SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK'S HEGELIAN REFORMATION
GIVING A HEARING TO *THE PARALLAX VIEW*

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Slavoj Žižek. THE PARALLAX VIEW. *Cambridge: MIT P, 2006.* [PV]

Near the end of a two-hour presentation at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on November 10, 2006, Slavoj Žižek confesses that, in terms of the intellectual ambitions nearest to his heart, "my secret dream is to be Hegel's Luther" ["Why Only an Atheist Can Believe"]. This confession comes just months after the publication of his latest major work, *The Parallax View,* a book described as a new *magnum opus.* There are ample justifications within this text to license retroactively rereading it through the lens of Žižek's subsequent public admission that he is now preoccupied with rescuing Hegel from the numerous misinterpretations to which this giant of German idealism (who casts such a long shadow over the Continental European philosophical tradition) has been repeatedly subjected over the past two hundred years. *The Parallax View,* at certain points explicitly and in other places implicitly, can be seen as centered on an effort to confront aggressively the various received versions of Hegel widely accepted as official and orthodox exegetical renditions. The motif of the "parallax gap," elaborated in a plethora of guises throughout this 2006 tome, condenses and reflects the axiomatic theses of what could be called Žižek's Hegelian reformation.

The critical assessment of *The Parallax View* offered here seeks to go straight to its theoretical heart by highlighting a single line of argumentation running through the full span of this text's different moments and phases. Žižek's own Hegelian-style conceptions of truth (as fiercely partisan rather than calmly neutral) and universality (as immanently concrete rather than transcendently abstract) validate such an interpretive approach—"*universal Truth is accessible only from a partial engaged subjective position*" [PV 35]. Deliberately extracting particular conceptual constellations and forcing them to link up with each other according to the plan of a certain directed philosophical agenda promises to be much more revealing of the essential features of Žižekian thought than a comprehensive survey of this latest of his major works.

The specific argumentative thread to be isolated here is the new extended engagement with the terrain covered by cognitive science and the neurosciences. Apart from the task of denouncing falsifying popular pictures of Hegel, one of Žižek's other driving ambitions in this book is the desire to formulate a fundamental ontology appropriate to the theory of subjectivity mapped out over the course of his entire intellectual itinerary (a theory informed by Kant and post-Kantian German idealism combined with Lacanian psychoanalytic metapsychology). And, herein, the articulation of such an ontology appropriately gets entangled, via reflections on the nature of the brain, with the latest instantiations of the perennial philosophical problem of the relationship between mind and

body. Žižek grants that the central nervous system is, in at least several undeniable and important senses, the material, corporeal ground of the subject, the bodily being without which there cannot be the *parlêtre* (speaking being). But, in the spirit of Schelling and Hegel (especially their philosophies of "productive" nature), the fashions in which Žižek attempts to tie together systematically a materialist ontology with an account of more-than-material, transontological subjectivity illuminate a normally obscured and ignored set of implied consequences flowing from the gesture of dissolving hard-and-fast dualist distinctions between body and mind, nature and spirit.

The past few decades of philosophical engagement with the neurosciences, an engagement almost completely monopolized by the Anglo-American Analytic philosophical tradition and neglected by the Continental European philosophical tradition to an equal degree, has emphasized (to put this in the vernacular of German idealism) the naturalization of spirit resulting from the collapse of any strict nature-spirit dichotomy. The materialisms promoted by those Analytic philosophers amenable to grounding the mental on the neuronal simply assume that the outcome of folding mind and matter into each other is a becoming-material of the mind, namely, a naturalization of the spirit (that is, the mind comes to resemble the brain conceived of as just another part of the physical world as depicted by the cause-and-effect laws posited by the natural sciences at larger-scale levels above the quantum domain). This is one way of describing the essentially reductive orientation of those mainstream materialisms developed thus far in conjunction with certain philosophical interpretations of the neurosciences. Described differently, the reductive assumption here is that rendering mind immanent to matter requires, to greater or lesser degrees, dementalizing the mind so as to materialize it in conformity with the image of matter (and, more generally, the material universe) as an integrated web of mechanisms held together and made exhaustively consistent with itself through the basic governing force of efficient causality. The discussions of materialism and the mind-body problem in Analytic philosophy seem to remain stuck with visions of materiality not much different from those underlying the pre-Kantian early modern perspectives of, among others, Hobbes, Boyle, and Locke.

What presumptively fails to be asked in all this is the question of whether the common proto-conceptual pictures of material being tacitly informing theoretical reflections on such matters can and should remain unchanged once the outdated, inflexible binary oppositions between nature and spirit or body and mind are destabilized critically. Whereas Analytic philosophers generally take it for granted that passing through the fires of this destabilization yields a straightforwardly naturalized spirit as its reduced product, Žižek, inspired by the German idealists, takes seriously the possibility that, at least as a correlative-yet-inverse set of consequences, folding mind and matter into each other (also) results in a (partial) spiritualization of nature (but, for Žižek, these consequences definitely are not to be depicted in the guise of some sort of crude pan-psychism). Žižek's materialist ontology, particularly as elaborated in *The Parallax View,* is motivated, to a significant extent, by the question of how basic proto-philosophical images of materiality must be transformed in the aftermath of the gesture of rendering the subject and its structures as fully immanent to material being. Žižek is convinced that (in Hegel's vocabulary) including the apparently immaterial subject (that is, mind or spirit) within apparently material substance (that is, matter or body) cannot leave substance untouched and unaltered in the process. The unavoidable philosophical price to be paid for naturalizing human beings is the accompanying denaturalization of nature [Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology* 241].

