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A Squinting Gaze on the Parallax between Spirit and Nature

Frank Ruda

1.

A parallax names “the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight.”¹ If I close my right eye and look at something I hold in front of me and then repeat the same with my left eye closed, what the respective eyes see differs. Even though I hold in my hand one and the same thing and may not have moved it at all, the thing seems to have changed its position. This is almost too trivial an observation: there can be a difference in and to a thing that appears to be externally caused by the different perspectives from which I look at it. It is spontaneously tempting to understand this as a simple effect of changing our subjective perspective. A parallax would then amount to a subjective change (of perspectives) alone.

2.

This spontaneous understanding is problematic, because it misses a crucial component without which the concept of the parallax loses its determinacy (and hence its status as concept). Slavoj Žižek has systematically argued for as to why the parallax should be elevated into the ranks of philosophical concepts: with it, we are not only dealing with a transformation of a subjective epistemological position, but what is at stake is ultimately the object in question. The epistemic shift of subjective perspectives enables an insight into the ontological rift determining the constitution of the object. With the squint of an eye, I am confronted with an inconsistency in the perceived object: an inconsistency that is not externally caused by me but rather points to a different kind of subjective involvement. Being a peculiar convergent squint, a parallax view can make intelligible that and how the very inconsistency of an object or of objectivity is linked to my distorted relation to it. This distortion springs from “a redoubling of myself as standing outside and inside my picture,” which is why “the reality I see is never ‘whole’... it contains a blind spot, which signals my inclusion in it.”² Including my gaze

into the picture that I look at from the outside changes the whole picture. It pierces a hole into it, as much as it displaces me. The subject is not an object among objects but some- (strange-) thing that is integrated into the domain of objectivity, precisely in the place where the latter is itself not fully constituted and coherent. The relation between subjectivity and objectivity is a parallax one.

3.

Does this mean that every subject-object-relation is parallaxic in the very same sense? It seems rather obvious that convergent parallax squintings will look different, depending on the domain or specific relation in and onto which one looks awry. When, for example, the object in question is not a physical object but something political or the whole of (or the transcendental structure of) reality, what the specific parallax means (as there can be multiple types of parallax: ontological, political, economic, ecological, etc.)³ needs elucidation. One must add specificity to the singular, theoretical, and practical shapes, to use Hegel's term, of the parallax. This implies more than just inscribing my own position of perceiving reality into reality—since, this could still be rendered as a (more or less sophisticated) form of subjective perspectivism. The determinateness of the parallax must come from somewhere else, too. One must account for the fact that the objective rift that emerges due to the subjective shift must be regarded also as an enabling condition for the very movement through which it appears.

4.

With such a reading of the parallax, we leave subjective perspectivism behind and move to a peculiar form of (a parallax) objective-subjective/subjective-objective materialism. Žižek calls this materialism dialectical, “adopting what is arguably the most stupid philosophical system of the twentieth century,”⁴ “imbecility incarnate.”⁵ It is dialectical because it does not only emphasize a subjective impact on objectivity but also the entanglement of the objective constitution of subjectivity a retroactive precondition produced by subjectivity. So, with the insight into the objective inconsistency brought about by the subjective change of perspective, it becomes clear that the subjective transformation is conditioned by an objective inconsistency⁶—“the cause is a retroactive effect of its effects...”⁷

5.

This is the reason why in a dialectical materialist account of the parallax, we are ultimately dealing not only with one dimension of parallax “activity” and movement but with two interlinked ones: a two-dimensional, retroactive (objective) parallax condition of a parallax (subjective) movement, or a parallax within the transcendental

itself that retroactively enables the parallax view that makes it visible. This means that there is no epistemological barrier separating us from the thing in itself; we relate to it through the very inconsistency of our relation. For if the thing in itself is parallax, there is a way of grasping it, namely through a parallax view. One general ontological implication of this is that there can never be a consistent ontology—be it materialist or idealist—simply because consistency is in a way just a necessarily false appearance.⁸ We only see consistency as long as we do not see things clearly by squinting our eyes. There can be no consistent ontology (of consistency) and no ontology which, by sticking to one principle of coherence, could ever sustain itself and nonetheless explain the emergence of subjectivity. It seems a parallax is conceptually only a real parallax if we are effectively dealing with a (dialectical) parallax movement between two parallax movements (between subjectivity and objectivity).

