žižek's sagacious analysis of the political situation. Žižek's relationship with politics is theoretical-practical. Let us briefly recall that in his youth his involvement with politics was direct, standing in the presidential elections of his country and later supporting leftist governments in office while also continuing his activism and political solidarity with different causes inside and outside his country. Žižek own writing includes accounts of his initial closeness to European politics, in his article "A leftist Plea for 'Eurocentrism':

It is thus politicization that reemerged violently in the disintegration of Eastern European socialism. From my own political past, I remember how, after four journalists were arrested and brought to trial by the Yugoslav army in Slovenia in 1988, I participated in the Committee for the Protection of the Human Rights of the Four Accused. Officially, the goal of the committee was just to guarantee fair treatment for the journalists; however, the committee turned into the major oppositional political force, practically the Slovenian version of the Czech Civic Forum or the East German Neues Forum. (Žižek, 1998: 990)

Moving to another scenario that complements the journey in the adventure that means to introduce us to the "Žižekian" legacy, it is possible to observe that since early times the study of past philosophical or literary works has been one of the most common focuses of vast groups of historians. This field soon became a different and specific one, recognized in our time as the study of what Victor Cousin¹⁰ defined as "l'histoire des idées".¹¹

The present paper aims to analyze and critically study the intellectual trajectory of an intellectual of our time,¹² an initial introductory approach that will remain indebted to the whole complex framework created by Žižek. How-

10. According to Kelley (2002a), the history of ideas became an independent concept in the 19th century. Until then, it was linked to philosophy, without distinction. It was Victor Cousin who gave the name "the history of ideas" to the field that we know today. Thus the starting point for this document found its origins in Cousin's work.

11. For more on this concept see Maurice Mandelbaum (1965).

12. The study of an author's work during his lifetime implies being able to understand it in a determined and shared global historical framework, and reduces the alien vision that appears when studying a legacy built in a historical and social period unknown to the reading eye. This problem was addressed by Quentin Skinner (1969) in the following way:

The relevance of this dilemma to the history of ideas – and especially to the claim that the historian should concentrate simply on the text in itself – is of course that it will never in fact be possible simply to study what any given classic writer has said (especially in an alien culture) without bringing to bear some of one's own expectations about what he must have been saying. The is simply the dilemma, familiar to psychologists as the (apparently inescapable)determining factor of the observer's mental set. By our past experience "we are set to perceive details in a certain way." And when this frame of reference has been established, "the process is one of being prepared to perceive or react in a certain way. (p. 6)

In addition, to complement this is recommended Floyd H. Allport (1955).

ever, we have to undertake the task in order not to postpone it any longer: why waste ourselves in efforts to study and analyze the legacies of thinkers of other times when we have in front of us today one of the most important thinkers of our century, whose work has global reach and influence, and who will undoubtedly be remembered for eternity as a crucial intellectual for understanding philosophical problems, political conflicts and the historical moment?

Pierre Vilar (1980), one of the exponents of the French Annales School, considered that History was the only instrument that could lead us to a reasoned knowledge of the world. In close disagreement, Chesneaux (1977) proposed vindicating the dialectical relationship between past and future; it is with regard to antagonism and the co-existence of the struggle of opposites that temporal structures, characters, ideas and mass movements appear. Here we find the fundamental reason to undertake the writing of books and other documents as an unpostponable task. What place will Žižek's ideology have in the future? What documents will we leave today for the historians of tomorrow?

The philosophical monument built by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek contains, if we look back even to his earliest works, several interesting elements; among them, we find what Peter H. Merkl (1967) defined as "Timeless Elements"; what William T. Bluhm (1965) defined as "Universal Ideas"; Catlin's proposal (1950) under the slogan "Dateless Wisdom", and the contribution of Hacker (1954), i.e. "Universal Application". Moreover, in the English-speaking world, we find in the field of "intellectual history" a line that we could call the "Cambridge-Baltimore axis" of John Pocock and Quentin Skinner,¹³ which offers various tools to enable an approach to the lines of thought and a return to their own intellectual journey.