Prior to tackling his take on the mind-body problem, Žižek's Hegelianism (with which he introduces the dialectical subtleties of post-Kantian late modernity into conversations about the brain) ought to be examined. On first glance, the term "parallax," as deployed by Žižek, seems to involve a return to Kant, because, in connection with this

term, select contradictions and incompatibilities are elevated to the status of insurmountable absolutes. Insofar as Žižekian parallax splits are characterized as ruptures between incommensurable dimensions, as rifts between strata prohibiting any reconciliation or translation of these separated strata on the placid plane of a third sublating medium, it appears that Kantian-style antinomies are presented here as brute metaphysical facts indigestible by the Hegelian *Aufhebung* (or anything else akin to it). However, early on in *The Parallax View,* Žižek warns that the assertion of the existence of these parallax gaps is not tantamount to a "Kantian revenge over Hegel" [4]. Instead, this assertion allegedly leads to a revivification of Hegelian philosophy as the most supremely subtle incarnation of "dialectical materialism" [4]. Žižek's Hegel is the exact opposite of what he usually is conceived to be—not an idealist metaphysician of the all-consuming conceptual synthesis of a thereby totalized reality but, instead, a materialist thinker of (in Lacanese) a not-All Real shot through with antagonisms, cracks, fissures, and tensions.[1] Apropos of Kant, this peculiar reincarnation of Hegel further radicalizes (rather than overcomes) the parallax gaps posited within the critical-transcendental framework[2] (a radicalization in which Kantian epistemological contradictions and impasses are ontologized [Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology* 15, 129–30]). What's more—and this point is not to be missed—whereas Kantian transcendental idealism treats the subjectively mediated structures (including various dichotomous splits found therein) which it analyzes as inexplicable givens, Žižek's Hegel-inspired ontology purports to be able to get back behind these structures so as to explain their very emergence in the first place, both historically and materially.

Before delving deeper into the essential features of Žižek's Hegelian dialectical materialism, it should be asked: Why is exhuming the corpus of an allegedly materialist Hegel important, especially today? Žižek depicts the current intellectual situation as one in which a false forced choice between either "mechanical materialism" (that is, a reductive approach in which material being is treated as nothing more than an aggregate of physical bodies bumping and grinding against each other) or "idealist obscurantism" (that is, a reaction against mechanical materialism that insists upon the existence of a sharp dehiscence between the physical and the metaphysical) is repeatedly presented in diverse forms of packaging [PV 4]. Despite cutting-edge work in the contemporary sciences appearing to vindicate after-the-fact the intuitions contained in the philosophies of nature elaborated by the early nineteenth-century German idealists, these sciences and the majority of those who claim to represent them have tended to turn a blind eye to the theoretical resources contained in the writings of, among others, Schelling and Hegel (this is unsurprising, given that twentieth-century Anglo-American Analytic philosophy arose, in part, as a reaction against nineteenth-century British Hegelianism). Throughout *The Parallax View,* Žižek, departing from the work of others engaged with the natural sciences (especially cognitive neuroscience) who either gesture in the direction of or strive to develop more sophisticated materialist theoretical frameworks (such as Antonio Damasio, Daniel Dennett, Joseph LeDoux, Catherine Malabou, Thomas Metzinger, and Francisco Varela), aims to show not only that today's sciences would be better able to express their insights if equipped with the concepts and terminology of a dialectical materialism formulated in dialogue with German idealism. Žižek's thesis goes one step further: the natural sciences cannot even properly come to recognize and realize their true results if their fashions of self-understanding continue to remain mired in the ill-framed debates staged between, on the one hand, varieties of materialism whose notions of matter are no more sophisticated than seventeenth-century conceptions of "corporeal substance" moved solely by the

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1. Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do *67, 217; Žižek,* Tarrying with the Negative *19; Žižek,* Ticklish Subject *60; Žižek,* Organs without Bodies *60; Johnston,* Žižek's Ontology *126–27.*

2. Žižek, Ticklish Subject *55, 84–85, 86, 113; Žižek,* For They Know Not What They Do *xcvi; Žižek, PV 25.*

mechanisms of efficient causes and, on the other hand, equally unsophisticated varieties of idealism interminably stuck reactively combating such materialisms. Among its many advantages, Žižekian dialectical materialism promises to move beyond the recurrent disputes between materialist reductionists and idealist antireductionists that have grown so sterile and unproductive.

Žižek specifies that what he calls "dialectical materialism" is a philosophical orientation centered on the question/problem of "*how, from within the flat order of positive being, the very gap between thought and being, the negativity of thought, emerges*" [PV 6] (and he claims that this is Hegel's fundamental concern too [PV 29]). What makes Žižek's materialism specifically dialectical, on his account, is its ability to elucidate the material genesis of more-than-material phenomena and structures. Along these very lines, in the introduction to *The Parallax View,* he refers to a process of "transcendental genesis" [PV 7], namely, the immanent emergence of configurations that, following this emergence, thereafter remain irreducibly transcendent in relation to the immanence out of which they emerged (although, of course, a dialectic of oscillating reciprocal modifications between material immanence and more-than-material transcendence takes shape in the wake of the "generation" [PV 406] of this split).

Succinctly stated, Žižek, as a self-proclaimed dialectical materialist, is an emergent dual-aspect monist. As is well known, Spinoza is a dual-aspect monist insofar as he asserts, ontologically speaking, that there is one (and only one) substance (that is, "God"), although this single totality of being necessarily appears refracted into distinct, disparate attributes (in particular, the attributes of thinking and extension). Both Schelling and Hegel (and, by implication, Žižek too) are troubled by the absence of any explanation on Spinoza's part of how and why the monistic One comes to be refracted into the disparate appearances of a dualistic Two.[3] (Of course, Spinoza is a major point of reference for Hegel given Spinoza's importance in Kantian and post-Kantian intellectual circles at the time; and Žižek frequently engages with contemporary manifestations of Spinozism as advanced by, most notably, Gilles Deleuze and his progeny.) Moreover, not only does a Spinozistic substance metaphysics lack such an explanation—it also runs the risk of licensing reductionist stances according to which anything other than the ontological One-All is dismissible as merely illusory or epiphenomenal in relation to this ultimately homogenous substratum. The Žižekian Hegel (or, alternately, the Hegelian Žižek) promotes a nonreductive materialism in the form of a monism of the not-All One, a materialist ontology of the ground of being as a self-sundering substance fracturing itself from within so as to produce parallax splits between irreconcilable layers and tiers of existence [PV 36].