6.

This must mean that not only subjectivity and objectivity each cannot constitute themselves coherently but also their relationship is beset by an “insurmountable parallax gap”—a gap around which Žižek’s “entire work circulates,”⁹ because it is the displaced center of his dialectical materialism. In this sense, the parallax gives an account of what we mean when we speak of “negativity.” If the parallax can thus never be one and unified—it is the clinamen in any one—and we must thus be dealing with a movement between two, we must also account for their relation (for the third element)—which, again, we can only do from making the move from one to the other and back (as there is no other, neutral way of doing it). The parallax de-substantializes not only substance but also the subject, and finally their relationship. There is no preordained place for the subject in any substantial framework nor is there any (even evacuated or unsubstantial) substance in the subject.¹⁰ There is only an un-relation between subject and substance. This is implied by the parallax between two subjective and objective parallax constitutions—a swerve between a shift and a rift.

7.

This un-relational, parallax parallax manifests in different *modes*.¹¹ There is, following an enumeration that one can find in Žižek, the *neurobiological parallax* (on the one hand side, we have the human face, on the other, there is the material “brainmeat,”¹² so that we have two closely linked incompatible sides); there is *the parallax of ontological difference* (“one cannot reduce the ontological horizon to its ontic ‘roots’, but one also cannot deduce the ontic domain from the ontological horizon, that is, transcendental constitution is not creation”¹³); there is *the parallax of political economy* (the genuine logic of politics that manifests in the historical practice of class struggle and then the critique of political economy with its logic of commodities: both hang together without any direct point of contact); *the parallax between dialectical materialism and historical*

materialism (they are “essentially the same,”¹⁴ but the latter emphasizes the difference between thought and sociohistorical being wherein being determines thought, whereas the former emphasizes that such determination only exists insofar as thought takes sociohistorical situations as what conditions it); *the parallax of the Real* (“the Lacanian Real has no positive-substantial consistency, it is just the gap between the multitude of perspectives on it”¹⁵); and *the parallax between desire and drive* (whenever we seek to grasp what we really enjoy in our own singular way, it seems to escape us and we seem to be entangled in things we do attempt to avoid).¹⁶ And certainly there cannot but also be a *parallax between spirit and nature* (as the opposite and potential retroactive precondition of spirit).

8.

How does one conceive of this last parallax between spirit and nature? This is a real question because the spontaneous understanding of nature—as that which is opposed to what has (like spirit) a history in the strong sense of the term—does not seem to be historically constituted (and thus seems to simply ontologically precede spirit). We would lose the parallax if one side simply constituted the other (as in the thought that man emerges from nature). There appears to be a rather harsh difference, an antagonism between spirit and nature without any parallax. But, as Žižek once remarked about the dialectical method, “[w]hat if the point precisely *is* to not ‘resolve’ antagonism ‘in reality’, but simply to enact a parallax shift by means of which antagonisms are recognized ‘as such’ and thereby perceived in their positive role?”¹⁷ How does one enact a parallax shift between spirit and that which appears to be its opposite, nature?¹⁸

9.

In line with Žižek’s comment, it seems possible to answer this question by recourse to Hegel. One standard reading of the spirit-nature relationship in Hegel holds that spirit seeks itself—its own categories and concepts, structures, and inferential relations—in nature and thereby reaches the point where it becomes able to identify the very material potential for its own becoming in a reflective turning back onto it. The problem with such a reading is that it basically suggests Hegel knew nature only as something ultimately concocted by spirit. Thereby, it becomes unintelligible what “nature” actually was supposed to be, apart from the material medium for spirit’s auto-recognition.

10.

The place where Hegel systematically deals with nature, in the philosophy of nature, is to be found in his *Encyclopaedia*.¹⁹ The transition into “nature” in the *Encyclopaedia* is made from the previous part, the so-called small *Logic*. It has often been read in the

same critical manner in which the end of the *Science of Logic*, the so-called big *Logic*, has been attacked with regard to its very end. Here the absolute idea seems to copulate with itself with the effect of releasing itself from its loins into nature.²⁰ This has often been taken to be both the highest peak and the purest eclipse of idealist philosophy. We only get to “nature” when after the big *Logic*, there is no immediate philosophy of nature, but another logic, the “small *Logic*.”²¹ After the *Science of Logic* has run its course, it must be repeated in a different, notably smaller or encyclopedic form to then be able to also repeat again the releasing birth act of nature from the bosom of the absolute idea in another form. The gist of this is that we cannot simply—as is already clear from this rather abstract reconstruction of the place of nature in Hegel’s system—consider and take nature as a given; rather, we must account for how it is brought about. Whatever one makes of all the charges against Hegel, it seems clear “nature,” that which is supposed to condition spirit, is a product.