So we can take the risk of embracing two – or even more – perspectives. On the one hand, we can understand Žižek's theoretical work as a process that is always in dialogue with his life experiences, considering his philosophical work by periods, so we will find ourselves with a "Early Žižek"; "Second Žižek"; and "Late Žižek". This would lead us to understand his lines of thought with a meaning resulting from the context, with structures in displacement, the legacy of a period, a life as a result of a development of various encounters and mis-encounters, events or ruptures, a "flow of social life" (Giddens, 1995). The above, however, would forget the essential dynamism, the dialectical and retroactive character of Žižek's¹⁴ work, the whole framework that has accompanied the life of the intellectual, accompanying his fixed position on the intellectual scene as a philosophical monument, which leads us to the other perspective, to adopt an orthodox reading, to fall into the error of considering the work with an "autonomy of the text itself" (Skinner, 1969).

13. For a recent review of Skinner's work, see Brett and Tully (2006).

14. According to Giddens (1995): "If the sociologies of understanding are founded, so to speak, on an imperialism of the subject, functionalism and structuralism propose an imperialism of the social object. One of my main ambitions in formulating structuration theory is to put an end to these two imperial ambitions." (p. 40)

Both views of Žižek's intellectual trajectory would be bathed in orthodoxy,¹⁵ which is always risky. Not only would it mean a clouded understanding of the philosophical lines he has developed, but it would also operate as a repression of the text and the ideas themselves. Regarding both views, Skinner says (1969):

My concern in what follows will be to consider these two orthodoxies in turn, and to argue that both in effect share the same basic inadequacy. Neither approach seems a sufficient or even appropriate means of achieving a proper understanding of any given literary or philosophical work. Both methodologies, it can be shown, commit philosophical mistakes in the assumptions they make about the conditions necessary for the understanding of utterances. It follows that the result of accepting either orthodoxy has been to fill the current literature in the history of ideas with a series of conceptual muddles and mistaken empirical claims. (p. 4)

The warning at this point lies in entering into what John Passmore (1965) conceived as “a most useful task by showing that what purports to be a new theory is in fact an old one dressed up in new language but subject to familiar objections” (p. 2). Is the work of Slavoj Žižek a new theory disguised with other old theories? The answer in my opinion would be dialectically opposed to a general level we can affirm: Yes *and* No: Yes, in the sense that all the great thinkers¹⁶ of our time and other times have taken previously constructed ideas – Žižek himself recognizes himself as a scholar who follows a Hegel-Lacanian-Marx triad, or to be more precise “the identity of my Hegelian-Lacanian position” (Žižek, 2009: 5); and no, mainly because of the transparent distinctions and creative elements of the perspectives that the Slovenian intellectual has managed to disseminate and establish, nourishing himself both from the classic authors and from the tools that he scrutinizes and re-uses from various disciplines.

15. On “Orthodox”, see Cambiasso's analysis of Anthony Giddens' 1999 definition:

Giddens defines orthodox consensus as the predominance of positivist-inspired positions and philosophies of natural science in the field of social sciences, which became extensive in the second post-war period. It is possible to mention three characteristics that define the foundations of the orthodox consensus: on the one hand, the influence of positivism as a logical scheme, which, among other things, implied the statement that the social sciences should be modeled according to the format of the natural sciences; on the other hand, the influence of functionalism at the level of method; and finally, the influence of the conception of “industrial society” and the “theory of modernization”. The combination of these three elements was shaping the main currents of opinion in the social sciences in general and in sociology in particular until the end of the 1960s. (2011: 3)

16. See John Passmore (1965):

There was, for example, some point in Ralph Cudworth's attempt to show in his *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), a work which is very largely historical in character, that Hobbes's theory of perception was in certain respects identical with the theory criticised by Plato in the *Theaetetus*. (p. 2)