However, insofar as the word "dialectical" nowadays tends to connote hazy notions of integration and synthesis, it doesn't seem entirely appropriate for Žižek to describe his monism of the not-All One as a materialism that is recognizably dialectical. Instead, Žižek's tethering of so-called dialectical materialism to an ontology of a self-sundering substance internally generating parallax-style antinomies and oppositions seems more like a sort of genetic transcendentalism, a theory centered on the model of a trajectory involving the immanent genesis of the thereafter-transcendent (that is, an emergentist supplement to Kantian transcendental idealism). One could call this theory "transcendental materialism," defined as a doctrine based on the thesis that materiality manufactures out of itself that which comes to detach from and achieve independence in relation to it.[4] If Kant's transcendental subject amounts to the set of conditions of possibility for the constitution and cognizance of phenomenal reality, then Žižek's emergent dual-aspect mo-

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3. Schelling, On the History of Modern Philosophy *71–72; Hegel,* Phenomenology of Spirit *10–11 [§17–§20], 12–13 [§23].*

4. Johnston, Žižek's Ontology *xxiii–xxiv, 61, 74, 81, 209, 228–29, 274–75, 284.*

nism (with its delineations of the dynamics through which transcendentally conditioned phenomenal realities arise from material being) attempts to identify the conditions of possibility for these Kantian conditions of possibility. Put differently, Žižekian dialectical materialism also could be described, with respect to Kant, as a materialist metatranscendentalism proposed as the "real" basis for idealist transcendentalism.[5]

And yet, in the face of the danger of possible misinterpretations, the decision to christen the fundamental philosophical position espoused in *The Parallax View* "dialectical materialism" is part of Žižek's Hegelian reformation, his protracted effort, as described above, to reinterpret Hegel as a thinker of discordant material inconsistency rather than harmonious ideational consistency. Although this might initially strike the ear as a heterodox Hegel, Žižek insists throughout his extensive oeuvre that his is really the sole orthodox Hegel. This is quite reminiscent of Lacan's (in)famous "return to Freud." Žižek's "return to Hegel" is likewise an interpretive stance involving the assertion that the standard construal of the orthodox-heterodox distinction needs to be reversed given the inaccurate bastardizations essential to the supposedly orthodox renditions of the original source in question. Like the Lacanian Freud, the heterodox appearance of the Žižekian Hegel arises from its notable contrasts with the enshrined vulgar distortions widely accepted as faithful depictions.

In the course of elaborating the foundational thesis of Žižekian dialectical materialism stating that the materiality of a not-All One gives rise to a series of conflicting, irreconcilable Twos (as more-than-material dimensions and dynamics), *The Parallax View* runs through a dizzying array of distinctions, all of which are treated as parallax pairs (that is, as seemingly insurmountable oppositions between mutually exclusive poles/positions): being and thought [6], positivity and negativity [6], the temporal and the eternal [31], immanence and transcendence [36], particularity and universality [41], substance and subject [42], is and ought [49], the ontological and the evental [56], essence and appearance [106–07], the neuronal and the mental [178, 197, 210–11], the finite and the infinite [273–74], and the Pre-Symbolic and the Symbolic [390]. With each of these pairs of terms, the question recurrently posed by Žižek is: How does the latter term emerge out of the former term? And the basic general model being constructed here stipulates that once a second plane is produced by a first plane—this amounts to the genesis of a transontological dualistic Two out of an ontological monistic One—the resulting split between these planes becomes an ineradicable gap, an ineliminable dehiscence permanently resistant to any and every gesture aimed at its dissolution. Moreover, the thus-produced second plane, according to Žižek, achieves a self-relating autonomy with respect to its thereby transcended originary ground or source (as a substantial base/foundation giving rise to desubstantialized appearances and processes). In short, the effect comes to outgrow its cause.

The underlying logic of the theoretical matrix elaborated by Žižek in *The Parallax View* can better be clarified and evaluated by fleshing it out through a selective focus on just a few of the concepts and distinctions mentioned earlier here. In particular, examining in greater detail Žižek's recasting of philosophical notions of materiality vis-à-vis the natural sciences (especially cognitive neuroscience) will help both to illuminate what is essential to Žižekian dialectical materialism as well as to illustrate why such a materialism is timely and important. Building on arguments deployed in many of his previous texts,[6] Žižek insists that the images of matter informing familiar, standard varieties of and perspectives on materialism reduce materiality to being nothing more than the stable solidity of bodily density. This type of mindless matter is envisioned as exhaustively

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5. Johnston, "Ghosts of Substance Past" 50–51; Johnston, Žižek's Ontology *xxv, 71, 108–09, 273.*

6. Žižek, Indivisible Remainder *227, 230–31; Žižek,* Organs without Bodies *24–25.*

determined by the physical laws of nature vouched for by the perceived authority of the natural sciences. Faced with the ostensibly unanalyzable existence of this supposedly foundational type of matter, one tends to be pushed into either absolutely affirming its ultimate status (with all the reductive implications entailed by such an affirmation) or categorically rejecting it as primary with an equal degree of absoluteness (precisely so as to avoid the reductive implications entailed by affirming its ultimate status). That is to say, one is pressured into choosing between either the reductionism of a monistic mechanistic materialism or the antireductionism of a dualistic spiritualist idealism. Given the manners in which matter is represented by the picture-thinking of theorists still clinging to terribly outdated images of the material Real, the false dichotomy of this hackneyed, tired either/or alternative inevitably foists itself upon theoretical reflection again and again. In *The Parallax View,* Žižek seeks nothing less than an exit out of this stale, sterile cul-de-sac, an escape from the seesawing of this unproductive, go-nowhere philosophical rut.

The key to such an exit consists of Žižek's contemporary reformulation of Hegel's 1807 injunction to conceive of substance also as subject [PV 42]. In relation to what is at stake in this injunction, Žižek presents a forced choice of his own—"either subjectivity is an illusion, or reality is *in itself* (not only epistemologically) not-All" [PV 168]. In other words, one must decide between a "closed" ontology of asubjective material being—both mechanistic materialism and its rebellious-yet-reactive idealist shadow orbit around this option—and an "open" ontology positing a form of materiality that is more and other than the stupid, solid stuff of traditional philosophical imaginings of matter. Relatively early in *The Parallax View,* Žižek appeals, in the context of a discussion of the rapport between the ontological and the evental, to a notion of being as shot through with holes and voids; rather than existing as a smooth, uninterrupted fullness consistent with itself in its homogeneity, the ontological harbors the actual discontinuities of (and potential disruptions arising from) vacant spaces internal to itself (with some of these spaces becoming the fault lines of discrepancies and rifts surfacing within being). From the perspective of what Žižek identifies as "the materialist standpoint," there dwells, within the "constellation of Being," a "minimally 'empty' distance between . . . beings" [PV 56]. This perforation of being provides the minimal opening needed for the introduction of the psychoanalytic motif of conflict into ontology itself, an introduction interfering with the general penchant of thought to conceive of being as a harmonious organic cosmos at one with itself—with this move being utterly central to Žižek's endeavors. A little over twenty pages later, in association with the issue of the distinction between idealism and materialism, he starts to draw out the consequences of reimagining matter as porous and broken up rather than as an impenetrable heftiness:

> *[F]or the materialist, the "openness" goes all the way down, that is, necessity is not the underlying universal law that secretly regulates the chaotic interplay of appearances—it is the "All" itself which is non-All, inconsistent, marked by an irreducible contingency.* [PV 79]

The materialism of which Žižek speaks here is, of course, his own version of it. Invoking a Žižekian distinction cited previously, what both "mechanical materialism" and "idealist obscurantism" share in common—this link firmly shackles these two positions to each other, establishing an agreement underlying and organizing their more superficial disagreements—is a consensus stipulating that materiality is, when all is said and done, really just the corporeal substance of, say, Galileo or Newton (that is, physical objects blindly obeying the clockwork automaton embodied in the cause-and-effect laws of nature as formulated at the level of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century science). From the perspective of *The Parallax View,* a curious time lag plagues current philosophical

consciousness: although aware of momentous developments in the historical march of the natural sciences from the beginning of the twentieth century onward (especially developments connected to quantum physics and the neurosciences), today's predominant collective theoretical imagination, as expressed in continuing disputes between varieties of materialism and idealism that seemingly haven't digested certain recent scientific discoveries, remains stuck with representations of matter that predate the twentieth century. For Žižek, certain crucial aspects of the sciences of the twentieth century accomplish, so to speak, a desubstantialization of substance [PV 165, 239, 407] (à la, for instance, string theory's grounding of physical reality on ephemeral vibrating strands of energy captured solely through the intangible abstractions of branches of mathematics operating well beyond the limitations and confines of crude imaginative picture-thinking). This desubstantialization of substance makes possible a conception of materiality as open and contingent—in other words, as something quite distinct from the closed and necessary tangible stuff of old.

Parallel to the insistence that (in Hegel's parlance) substance is subject (that is, material being, as incomplete and inconsistent, contains within itself the potentials for the creative genesis of modes of subjectivity exceeding this same ontological foundation), Žižek's dialectical materialism conversely but correlatively proclaims that subject is substance. Žižek declares, "a truly radical materialism is by definition nonreductionist: far from claiming that 'everything is matter,' it confers upon 'immaterial' phenomena a specific positive nonbeing" [PV 168]. In fact, as can be seen clearly at this juncture, Žižekian materialism is nonreductive in two distinct senses: first, it depicts material being as an autorupturing absence of cosmic-organic wholeness prone to produce immanently out of itself precisely those parallax-style splits supporting transontological, more-than-material subjectivities; second, these thus-produced subjective structures acquire a being of their own in the form of a certain type of incarnate existence (examples of this special sort of dematerialized matter integral to the constitution of subjectivity include Schelling's "bodily spirituality"[7] and the strange "materiality" of the signifiers spoken of by Lacan[8]).

The Parallax View is the first text in which Žižek devotes time to a sustained treatment of the perennial philosophical problem of the mind-body rapport as informed by recent work in the neurosciences. And this newly opened theoretical front, dealing with disciplines rarely addressed directly by those interested in German idealism and/or Lacanian psychoanalysis, promises to be a fruitful testing ground for Žižekian dialectical materialism. As regards the positioning of the neuronal and the mental with respect to each other, Žižek speculatively ponders whether "the emergence of *thought* is the ultimate Event" [PV 178]. By "Event," he's alluding to Alain Badiou's notion of the evental as distinct from the ontological.[9] In this precise context, Žižek is suggesting that, like the irruption of the event out of being, the emergence of the mental (that is, "thought"), although arising from within the neuronal, nonetheless comes to break away from being determined by the electrochemical inner workings of the wrinkled matter of the central

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7. Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars" 237; Schelling, Clara *39–40; Žižek,* Indivisible Remainder *3–4, 112, 152; Žižek, "Abyss of Freedom" 46, 60–61; Žižek, "Interview—with Andrew Long and Tara McGann" 136; Žižek, "Spectre of Ideology" 73; Žižek,* Organs without Bodies *75.*

8. Lacan, "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" 248; Lacan, "Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power" 496; Lacan, "Discours de Rome" 137–38; Lacan, "Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse" 199; Lacan, "Petit discours à l'ORTF" 224; Lacan, "Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever" 187; Lacan, Seminar I *244; Lacan,* Seminar II *82; Lacan,* Seminar III *32; Lacan,* Séminaire IX*; Lacan,* Séminaire XIV*; Lacan,* Séminaire XVI *88–90.*

9. Badiou, Being and Event *173; Badiou, "Matters of Appearance" 253.*

nervous system (and, connected with the brain, the evolutionary-genetic factors shaping the human body as a whole). This is to claim that the mental phenomena of thought achieve a relatively separate existence apart from the material corporeality serving as the thus-exceeded ontological underbelly of these same phenomena. From this contention, Žižek then proceeds to elucidate that particular dimension of the theoretically vexing mind-body relation brought to a heightened degree of visible prominence through the lens of his philosophical-psychoanalytic brand of dialectical materialism:

> *Consciousness is "phenomenal" in contrast to "real" brain processes, but therein lies the true (Hegelian) problem: not how to get from phenomenal experience to reality, but how and why phenomenal experience emerges/explodes in the midst of "blind"/wordless reality. There must be a non-All, a gap, a hole, in reality itself, filled in by phenomenal experience.* [PV 197]

The issue identified here as distinct from "the true (Hegelian) problem" is, as is common knowledge, a classic question of epistemology (that is, the old problem of the mind's access to an extramental world). In addition, this very question motivates Kant to initiate the "Copernican revolution" of his critical-transcendental turn as launched right at the start of the *Critique of Pure Reason* [22, Bxvi–xvii]. However, in terms of the rapport between the neuronal and the mental, what interests Žižek instead is the occurrence of the genesis of the latter out of the former (subsequently in *The Parallax View,* he again describes this genesis as explosive, as an "ontological explosion" [PV 210–11]). In this vein, if one reasonably grants that the brain is, at a minimum, a necessary condition for the mind, one is prompted, as Žižek's reflections indicate, to wonder what kind of matter can and does give rise to something that then, once arisen, seems to carve a chasm of inexplicable irreducibility between itself and its originary material ground/source. Phrased differently, if mind is, at least partially, an effect of brain, what is the ontological nature and status of a cause capable of causing such an effect (that is, an effect appearing to establish an unbridgeable divide between itself and its supposed prior cause)?