11.

But is this not precisely the worst metaphysical idealism to assume that nature is a product of spirit? Wasn’t this the whole point—that it is problematic to conceive of nature from the perspective of “God... before the creation of nature and of... finite spirit”²²? This sounds like onto-theology at its metaphysical worst, and this might be why “the transition from logic to the philosophy of nature is... without a doubt one of the most difficult and frustrating transitions in Hegel’s system for both critics and proponents of his thought.”²³ What is it precisely that is created when “nature” is created? (The philosophy of) Nature appears after the end of the small *Logic* and before the beginning of the so-called *Philosophy of Spirit*. One way of reading this is to assume that we move from logics to nature to spirit. Nature then is conceived of the site where spirit emerges. Yet, taking into account that before the *Science of Logic* could commence its task, there had to be the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—a book that Hegel for a long time conceived of as introduction to his system, a system supposed to commence with the *Logic*²⁴—it becomes obvious that in Hegel’s system, there is more than the one sequential order (of logic-nature-spirit). We can also read the triadic structure by beginning with spirit that learns how to think logically and scientifically and is then able to investigate nature properly. But we can also take into account that “nature” describes the (material) condition of spirit. Spirit starts to understand it adequately as its precondition by creating a science of thought, that is, through a science of nature; hence, we get nature-spirit-logic. All of these individual sequences are repeated after having traversed all its members. Yet, the concept of “nature” seems to vary depending on the sequence.²⁵ And is Hegel not suggesting that we need the cognition and philosophy of nature to tell us what we are talking about when we talk about “nature”²⁶? Nature seems to be torn between being a product and being a precondition of spirit, a logical deduction and a material resource. Depending from where and with what we look at it—closing the logical, the spiritual, or the natural eye—nature changes its nature.²⁷

12.

To say something about nature is to say something about the transition into and/or out of nature. One can only speak of nature only if one also speaks of logic and spirit. Here we draw nearer to what appears to be the singular parallax, the parallax between spirit and nature. What does need to happen so that we can make the transition into the natural domain, so that we can begin with nature? Hegel accounts for it by introducing in §237 of the *Encyclopaedia* what he calls the “absolute idea.”²⁸ The idea in general “is the *truth*,” which means “that objectivity corresponds to the concept.”²⁹ What does the concept here correspond to? Answer: to the insight into what the objectivity of thinking is. Thought thinking itself reaches a point where the concept of thinking corresponds to the act of thinking (the concept of thinking)—the subjective act of thinking and the objective constitution of thinking absolutely coincide or collide. Thinking analytically separates these two dimensions—because “it merely takes up its object,” that is, thinking, “giving the latter full play, as if it were merely looking upon its movement and development”³⁰—yet also syntheticized the two by applying “the strenuous effort of holding off one’s own notions [*Einfälle*] and particular opinions which are always trying to assert themselves.”³¹ The absolute idea brings together theory and practice, practice of theory and theory of practice of what thinking is. With the absolute idea, we do not simply get a concept of thinking but we think the concept of thinking in such a way that we let ourselves be forced to think in a way that also detaches us, over and again, from all mere subjective associations and we thus attain a thought-objectivity. Hegel therefore identifies this unity—of thought—with what he calls the speculative method.

13.

Why does one need to introduce the concept of method here? The moment the investigation of the logical structure of thought reaches the point where we realize that this examination is what thinking is—determining and being determined by itself—we need to formulate a concept of what we have done by examining thought. This leads thought to formulate a system(atic) (approach to and) of thinking and this means to formulate thinking in terms of a method of thought that examines itself (and thus it also examines and thinks what it means to examine itself). The absolute idea is a name for the retroactive and totalizing—and in this sense methodological³²—comprehension and articulation of what needs to have happened for thought to think thought. If the *Logic* depicts God’s thoughts before the creation of the world and nature, at one point God during the process of creation stops and reflects on what she has been doing. And, in the end, God at this point could not but have had the idea that now it is done (and good in the Platonic sense of the term).³³ At this point, we reached the end of the *Logic* and of first part of the *Encyclopaedia*. Then there comes the final §244, wherein Hegel famously states, mirroring, but modifying, the last passages of the *Logic*,³⁴ that “the absolute freedom of the idea is that... in the absolute truth of itself, *resolves to release* [itself, F.R.] *freely from itself... as nature*.”³⁵ The idea decides to release itself from itself, and the form in which this happens is nature.