Let us recall that, for Pierre Bourdieu (1989):

to speak of life history is at least to presuppose, and this is not superfluous, that life is a story and that, as in Maupassant's title *Une Vie*, a life is inseparably the set of events of an individual existence conceived as a story and the telling of that story. (p. 121)

The knot between Žižek's biographical and existential experiences has led to particular characteristics that are reflected in the work he has published. This knot between his biographical history and his work can be studied using one of his own concepts: parallax.¹⁷ The division or dyad Slavoj (Man) and Slavoj Žižek (Intellectual) can be synthesized in his own words as follows:

that of putting two incompatible phenomena on the same level, is strictly analogous to what Kant called "transcendental illusion," the illusion of being able to use the same language for phenomena which are mutually untranslatable and can be grasped only in a kind of parallax view, constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible. Thus there is no rapport between the two levels, no shared space—although they are closely connected, even identical in a way, they are, as it were, on the opposed sides. (Žižek, 2009: 4)

In short, "they are substantially the same, the shift from the one to the other is purely a shift of perspective" (Žižek, 2009: 6). So, the subjective construction of a human being cannot be reduced to a limited set of nomothetic rules, so that thinking about Slavoj Žižek requires an attentive look at the different spheres and perspectives that made the philosopher and intellectual Slavoj Žižek burst onto the intellectual scene with subsequent global success.

It should be noted that Žižek's global success was not a gift, it is the fruit of his serious work that persists, with contributions that from an early date elucidated the facility of this philosopher to break theoretical and disciplinary boundaries in the search for the articulation of a "paradigm" (Dunaway, 1995) according to the objectives that the philosopher proposed.

Donald R. Kelley (2002a) wrote that:

In fact the most important advances in intellectual history in this century have been made not in history as such but rather in some of these overlapping disciplines, especially in the history of philosophy, of natural science, and of literature. (p. 6)

17. In his text *Parallax View*, Slavoj Žižek wrote:

the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no neutral common ground is possible. In a first approach, such a notion of parallax gap cannot but appear as a kind of Kantian revenge over Hegel: is not "parallax" yet another name for a fundamental antinomy which can never be dialectically "mediated/ sublated" into a higher synthesis, since there is no common language, no shared ground, between the two levels? (p. 4)

Indeed, Slavoj manages to pigeonhole himself in this distinction, drawing on science, literature and cinema, and even taking elements from popular culture. According to Bourdieu (1989):

To try to understand a life as a unique and sufficient series in itself of successive events with no other nexus than the association to a “subject” whose constancy is undoubtedly no more than that of a name, is at least as absurd as trying to give a reason for a journey in the subway without taking into account the structure of the network, that is, the matrix of objective relations between the different stations. (p. 31)

Bourdieu’s analysis confronts us with the personal trajectory of an individual and those beyond the objective events that are possible to find and map. The debate of subjectivity/objectivity emerges to demonstrate that there is an impossibility in the construction of a totalizing vision of a life¹⁸ and this can be extrapolated to the attempt to systematize a line of thought. The stories of a life will always be indebted to the oblivions, to the silences, to the altered, modified elements or those that from a specific point of view do not seem to be crucial. And a similar situation occurs in the work of an author such as Žižek.

In and out of the history of philosophy or the global academy?