Žižek begins answering this question through discussing the notions of body and selfhood as associated with the problematic of the connection between the neuronal and the mental. Starting with the example of "reality" as biomaterial existence, he asserts:

> *At the level of reality, there are only bodies interacting; "life proper" emerges at the minimally "ideal" level, as an immaterial event which provides the form of unity of the living body as the "same" in the incessant changing of its material components.* [PV 204]

At first, these remarks perhaps sound slightly like an endorsement of a sort of nominalism combining Heraclitus (everything that exists is in a constant state of flux) with Hobbes (only the singular things of corporeal substance really exist). However, the Hegelian Žižek is certainly neither a nominalist nor a metaphysical realist (and, obviously, his materialism is definitely distinct from that espoused in the *Leviathan* of 1651). The ideality of immaterial events spoken of here is something neither physical nor nonphysical, a more-than-material dimension that, despite Žižek's avowedly materialist ontology, is not without its proper ontological status (including an ability to generate "effects in the Real" [PV 245], to affect the very material beings giving rise to this dematerialized dimension—moreover, one would do well here to recall Lacan's many elaborations concerning the materialities specific to signifiers and structures). All of this becomes clearer when, two pages after the statement just quoted, he shifts from talking about "life" (as the impersonal identity of an organism, an "ideal" identity amounting to more than the

sum of the organism's "real" parts) to discussing selfhood (as the personal identity of a subject):

> *Here we encounter the minimum of "idealism" which defines the notion of Self: a Self is precisely an entity without any substantial density, without any hard kernel that would guarantee its consistency. If we penetrate the surface of an organism, and look deeper and deeper into it, we never encounter some central controlling element that would be its Self, secretly pulling the strings of its organs. The consistency of the Self is thus purely virtual; it is as if it were an Inside which appears only when viewed from the Outside, on the interface-screen—the moment we penetrate the interface and endeavor to grasp the Self "substantially," as it is "in itself," it disappears like sand between our fingers. Thus materialist reductionists who claim that "there really is no self" are right, but they nonetheless miss the point. At the level of material reality (inclusive of the psychological reality of "inner experience"), there is in effect no Self: the Self is not the "inner kernel" of an organism, but a surface-effect. A "true" human Self functions, in a sense, like a computer screen: what is "behind" it is nothing but a network of "selfless" neuronal machinery . . . in the opposition between the corporeal-material process and the pure "sterile" appearance, subject is appearance itself, brought to its self-reflection; it is* something that exists only insofar as it appears to itself. *This is why it is wrong to search behind the appearance for the "true core" of subjectivity: behind it there is, precisely, nothing, just a meaningless natural mechanism with no "depth" to it.* [PV 206]

As he summarizes this train of thought later, "there is no 'true substance' of the Self beneath its self-appearance . . . the Self 'is' its own appearing-to-itself" [PV 217]. These reflections on the status of selfhood provide an opportunity both for clarifying, through precise concretization, the essential dimensions of Žižekian dialectical materialism as well as for distinguishing this theoretical position from superficially similar stances. Apropos of the relationship between the reality of material bodies and the ideality of more-than-material identities, this specific variety of dialectical materialism maintains that there are two things to be explained here: one, the emergence or production of (to employ a Schellingian distinction informing Žižek's position) the Ideal (in Žižek's more Lacanian terms, the Imaginary-Symbolic dimension involving both the subject and subjectification [*Ticklish Subject* 159–60, 183]) out of the Real (in this instance, material being as a tension-plagued not-whole, as heterogeneous and inconsistent); two, the becoming-autonomous (as Hegel would put it, the achievement of a self-relating "for itself" mode of existence) of this thus-generated dimension of more-than-material ideality. The first part of this account identifies Žižek as a materialist. The second part indicates the nonreductive nature of this materialism. And, in the vein of this second part, Žižek, speaking of the vectors through which subjective freedom arises, proposes that understanding the becoming-autonomous of more-than-material ideality hinges on answering the question, "*How can appearance exert a causality of its own?*" [PV 206]. Normally, the word "appearance" involves the notion of a superficial manifestation entirely dependent for its being on the corresponding that-which-appears (for example, if the mental is deemed an appearance of the neuronal, this would seem to entail a reductive materialism according to which the mind is epiphenomenal with respect to the brain). However, Žižek's nonreductive dialectical materialism, as coupled with a type of emergentism, posits that apparently epiphenomenal appearances cease to be epiphenomenal if and when (as happens with human beings) these appearances begin to interact on the basis of logics internal to the "ideal" field of appearance itself. In other words, epiphenomena allegedly can no lon-

ger be said to be epiphenomena once an intraideal set of cross-resonances is established between appearances themselves after these appearances have arisen from the ground of "real" materiality[10] (an ontological ground partially broken with precisely through the establishment of autonomous logics of self-relating between appearances at more-than-material levels of existence).

One might want to pause at this point to consider how all of this is compatible with Žižek's adamantly avowed Lacanianism. Doesn't Lacanian theory generally treat the body as a passive receptacle or surface for receiving the images and signifiers inscribed onto it by virtue of its insertion into the mediating milieu of Imaginary-Symbolic reality? Isn't the material of raw human flesh, in Lacan's picture, a mere bearer of or support for extracorporeal constructions arranged by the representative instantiations of the big Other? Although the ontogenetic dynamics of subjectification temporally unfolding within the registers of the Imaginary and the Symbolic do indeed involve, according to Lacan, processes in which the body of the individual is stamped with marks and traits originating from an outside beyond this body, these processes themselves couldn't take place in the first place, wouldn't even be possible to begin with, were it not for human corporeality being such that this fleshly materiality is already open to the alterity of externally impressed inscriptions. What needs to be grasped here is the receptivity of the endogenous with respect to the exogenous (to resort to the vocabulary of the early Freud).