14.

Hegel had defined in §18 of the *Encyclopaedia* the philosophy of nature as that part which scientifically deals with “the idea in its otherness.”³⁶ The idea in its otherness is because we encounter an externality—at least if we defined the idea as the immanent entanglement of theory and practice, method and invention, tradition and progress (as Hegel did). So, we find something that is external to this dialectical knot between theory and practice of thinking. In nature—at least in nature at its most basic, which is conceptualized first as space and then as time—thought cannot and does not recognize itself. Thought had methodically established a self-determining order, but it cannot find it in nature. And it might not be entirely accidental that the second part of the *Encyclopaedia*—in its most recent published form—begins with a “Zusatz,” an addendum. It is clear that the “Zusätze” are put together by the later editors of the *Encyclopaedia* from students’ notes. Yet, does this suggest that Hegel commented on his text during the transition from *Logic* to nature orally (and extensively)? It appears unclear if the addendum with which the philosophy of nature begins is an addendum to the preceding paragraph (i.e., to the last paragraph of the *Logic*, i.e. §244). It is unclear, because this paragraph already has a “Zusatz” and the first paragraph in the philosophy of nature is consistently §245, which appears after the addendum. Is thus this “Zusatz” at the beginning an addendum to the addendum? Can one make the transition only by an addendum? Or is it a pure addendum without a preceding paragraph? What was Hegel commenting on when he made the transition into the philosophy of nature? The preceding paragraph? It does not seem to be the case, as the entire addendum is on the concept of the philosophy of nature in general. Might this be the only way in which we get from logic to nature, by stepping out of the succession of paragraphs and addenda? Like a pure comment without anything to comment on? Does this mean, if we want to know how nature commences—does it begin with and as a “Zusatz”—the answer might actually be: no idea?³⁷ Would this already be the idea in its otherness?

15.

Hegel describes the transition as a release but also in terms of a return. There is a “return to the beginning,” which is “at the same time a move forward.”³⁸ It is as if at the end of a process of thinking thought that discovers itself by inventing itself along the way, and at one point in this process, thinking reflects on the very conditions that allowed it to do what it thereby is about to complete. It has an idea of what it has done, but it does only really have an idea of what it has done if it also thinks the conditions—even if they are self-positing or produced—that enabled it to do what it did. It needs an idea of what precedes the idea. Those conditions are what conditioned thought, but thought only knows this after it started determining itself as thought (and thus also determines what it is conditioned by). At the end of the small *Logic*, it has no idea what it is conditioned by, which is why it now must take a closer look—and Hegel therefore speaks at the high point of the idea also the language of “intuition [*Anschauung*].”³⁹ Thought at the highest peak of its own self-referential theoretical and practical activity

looks back over its shoulder and in returning determines what will have conditioned it all along since its own commencement.⁴⁰ Thinking to grasp purely what it is can only commence by subtracting all external determination, the whole world, history, and nature as well as any preconception to itself. Only in this way thought thinkingly determines itself. But when it purely thinks through itself, thought at one point—when it reaches the absolute idea of itself—also thinks the situation in which it thinks (and subtracting everything outside of itself might appear to be a negative way of doing so).⁴¹ So, when thinking thinks thought, thought at one point also thinks what “it” was like when it did not think. Thought thinks “it” by attempting to leave itself out of the picture, by forming a concept of what the world was like without it. It is as if thought on its purest heights cannot but think its own demise.⁴² The highest form of thought thinking thought—the absolute idea—is at the same time its lowest: thought thinking its own absence, thought becoming forgetful, oblivious, forgetting itself. This oblivion manifests as nature.

16.