Žižek is one of the founders of “Ljubljanska lakanovska šola” (the Lacanian school of Ljubljana), which includes other contemporary philosophers such as Mladen Dólar and Alenka Zupančič.¹⁹ Despite being part of a Slovenian “troika” with these two thinkers, it is Žižek who has marked a great distinction in relation to his contributions to the social sciences. It is possible to affirm

18. In the words of Bourdieu himself (1989):

The subject and the object of biography (the researcher and the testimony) have in some way the same interest in accepting the postulate of the meaning of the existence told (and, implicitly, of all existence). We are certainly entitled to suppose that the autobiographical account is always inspired, at least on the one hand, by the desire to give meaning, to give reason, to extract a logic at once retrospective and prospective, a consistency and a constancy, by establishing intelligible relations, like those of the effect to the efficient or final cause, between successive states, thus constituted in stages of a necessary development. (And it is likely that this gain in coherence and necessity is situated at the beginning of the interest, variable according to the position and the trajectory, that research brings to the biographical project). This inclination to become an ideologue of one’s own life by selecting, according to an overall intention, certain significant events and establishing between them connections appropriate to give them coherence, such as those implied by their institution as causes or, more often, as ends, finds the natural complicity of the biographer who is led by everything, starting with his or her dispositions as a professional interpreter, to accept this artificial creation of meaning. (p. 122)

19. According to Slavoj Žižek, in a personal communication, these names have been joined by younger and “much more Lacanian” philosophers such as: Simon Hajdini, Gregor Moder, Samo Tomšič and Jure Simoniti.

that without Žižek there are simply no great thinkers of our time in Slovenia. Žižek is a knot in itself that winds around him again and again, and while other hoops wander, it is thanks to Žižek's work that other thinkers from his country – and also from other corners – have managed to join the global intellectual scene. Žižek's originality is to introduce into the academy Lacanian-Hegelian philosophy, the defense of Europe and the proposal of a theoretical psychoanalysis, among many other essential and current contributions to today's academic debates.

Now, is it convenient to use an inside/outside distinction, extrapolated to the author's objectives, the man behind the text and the result and possible readings? According to Donald R. Kelley (2002b):

The inside-out conceit conceals another problem of intellectual history, and this is the semantic gap between authorial intention and the reception by later readers and critics. It is the aspiration of philologists, editors and some interpreters to establish, or to divine, the creative spirit underlying texts (on the analogy of fundamentalist biblical critics), but once set down the word takes flight among the vulgar and the predisposed, and even the original author cannot be trusted to reconstruct the creative moment. It is only making the best of this hermeneutical predicament to add that meaning, which in any case transcends the means and their intentions, is improved and enriched by such dissemination. (p. 7)

Let us remember that Flaubert wrote in a letter to Georg Sand in 1875, "L'homme n'est rien, l'œuvre tout! [The man is nothing, the work everything!]" (1953: 249).²⁰ Here is the maxim in the theoretical edifice of this European philosopher who has managed, from the heart of Slovenia, to spread "the Žižekian virus" throughout the globe. Taking Flaubert's premise, we will affirm that Slavoj, the man, is NOTHING... but his work deployed from his position as an intellectual is EVERYTHING.

In the previous section we were able to see the duality of inside and outside in relation to knowledge, philosophy and its history. This distinction has been maintained since early times and its opposition created a wide range of possible fans to approach or consider the human condition and to observe what philosophy is or is not. We have to affirm as a starting point the inside/outside position of the philosophical work of Slavoj Žižek, who openly recognizes himself "outside the academy", with a particular style of writing, references and quotations to non-academic media, and a null use of quotations to texts of scientific-academic character, but who, at the same time, is able to incorporate into the philosophical debate radical views that broaden the scope of philosophy today. According to Donald R. Kelley (2002b) in his article "Intellectual history and cultural history: the inside and the outside", we find some beginnings that are pertinent to remember:

20. To literary artists like Flaubert, Taine's 'fatalism' was no less objectionable than Sainte-Beuve's psychologism. For Taine, Flaubert complained, 'The masterpiece no longer has any significance except as a historical document (p. 7). See Kelley (2002b).