In *The Parallax View,* Žižek reminds readers of the central role language, with its marks and traits, enjoys in the Lacanian depiction of subjectivity. According to the Žižekian rendition of Lacan, the linguistic signifiers of the symbolic order, as a big Other, conjure into existence a subject that is neither the bodily being of an organism nor the meaningful stories of some sort of recognizable, humanized personal identity (in relation to this topic, Žižek refers to Damasio's distinction between the "core self" and the "autobiographical self" [Damasio 172–75, 224–25], rightfully arguing that the Lacanian subject is neither the moment-to-moment physiological reality of the core self nor the continuous, coherent ideational-narrative content of the autobiographical self) [PV 226–27]. Symbolic signifiers supposedly, as Žižek has it, bore holes and hollow out spaces within the positive plenitude of being, creating the nothingness he persistently identifies as subjectivity proper (as opposed to the subjectifying selfhood of the ego and its coordinates of identification).[11] As Žižek stipulates, this isn't to claim that the Lacanian subject is itself reducible to the signifying chains representing (or, more accurately, misrepresenting) this anonymous, faceless "x" (although, nonetheless, this subject wouldn't exist without the tension established between it, as a locus of enunciation [that is, Lacan's "subject of enunciation"], and the utterances in which this enunciator is alienated and alienates itself [that is, Lacan's "subject of the utterance"][12]). He explains:

> *[W]e should take Lacan's term "subject of the signifier" literally: there is, of course, no substantial signified content which guarantees the unity of the I; at this level, the subject is multiple, dispersed, and so forth—its unity is guaranteed only by the self-referential symbolic act, that is, "I" is a purely performative entity, it is the one who says "I." This is the mystery of the subject's "self-positing," explored by Fichte: of course, when I say "I," I do not create any new content, I merely designate myself, the person who is uttering the phrase. This self-designation nonetheless gives rise to ("posits") an X which is not the "real" flesh-and-blood person uttering it, but, precisely and merely, the pure Void of*

10. Johnston, "Lightening Ontology"; Johnston, Žižek's Ontology *283–84.*

11. Žižek, Sublime Object of Ideology *195; Žižek,* Tarrying with the Negative *39, 245–46; Žižek,* Indivisible Remainder *124, 160; Žižek,* Ticklish Subject *196–97.*

12. Lacan, Seminar XI *139–40, 207–08, 218, 236; Lacan, "L'étourdit" 449, 452–53.*

> *self-referential designation (the Lacanian "subject of the enunciation"): "I" am not directly my body, or even the content of my mind; "I" am, rather, that X which has all these features as its properties. The Lacanian subject is thus the "subject of the signifier"—not in the sense of being reducible to one of the signifiers in the signifying chain ("I" is not directly the signifier I, since, in this case, a computer or another machine writing "I" would be a subject), but in a much more precise sense: when I say "I"—when I designate "myself" as "I"—this very act of signifying adds something to the "real flesh-and-blood entity" (inclusive of the content of its mental states, desires, attitudes) thus designated, and the subject is that X which is added to the designated content by means of the act of its self-referential designation. It is therefore misleading to say that the unity of the I is "a mere fiction" beneath which there is the multitude of inconsistent mental processes: the point is that this fiction gives rise to "effects in the Real," that is to say, it acts as a necessary presupposition to a series of "real" acts.* [PV 244–45]

As Žižek subsequently puts it in a footnote, language functions, in this case, in the capacity of "a machine of 'abstraction'" [PV 414–15]. More specifically, the avatars of subjectivity furnished by the Symbolic big Other (in particular, proper names, as per Saul Kripke's "rigid designators," and personal pronouns, as per Émile Benveniste's "linguistic shifters"[13]) generate a subjective "One" (or, as the young Jacques-Alain Miller contends vis-à-vis Frege, zero [Miller 32–34]), namely, a contentless void devoid of anchoring in either the body or, for that matter, the rest of the language that gave birth to this void through the always fateful collision of bodies and languages. Additionally—this is crucial to note in order to avoid understandable misunderstandings—the abstraction of which Žižek speaks here is a precise theoretical notion tied into a common thread running through three of Žižek's favorite thinkers: Hegel (in terms of his claim that the idea of a concrete reality existing apart from conceptual abstractions is itself the height of conceptual abstraction), Marx (in terms of his concept of "real abstraction" indebted to the preceding Hegelian claim), and Lacan (in terms of his rebuttals of the May 1968 slogan protesting that "structures don't march in the streets"). In all three of its instances (Hegelian, Marxian, and Lacanian), the fundamental thesis regarding the notion of abstraction is that abstractions (such as, in Žižek's discussion glossed above, the abstractions constitutive of subjectivity as such) don't remain ineffectively removed from the particularities of the nitty-gritty concreteness of actual, factual existence. To paraphrase Lacan, these abstractions have legs—or, as Žižek phrases it, they have "effects in the Real." The material Real itself comes to be perturbed by the fictions it secretes.

With respect to the issue of the mind-body problem, this has important repercussions insofar as it provides a potent argument against epiphenomenalism. Mind (including, for present purposes, the dimensions of the subject) cannot be demoted to the status of pure epiphenomenon, as asserted by reductive mechanistic materialists. Why not? Even if dematerialized subjectivity, engendered by, among other things, the intervention of the signifiers of symbolic orders, is "illusory," it's an illusion that nonetheless actually steers cognition and comportment[14] (along similar lines, Alenka Zupančič refers to "the Real of an illusion"[15])—and, hence, thanks to certain other variables (most notably, neuroplasticity, about which more will be said below), this fiction partially remakes reality in

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13. Kripke, Naming and Necessity *48–49, 52–53, 57–58; Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language" 226; Johnston,* Žižek's Ontology *214–15, 217–20, 285.*

14. Johnston, "Lightening Ontology"; Johnston, Žižek's Ontology *281–84.*

15. Zupančič, Das Reale einer Illusion *141–42; Zupančič,* Esthétique du désir, éthique de la jouissance *52.*

its own image (with this dynamic process involving a materiality that is "plastic" as per Malabou's conceptualizations of plasticity[16]). Expressing this line of thought in a vaguely Hegelian style, the "true" reality of material being (as substance) passes into the "false" illusions of more-than-material nonbeing (as subject). But, through a movement of reciprocal dialectical modification, these illusions then pass back into their respective reality, becoming integral parts of it; and, at this stage, they no longer can be called illusions in the quotidian sense of the word (that is, false, fictional [epi]phenomena). The only further qualification to be added here, in light of Žižek's hitching of his dialectical materialism to the motif of parallax splits, is that this movement of reciprocal dialectical modification is interminable to the extent that it forever fails to close the gap opened up within the material Real through the initiation of processes of subjectification and the ensuing advent of subjectivity proper *qua* $.