This imagination of thought’s own absence is different from the way in which Hegel criticizes the problematic post-Kantian conception of objective cognition that aims to subtract the subjective act of cognizing an object of experience from the cognition of this very object.⁴³ It is as if, strangely here, after the end of the small *Logic*, what previously seemed an unrealizable task is actually realized. But not in the same way. Hegel is not simply forgetful of his own deconstruction of problematic presuppositions. “Nature” is indeed spirit’s conceptual name for the absence of spirit.⁴⁴ But everything hinges on how to read this with regard to the constitutive parallax relation between spirit and nature. Thought seeks to understand itself and therefore, as Hegel almost everywhere argues, needs to externalize itself. Pure thought externalized as such leads to pure externality, which for Hegel determines the concept of nature as it first manifests itself as space.⁴⁵

17.

What is it to think of nature as a space (inhabited by all kinds of things) where thought is not? One can start answering this by taking recourse to an analysis, provided by Gérard Wajcman, of a phenomenon of contemporary mass media: the fascination with animal-life documentaries.⁴⁶ Wajcman suggests that the documentaries allow for the belief that in the natural realm, everything is in order and there is no distress or disorientation. Animals always seem to know what to do, when and with whom to do it, etc. The natural animal world seems happily be deprived of all the things that trouble human beings. Wajcman suggests watching animals is enjoyable precisely because they do not have the problems we have. Nature is truly external to the sphere(s) of (sexualized) spirit: “Between men and women it’s been pretty messy... Not at all as it is with animals where everybody seems to know perfectly well how to do it. How, and with

whom, and when.”⁴⁷ Thought conceiving of the conditions of its own commencement, and thus of itself, conceives of the absence of thought in a particular way: the absence of thought is an enjoyable thought.⁴⁸

18.

Why are we dealing with a parallax here? Not simply because thought imagines nature to be everything that thought is not but because thought imagines nature as that which precedes and thus conditions thought in such a way that we will be able to take it as a key to thought’s emergence—as the anatomy of the human is the key to that of the ape, as Marx will later remark. Yet, nature is not on every level as harmoniously non-spiritual; otherwise, it would be difficult to account for the emergence of something that is not nature from within nature.⁴⁹ Nature is not the complete absence of order and lawfulness;⁵⁰ or, more specifically, not every absence is the same.⁵¹ And nature is—this is crucial—a specific kind of absence: an absence that is linked to a peculiar material presence. For nature is not simply an invention of thought—thought finds something outside of itself⁵² that it considers to mean something for itself. “Nature” is something that thought finds outside of itself and internalizes it by identifying it with the idea of its own absence.⁵³ Thought is thus materially dealing with something when it is dealing with its own absence—and this absence repels it, yet it is also attracted by it, because thought “is presaged in Nature.”⁵⁴ What does this mean for what “nature” is? It means that thought projects onto nature that it is an embodiment of its own absence, but then forgets this same projection and hence becomes actually and effectively absent from its own projection onto nature. This cannot but mean for Hegel that nature “remains a problem.”⁵⁵

19.

Why is it a problem? Because it strangely seems to lead into the following scenario: thought seeks to understand itself better, identifies something that it finds outside of itself as material representation of its own absence—and thereby internalizes it into its process of self-understanding—but then starts thinking in a natural manner. Why natural? Because nature is at first the realm of externality, and as soon as thought identified nature as material embodiment of its own absence, it conceives of thought and nature as if the two were simply external opposites. The difference between thought and nature is thereby dealt with as if it were a difference between two bodies. Thought has a spontaneous tendency to become a problematically naturalist when it seeks to understand what it is conditioned by and posits this precondition as nature. The problem appears thus clearly: there is no logical transition from *Logic* to nature—since thought does not simply produce nature, we leave the terrain of logic. But as soon as there is nature, thought forgets that it is compelled to take material nature as embodiment its own absence. So, thought sees a logic of nature at work at its own origin. Yet, there is also no natural transition from nature to spirit (or thought), since otherwise we would never leave nature and thus there would be no spirit. Nature is and remains a problem.

20.

We think from the perspective of either nature or thought: both are tied together, mutually implied in the other, yet cancelling each other out, leading to the inner inconsistency of the respective other. Logical thought has to forget that it can only get to nature if it forgets itself. And if it does so, it forgets what it is looking at. It takes nature to be a natural given. Subsequently spirit becomes just another natural emergence (which we can only explain if we assume that nature inconsistencies, too). Nature does, in turn, not care about spirit's emergence; only spirit does—the planet, for example, will go on even when human life destroys itself. To depict this parallax relation between spirit and nature, Hegel has used a wonderful concept.⁵⁶ He states—according to his students' notes—that “Spirit finds in Nature... its counter-image [*Gegenbild*].” It is not an *Ebenbild*, similitude, but a counter-image to what thought thinks of itself and how it sees itself. Hegel argues, in line with Žižek, that we see nature with either the logical or the natural eye closed. Nature looks radically different each time, as does spirit in consequence as well. What we see in it is the counter-image enclosed in every image we have of spirit.