The history of philosophy, which had emerged as a new discipline in the 17th century, displays a similar structure. At first this took the form of doxography in the style of the classic (but also trivial and untrustworthy) work of Diogenes Laertius on the “lives and opinions of philosophers”. As the historian of philosophy Ephraim Gerhard complained in 1711, doxographers were interested only in external matters such as anecdotes about Pythagoras’ father, Plato’s mother, or Aristotle’s son, in the physical condition or temperaments of philosophers, or in the later *fortuna* of their writings. The very first periodical devoted to the history of philosophy, the *Acta Philosophorum* edited by C. A. Heumann beginning in 1715, exemplified the old doxography as expanded by new scholarship. Heumann himself believed that philosophical self-understanding required not merely inward-looking speculation but also inquiry into the human conditions of philosophizing, since, as Heumann aphorized, “Philosophers are made, not born” (*Philosophi fiunt, non nascuntur*), reversing the condition of the poet (*nascitur non fit*).²¹ Following Augustine, Heumann also went on to wonder if bastards had a special talent and whether women or *castrati* were capable of philosophy. Beyond psychological factors, Heumann considered the influence of environment, climate, the stars, race, nationality, and historical periods. In sharp contrast to this vulgar externalism was the work of such thinkers as Jacob Thomasius, who was, *ante litteram*, a historian of ideas – tracing concepts of God, nature, being, etc., from the ancient schools down to his own age. As his former student Leibniz wrote to Thomasius in 1669, “Most others are skilled rather in antiquity than in science and give us lives rather than doctrines. You will give us the history of philosophy [*historia philosophica*], not of philosophers.”²² In the terminology used by Leibniz (and given new currency in our time by Thomas Kuhn), Thomasius revealed not the outside but the inside – not the body but the soul – of the history of philosophy. The internalist view came to full flower in Hegel’s concept of *Philosophiegeschichte*. “The essential connection between what is apparently past and the present state reached by philosophy,” he wrote, “is not one of the external considerations which might have attention in the history of philosophy but expresses instead the inner nature of its character.” For Hegel this internalist history had nothing to do with an alien Thou and everything to do with the philosophizing I. “The course of history does not show us the Becoming of things foreign to us,” he added, “but the Becoming of ourselves and of our own knowledge.” (p. 4)

After the arrival of the Hegelian current that criticizes the internalist view of history, Slavoj Žižek gives validity to the ideas of the German philosopher, incorporating his complex system of thought in his analysis of our political future. At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Slovenian philosopher reminded us that, “We learn nothing from history” (2021), extrapolating a Hegelian conjecture to the global situation, a point he had been making since

21. Heumann (1715: 567-656) and cf. Ringler (1941: 497-504). Boeckh (1986: 139), citing the formulas *Criticus non fit, sed nascitur*, attributed to David Ruhnken, and *interpres non fit, sed nascitur* (note of Kelley, p. 14).

22. Nizolio (1670: fol. 2v); Leibniz’s preface (‘non philosophorum, sed philosophiae historia’); also in Leibniz (1969: 93); and see Leibniz (1993). Note by Kelley on p. 14.

his youthful writings. As a Hegelian philosopher, he addresses the problems of yesterday and tomorrow. Žižek (1998) used the concept “short circuit” (p. 988) to refer to the debate of the “universal and the particular” (p. 989); we make use of his own conceptual machinery and we will affirm that Žižek is a short circuit in the social sciences of our time.

Witnessing the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the subsequent Balkan wars, he has become a kind of survivor of the Western tragedy, a clear survivor of the global academy.

We need to continue to think actively about Žižek’s ideology. Despite the fact that some critics and/or enemies try to erect barriers to the dissemination of his theories, there remains only resignation to the fact that he has managed to survive the various attacks, which range from prolific theoretical articles that criticize Žižek’s ideology in a committed way, to attacks from voices in academia that impotently and desperately resort to the most vulgar and fanciful²³ attacks focusing on physical or biographical aspects. In 2016, in his text “A reply to my critics” Žižek wrote:

Lately I am getting used to attacks that not only render my position in a totally wrong way but also practice slander pure and simple, so that, at this level, any minimally rational debate becomes meaningless [...] The attackers mostly just make fun of a position which is simply not mine. (p. 1)