However, to return to a point made several paragraphs earlier, this entire Lacanian-Žižekian theory of the subject, measured according to the standards of Žižek's own dialectical materialist position, requires something more to be philosophically satisfying. As an emergent dual-aspect monist, Žižek must go one explanatory step further by discerning the prior conditions of possibility for the event of the advent of subjectivity out of materiality. Unsatisfied with treating this event as a miraculous transubstantiation of the otherwise inert material density of the all-too-human individual body, a Žižekian dialectical materialist believes in the necessity of theoretically tracing the genesis of subject out of substance and, in tandem with this, refuses to associate the emergence of subjectivity with anything resembling the inexplicable abracadabra of, say, grace. Žižek himself notes that only thus can one remain a materialist and avoid backsliding into idealism—"idealism posits an ideal Event which cannot be accounted for in terms of its material (pre)conditions, while the materialist wager is that we *can* get 'behind' the event and explore how Event explodes out of the gap in/of the order of Being" [PV 166]. Briefly returning again to Lacan, there are indeed various moments in Lacan's corpus (ranging from the early *écrits* on the mirror stage and psychical causality to the late seminars of the 1970s[17]) when he acknowledges, with varying degrees of directness, the importance for his theory of subjectivity of delineating the material-ontological conditions of possibility for the surfacing of the subject [Johnston, "Ghosts of Substance Past" 34–36]. Through a backward glance informed by Žižek's parallax perspective, it can be seen that Lacan's model of subject-formation must ask and answer a crucial question: What makes Real bodies receptive to being overwritten by features of Imaginary-Symbolic realities? Posed in less overtly Lacanian language, what, in the nature of human corporeal materiality, inclines this nature in the direction of trajectories of denaturalization? What sort of being paves the path of its own eventual effacing?

A plethora of significant lines of speculation potentially could be pursued in response to these questions. Lacan himself sketches the contours of several distinct replies to such queries (replies not to be spelled out in extensive detail here). In addition to Lacan's ways of raising and wrestling with this issue of the material conditions of possibility (at the level of the body) for the emergence of the more-than-material (at the level of selfhood and subjectivity), Žižek, drawing on certain other authors (in particular, Dennett, LeDoux, and Malabou), mobilizes the resources of contemporary cognitive neuroscience:

> *Where . . . do we find traces of Hegelian themes in the new brain sciences? The three approaches to human intelligence—digital, computer-modeled; the neu-*

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16. Malabou, Que faire de notre cerveau? *15–17, 22; Malabou,* Future of Hegel *8–9, 73–74, 192–93.*

17. Lacan, "Mirror Stage as Formative of the I *Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" 78; Lacan, "Presentation on Psychical Causality" 144; Lacan,* Séminaire VIII *410; Lacan,* Séminaire XXIII *12; Lacan,* Séminaire XXIV.

Untitled (Two men), 2008
wood panel, digital print, canvas, oil, gold leaf
60x35x3
Gallery Le Guern, Warsaw

> *robiological study of brain; the evolutionary approach—seem to form a kind of Hegelian triad: in the model of the human mind as a computing (data-processing) machine we get a purely formal symbolic machine; the biological brain studies proper focus on the "piece of meat," the immediate material support of human intelligence, the organ in which "thought resides"; finally, the evolutionary approach analyzes the rise of human intelligence as part of a complex sociobiological process of interaction between humans and their environment within a shared life-world. Surprisingly, the most "reductionist" approach, that of the brain sciences, is the most dialectical, emphasizing the infinite plasticity of the brain—that is the point of Catherine Malabou's provocative Hegelian reading of the brain sciences, which starts by applying to the brain Marx's well-known dictum about history:* people make their own brain, but they do not know it. *What she has in mind is something very precise and well-grounded in scientific results: the radical* plasticity *of the human brain. This plasticity is displayed in three main modes: plasticity of development, of modulation, and of reparation. Our brain is a historical product, it develops in interaction with the environment, through human praxis. This development is not prescribed in advance by our genes; what genes do is precisely the opposite: they account for the structure of the brain, which is open to plasticity. . . . Vulgar materialism and idealism join forces against this plasticity: idealism, to prove that the brain is just matter, a relay machine which has to be animated from outside, not the site of activity; materialism, to sustain its mechanical determinist vision of reality. This explains the strange belief which, although it is now empirically refuted, persists: the brain, in contrast to other organs, does not grow and regenerate; its cells just gradually die out. This view ignores the fact that our mind does not only reflect the world, it is part of a transformative exchange with the world, it "reflects" the possibilities of transformation, it sees the world through possible "projects," and this transformation is also self-transformation, this exchange also modifies the brain as the biological "site" of the mind.* [PV 208–09]

Not only is the empirical fact of neuroplasticity pregnant with philosophical-theoretical ramifications that have yet to be fully explored and utilized in discussions of the relations between materiality and subjectivity—this fact, approached by Žižek for the first time in *The Parallax View,* helps to concretize key aspects of his Hegel-inspired ontology and corresponding theory of the subject. As Dennett and LeDoux accurately observe with regard to the plasticity of the brain, human beings are designed by nature to have redesignable natures, that is, at a larger level, biologically determined to be free (*qua* undetermined) in a sense beyond biology.[18] The plastic nature of the brain is the paradigmatic incarnation of Žižek's ontological notion of material being as a permeable, porous openness (rather than as a closed density or causally saturated heaviness). In this vein, he maintains that "the only way effectively to account for the status of (self-)consciousness is to assert the ontological incompleteness of 'reality' itself: there is 'reality' only insofar as there is an ontological gap, a crack, in its very heart" [PV 242]. These fissures fragmenting being from within are characterized by Žižek in a number of ways in different places. However, neuroplasticity here tangibly signifies the essential essencelessness or groundless ground of human nature, the natural mandate that seems to be missing right down to the bare bones of corporeality itself.[19] This plasticity, in its oscillations between the making and unmaking of an indefinite number of structures and phenomena, is noth-

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18. Dennett, Freedom Evolves *90–91, 93; LeDoux,* Synaptic Self *8–9; Žižek, PV 213–14.*
19. Johnston, Žižek's Ontology *106–11, 114–15, 172–73, 200, 205, 208.*

ing other than the embodied epitome of the new image of matter underpinning Žižekian dialectical materialist ontology.[20]