Notes

- 1 Slavoj Žižek, *Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 17.
- 2 Žižek, *Parallax View*, 17.
- 3 Žižek considers the discursive status of philosophy itself to be that of the parallax view (so, of the parallax in a general manner that then needs specification)—a thesis he unfolds in his reading of Kojin Karatani. Cf. Žižek, *Parallax View*, 17 and Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).
- 4 Slavoj Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 102.
- 5 Žižek, *Parallax View*, 5.
- 6 This is how one can read Žižek's claim that “*L'objet petit a* can be defined as a pure parallax object... the inscription of subjectivity into the object” (Žižek, *Parallax View*, 18).
- 7 Žižek, *Parallax View*, 24.
- 8 For this cf. Žižek, *Sex*, 17–65.
- 9 Slavoj Žižek, *Interrogating the Real* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 17.
- 10 Cf. Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018), 17ff.
- 11 This leads to a complex combinatorics: there is a subjective parallax, an objective parallax, and a parallax of their non-relation. These three in a peculiar way mirror the different dimension of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, so that we have to say something about the imaginary imaginary, the imaginary symbolic, the imaginary real, the symbolic symbolic, etc. and in the same way about the subjective subjective, the subjective objective, the subjective relationship, the objective objective, etc. A model for this was developed by Žižek in: Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do. Enjoyment as Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008), xi–cvi.
- 12 Žižek, *Interrogating the Real*, 17.

- 13 Žižek, *Interrogating the Real*, 17.
- 14 Žižek, *Parallax View*, 6.
- 15 Žižek, *Parallax View*, 7.
- 16 This is not an exhaustive list—which would be impossible to give anyway. Cf., for example, also “Hegel’s Parallax” (cf. Žižek, *Sex*, 97–102). Žižek also made repeated use of Sartre’s claim that if one is attacked from both sides of the political spectrum, one must have hit something worth attacking, which points to the fact that the real object of a political debate can sometimes only be addressed through such a swerving, squinting movement, hitting it awry, as it were.
- 17 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), xvii.
- 18 Obviously, one influential way of replying to this question was formulated in Engels’ *Dialectic of Nature*. I will leave this text aside here, but will return to it in the nearby future.
- 19 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature. Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences (1830)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 20 For an opposite argument, cf. William Maker, “The Very Idea of the Idea of Nature, or Why Hegel Is Not an Idealist.” In *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 1–28.
- 21 For a detailed reading of problems related to this, cf. again Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*.
- 22 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29.
- 23 Benjamin Berger, “‘The Idea that Is’: On the Transition from Logic to Nature in Hegel’s System,” *Pli. The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 31: *Hegel and the Sciences: Philosophy of Nature in the 21st Century* (2019): 69–87, here: 70. If this really is a “transition” is a crucial part of the question.
- 24 The details of the relationship are more complicated. For this cf. again: Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*.
- 25 I am here reformulating the argument of note 12, only for the three terms: logic, nature, spirit.
- 26 Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, 4.
- 27 It is important to remark that neither of the three triadic sequences is convincing on its own. Reading them together explains Hegel’s emphasis on the image of the “circle of circles” (cf. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 751) as *modus operandi* and *representandi* of philosophy. It points to the fact that one must dialecticize the three sequential orders. For a more detailed reading of this, cf. Frank Ruda, “Imagine There Is No Nature. Preliminaries for a Dialectical Ecology” (forthcoming).
- 28 It marks the third and final section of the doctrine of the concept, which itself is the third and final part of the logic. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 299ff.
- 29 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia*, 283.
- 30 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia*, 301.
- 31 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia*, 301.
- 32 The *methodos* of this method is one that is identified fully only in retroaction. Only at the end will we know where the path we have been wondering on will have led us to.
- 33 Hegel therefore states that with the idea of method is presented as a “systematic totality” (Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 243)—a totality of differential determinations that determine the concepts generated on the way. All concepts generated in the path of