Whether they are direct or indirect, intellectual or personal, theoretical or practical, philosophical or psychoanalytical, or social or political attacks, these barriers, debates and criticisms do nothing but feed the Slovenian author, who time and again appears with academic articles, essays, books and opinion columns on political, cultural or social developments. In them one can see a common thread of his ideology, namely the objective he proposed in 1990 in his book *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, in which, from an early date, he saw the need to create a committed political intervention. With this premise, the legacy of the intellectual of the 21st century persists in inserting into the debate critical looks at the left itself, which have not ceased to cause commotion among the academy: most recently from 2021 to 2022 with the publication of his texts “Mon Manifeste Européen” (Žižek, 2021b); *Pandemic: Covid-19 shakes the world* (Žižek, 2020); *Heaven in disorder* (Žižek, 2021a); *Surplus Enjoyment: A Guide for the Non-Perplexed* (Žižek, 2022a); and his latest controversial column “La cancelación de la ética: por qué la exclusión del hombre blanco heterosexual es injustificable” (Žižek, 2022b). In these we

23. Žižek (2016): “Back to Dabashi’s book. On page 8, the comedy reaches its peak: a long quoted passage is attributed to me (it follows ‘Žižek claims:’), and after the quote the text goes on: ‘This is all fine and dandy – for Žižek. He can make any claim he wishes. All power to him. But the point is...’ There is just one tiny problem: the passage quoted and attributed to me and then mocked as an example of my European racism and of my misreading of Fanon is from Fanon himself.” (Again, no reference is given in Dabashi’s book – the quoted passage is from Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, Grove Press, 2008, p. 201-206.)

can witness his irreverence in the face of political correctness. The invitation therefore is to resign oneself and enjoy the Žižekian symptom.

Provisional conclusions

The presence of Slavoj Žižek in our time is not limited to digital and printed publications created by him, but includes the ontology of the present and the radical openness he proposes to consider the future. His work has inspired the creation of a magazine, *International Journal Of Žižek Studies*, which brings together various articles by thinkers from around the world on his proposed theories. Similarly, there is a filmography which includes: *The Reality of the Virtual* (2004), *Žižek!* (2005), *Examined Life* (2008), *Marx Reloaded* (2011), and *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006, 2012), as well as many other appearances in documentaries, films and lectures.

In the present issue, an attempt is made to approach the system of thought that the Slovenian philosopher has created throughout his philosophical trajectory. In order to achieve an approach to an author, it is necessary to understand him in his process, stages and periods; to analyze the existential traces that have altered his textual contributions; and the dialogue of man with author. It is not surprising when looking back at Žižek's life, that from the beginning he has oscillated between different disciplines, a wave of ideas that later would begin to build a theoretical and philosophical structure as a result of his capture of different paradigms.

In the face of the frequent proposals by various academics to drop the serious study of Slavoj Žižek's system of thought, and the accusations of being a charlatan or a philosopher who lacks a theory, a serious and committed analysis of the texts that the author has created is precisely what is required. Perhaps what makes us uncomfortable is not only his irreverence in the face of academic and institutional impositions, but also that we are witnessing a philosopher who is capable of making the knowledge that neoliberalism tries to limit to the few accessible to all. To conclude, we affirm that our triumph does not lie in achieving a total systematization of the trajectory of the Slovenian philosopher or in achieving a unique definition of what the "Žižekian" paradigm is; the triumph is in itself in the procedure and the process of the study and analysis of his system of thought. In the words of Žižek himself (2017):

The surrendering to pleasure reverts into pleasure of/in renunciation, repression of desire reverts into desire of repression, etc. In all these cases, gain occurs at a "performative" level: it is generated by the very performance of working towards a goal, not by reaching the goal. (p. 9)

It is from the critical study of his work and texts that new modalities of spreading the Žižekian plague find their way.

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