And yet, ontological openness alone, whether specifically as human neuroplasticity or generally as being's lack of integrated organic wholeness, is a necessary but not, by itself, sufficient condition for Žižek's correlative accounts of the initiation of processes of subjectification and the ensuing genesis of subjectivity. Psychoanalysis is quite relevant here. Of course, as already noted, Žižek opens up ontology, creating breathing room for subjects, by injecting the Freudian motif of conflict—for the later Freud in particular, with his dual-drive model, unsynthesized and irreconcilable divisions and ruptures are to be found within the bedrock of the very libidinal-material heart of human existence—into the nucleus of being itself. But more than this is required to extract subject from substance; an ontology of material being as shot through with cracks, gaps, and splits merely establishes the preconditions for the possibility of such an extraction as the absence of prohibiting conditions foreclosing this potentiality (that is, no stifling ontological closure smothers in advance subjects-to-come). As argued by this author elsewhere, three other ingredients must be added to Žižekian ontological openness—these three are complexity, affectivity, and temporality (the second and the third receiving sustained attention in Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis)—in order for his ontology and theory of subjectivity to come together in a systematic fashion. Summarizing much too quickly, the material being of Žižek's ontology, so as to give rise to something other than itself, must (1) harbor degrees of extreme complexity in terms of the relations between its fragmented features capable of canceling out, through the generation of loophole-producing short-circuits, any overriding pressure of "natural" default determinism as traditionally associated with standard, predialectical versions of materialism; (2) put into circulation forces of affectivity that prompt excessive investments in and attachments to specific elements of subjectification subsisting within the conflict-ridden spheres of extant existence; (3) at the level of temporality, unfold along temporally elongated trajectories of subjectification in which a series of select features of material being displace each other in a sequence of struggles driven by antagonistic tensions within the self-short-circuiting complexity of substance-as-potential-subject. This third dimension eventually brings to light the silhouette of the Lacanian-Žižekian subject-as-void, the emptied "x" emerging from the successive implosions of identification transpiring as moments of the processes of subjectification to which the volatile not-All of being gives rise [Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology* 222–23, 231–32].

Žižek hints that *The Parallax View* is a book meant to function as a systematizing encapsulation of the core components of his philosophical outlook. And yet, certain readers might experience a feeling of frustration in their attempts to discern the systematic unity supposedly underlying and tying together the wide-ranging discussions of the vast amount of diverse content contained in this text (analyses of philosophy, psychoanalysis, neuroscience, literature, film, politics, and so on—namely, the typical Žižekian smorgasbord of topics). Turning to another roughly contemporaneous reference he makes to Hegel (apart from the one cited at the very beginning of this essay) promises to help shed light on Žižek's understanding of what would count as systematicity. In a May 2006 interview broadcast on French radio, he comments on one of the features of his work for which he has become famous: his extensive use of examples drawn from numerous areas, including a plethora of bits plucked from contemporary popular culture's entertainment industries [Žižek, "Philosophie en situations"]. Whereas Žižek elsewhere appears to favor presenting these examples as handy illustrations for rendering more easily legible theoretical concepts already established prior to their application to the examples in question, here, in this radio interview, he maintains that both Hegel and himself operate in a particular dialectical fashion in their methodical navigations of the interplay between

20. Malabou, Que faire de notre cerveau? *127, 141, 146–47, 159, 161–64.*

empirical-historical instances and philosophical-theoretical concepts. More specifically, Žižek claims that, as a good Hegelian, he lets the form of the concept emerge from the content of the instance. And he proceeds to insist that, in a way, an example's inherent conceptual richness is always richer than the concepts distilled out of the example by the reflective consciousness of a philosopher (thus also providing a justification for his reexaminations of select examples reiterated throughout his writings insofar as the example requires repeated theoretical parsing in order for its implicit multifaceted significance to be made explicit).

Is this the method employed in *The Parallax View*? If so, how can a conceptually coherent philosophical-theoretical system arise out of an approach that tarries with a seemingly fragmented, heterogeneous multitude of disparate empirical-historical instances? Some people might be tempted to throw up their hands and deny the very possibility of anything systematic arising in this fashion. Others might go even further, accusing Žižek of pulling a cheap-and-easy trick through which, via the notion of parallax gaps as splits of incommensurability, he attempts to construct a system around his failure to be systematic (in other words, to appeal to Hegel in making a virtue out of this failure by hastily ontologizing his own intellectual inconsistencies, remaking being in the image of his idiosyncratic incoherence). A final return to Lacan, however, permits giving *The Parallax View* a much more sympathetic hearing (specifically by listening to Žižek with something akin to the ear of the psychoanalyst), a hearing this work genuinely deserves. As is well known, Lacan's strange style, the difficulty of the ways in which he conveys his teachings in both spoken and written formats, is part of his pedagogical technique in the training of aspiring future psychoanalysts; his articulations about the theory and practice of analysis, in order to be properly appreciated, must be interpretively approached by his audience in a manner roughly resembling how one, as an analyst, listens to an analysand's free associations. In short, Lacan tries to force his students to engage in analysis even while learning about analysis.

The texts of Lacan and Žižek sometimes seem to wander along a winding road strewn with *non sequiturs* and heading in a less-than-clear direction. But, as with even the most chaotic and disorganized associations of someone on the couch, there is invariably an integrated logic/pattern to be detected here. Simply put, for psychoanalysis, there is always method to the madness. Giving *The Parallax View* a hearing according to the theoretical criteria and parameters Žižek himself establishes therein—this Hegelian-style hearing (that is, evaluating a position according to its own standards) obviously must include Lacanian considerations—allows one to hear a recurrent refrain, a line of argumentation surfacing many times in this text with an almost obsessive insistence. This refrain is nothing other than the revivification of Hegel's frequently misunderstood emergent dual-aspect monism in the form of an ontology of the not-All One, a materialism of self-sundering substance generating out of itself structures of subjectivity coming to break with this substantial ground in their achieving a self-relating, transontological autonomy. Žižek consistently seeks to trace trajectories involving the immanent material genesis of thereafter more-than-material modes of transcendence. His labors and struggles in *The Parallax View* are oriented around the incredibly ambitious endeavor to assimilate, without simply liquidating, transcendental idealism (that is, the Kantian position animating the subsequent history of European philosophy up through the present, a history that justifiably could be described, by a paraphrase of the title of Freud's 1930 masterpiece, as "transcendental idealism and its discontents") within the framework of a position that is both dialectical and materialist. The title of the first section of the foreword to the 2002 second edition of *For They Know Not What They Do* speaks of "The Hard Road to Dialectical Materialism"; and the introduction to *The Parallax View* is entitled "Dialectical Materialism at the Gates." Perhaps what makes this such a difficult path to pursue, a path guaranteed to run up against powerful resistances, is that it begins only with the

absolute renunciation of faith in every figuration of the big Other whatsoever (including the deterministic authority of nature enshrined in the vulgar mechanistic materialism of contemporary scientism). The burden that must be borne by each traveler walking this "hard road" is the unbearable lightness of the absence of any and every One-All.

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