- the *Logic* are systematically linked through the retroactive closure at the end which is brought about by the concept of the speculative method.
- 34 It would be worth a study of its own to examine the precise differences in the endings of the small and of the big *Logic*. I leave this aside here. Elsewhere, I showed that the *Logic* can be read as a depiction of the practical unfolding of what Badiou calls truth-procedure (which does clarify that the *Logic* is not as such—simply—an ontology, but rather accounts for transformations occurring in the discourse of ontology). Cf. Frank Ruda, “Hegel’s Immanence of Truths.” In *Badiou and the German Tradition of Philosophy*, ed. Jan Völker (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 51–68.
- 35 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 303. The English translation makes it quite difficult to get that the idea releases itself from itself in a specific form, namely as nature. It rather generates the kind of impression that led to all the idealist and metaphysical readings. In the 1830 version, Hegel uses “sich... frei aus sich zu entlassen [to freely release itself from itself].” G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse [1830]*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 393.
- 36 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 46.
- 37 Some of Hegel’s readers suggested—following Hegel’s own explicit statement that “there is no transition that takes place” (Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 752)—that therefore there is no transition from logic to nature (as it cannot be made from within the logic nor can it occur in nature)—and we here see how the link, the non-relation between the two clearly, comes to the fore. Cf. Donald Philip Verene, “Hegel’s Nature.” In *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 209–25, here: 220.
- 38 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 303.
- 39 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 303.
- 40 “The Philosophy of Nature itself belongs to this part of return; for it is that which... assures to Spirit the knowledge of its essence in Nature” (Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 14).
- 41 Which Hegel indicates by including the so-called “preliminary conceptions” at least into the *Encyclopaedia*—and it can be argued that in a very different way the *Phenomenology* fulfils a similar function for the greater *Logic*. Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 47–134.
- 42 Which might be one reason as to why “Physics and the Philosophy of Nature... is worse than it supposes itself to be.” Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 3.
- 43 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 45ff.
- 44 An instructive contemporary reading can be found in: Wes Furlotte, *The Problem of Nature in Hegel’s Final System* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
- 45 This is very different from the idea that spirit seeks in nature a yet evolving spirit as many readers of Hegel have argued. It is also remarkable that Hegel gives clear conceptual precedence to space over time—not only in line with contemporary physics but also different from the Kant of the first Critique. Cf. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, 13f.
- 46 Cf. Gérard Wajcman, “The Animals that Treat Us Badly,” *Lacanian Ink* 33 (Spring 2009), 126–45, here: 131. For Žižek’s reading of this, cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil. Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014), 203.
- 47 Wajcman, “The Animals,” 131. In a sense, one can state that this is one way of finding the “universal” in the particular and empirical that Hegel talks about in §21. Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 55.
- 48 It is like thought regressive as if it were so drunk that it forgets what it is and becomes “Spirit estranged from itself; in Nature Spirit lets itself go (*ausgelassen*), a Bacchic God unrestrained and unmindful of itself” (Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature*, 14).

- 49 This resonates with Žižek's repeated critique of the idea of a "mother nature." Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Disparities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 22ff.
- 50 Which is why it is also important that one thereby should not wrongly just hypostatize contingency as something that is abstract in nature and the most difficult to think or come to terms with; the absence of structure is still determined ex negativo determined. Hegel will argue for a non-coherent concept of nature. Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 1, 216f.
- 51 Think of the endlessly used example of the Lubitsch joke about the difference between a "coffee without milk" and "without cream." Absence is never simply identical, or is it?
- 52 Hegel at the very end of the small *Logic* states that the idea "is the process of intuiting"—and intuiting suggesting one looks at something external (or externality as such). Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia*, 1, 303.
- 53 The idea of a thought that is not yet really thought and thus immersed into nature—so thought is there but not as thought—is what Hegel also describes as "the primal (ursprünglichen) state of innocence." Cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 2, 8.
- 54 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 2, 3.
- 55 Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 2, 3. Cf. also: G.W.F. Hegel, "Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Natur." In *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 24.1 (Hamburg: Meiner, 2012), 3.
- 56 "This is... the goal of the Philosophy of Nature that spirit, that Spirits finds in Nature its own essence, i.e. the Notion, finds its counterpart [*Gegenbild*] in it" (Hegel, *Encyclopaedia* 2, 13).