Žižek and Performance

Edited by

Broderick Chow and Alex Mangold

Performance Philosophy

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Series Preface

This series is published in association with the research network Performance Philosophy (http://performancephilosophy.ning.com/), which was founded in 2012. The series takes an inclusive, interdisciplinary, and pluralist approach to the field of Performance Philosophy – aiming, in due course, to comprise publications concerned with performance from a wide range of perspectives within philosophy – whether from the Continental or Analytic traditions, or from those which focus on Eastern or Western modes of thought. Likewise, the series will embrace philosophical approaches from those working within any discipline or definition of performance, including but not limited to, theatre, dance, music, visual art, performance art, and performativity in everyday life.

In turn, the series aims to both sharpen and problematise the definition of the terms 'performance' and 'philosophy', by addressing the relationship between them in multiple ways. It is thus designed to support the field's ongoing articulation of its identity, parameters, key questions, and core concerns; its quest is to stage and restage the boundaries of Performance Philosophy as a field, both implicitly and explicitly. The series also aims to showcase the diversity of interdisciplinary and international research, exploring the relationship between performance and philosophy (in order to say: 'This is Performance Philosophy.'), while also providing a platform for the self-definition and self-interrogation of Performance Philosophy as a field (in order to ask and ask again: 'What is Performance Philosophy?' and 'What might Performance Philosophy become?'). That is to say, what counts as Performance Philosophy must be ceaselessly subject to redefinition in the work of performance philosophers as it unfolds.

But this does not mean that 'anything goes' or that the field of Performance Philosophy is a limitless free-for-all. Rather, both the field and this series specifically bring together all those scholars for whom the question of the *relationship* between performance and philosophy and, therefore, the *nature* of both performance and philosophy (including their *definitions*, but also their 'ontology' or 'essential conditions'), are of primary concern. However, in order to maintain its experimental and radical nature, Performance Philosophy must also be open to including those scholars who may challenge extant concepts of 'performance' and 'philosophy'. In this sense, 'What is Performance Philosophy?' could be considered one of the field's unifying (or at least, shared) questions, just as the question 'What is Philosophy?' has been a shared question for philosophers for centuries. This is not mere circularity, but an absolutely necessary methodological reflexivity that must

constitute an aspect of any field, which otherwise leaves its own axioms and premises un-interrogated. Indeed, the very vitality of a field of knowledge lies in its willingness to persistently question its own boundaries rather than rule anything out once and for all. The intention is not to police these boundaries, but to provide a public forum where they might be both stated and contested.

The absolute timeliness of Performance Philosophy – both as a field and as a book series – is four-fold. In the first instance, it coincides with a (self) re-evaluation of Performance Studies as having long since come of age as a discipline. Second, it takes place in the context of the increasing importance of the notion of 'practice as research' in the arts. Third, it reflects an increased engagement with Philosophy across performing arts scholarship. Finally, it is emerging simultaneously with an intensification of the questioning of what counts as Philosophy and what form philosophical thinking might take – for instance, in the context of new work emerging from object-oriented ontology (Harman, Brassier et al.) and non-philosophy (Laruelle, Mullarkey et al.). Specifically, philosophy is becoming increasingly interested in its own performance and performativity, and in looking to the arts as a source of models for itself as it moves away from traditional metaphysics. This series is uniquely positioned to explore these currents.

We might note here that a certain anti-performance bias that has been constitutional in the history of philosophy, as either demonstrated or criticised by virtually every philosopher of note from Plato to Nietzsche, from Kierkegaard to Sloterdijk, Derrida, Weber et al., is clearly part of the inherited academic terrain. The purpose of the series is not to offer yet another 'introduction' to these philosophers by re-stating what they have already said, but to engage with the pedagogic, political, practical, and theoretical potential of the questions that are raised, not least as they concern the academy. This resonates in turn with what is currently being addressed in Europe, Australia, and elsewhere over what constitutes 'Practice as Research' (which itself relates to long-standing debates within Social Research). This engagement also helps to explain, at least partly, why in recent years Philosophy Departments in universities world-wide have become increasingly dominated by those schools of philosophy that stem from the analytic, or language centred traditions of philosophy, to the virtual total exclusion of those equally well-founded phenomenological and hermeneutic strands of philosophical enquiry for which the body, corporeality, and materiality are of central relevance.

In seeking to foster a platform for the publication of research findings in which a plurality of notions relating to Performance Philosophy may be addressed and negotiated, the series hopes to claim back *for* philosophy some of the valuable approaches that have in recent years gradually become woefully underrepresented within Philosophy Departments, while

at the same time bringing fresh philosophical perspectives to bear on the cultural practices of performance. For this reason we do not consider the series as belonging exclusively to the realm of either Performance Studies or Philosophy, for its purpose is precisely to contribute to the process of defining Performance Philosophy as a field of its own.

Laura Cull, Alice Lagaay, and Freddie Rokem

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The idea for the present book came while Broderick was staring idly out of a window on the London Underground, and it quickly became an exceptional and challenging project. We were overwhelmed with the response we received for our initial call for papers, and we are similarly amazed to now be publishing such a remarkable array of essays. Our first thank you, therefore, has to go out to our contributors. We are grateful to all of you for making the editing process such an eventful and rewarding experience.

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BC & AM,
March 2014

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Slavoj Žižek was born, writes books, and will die.

Introduction: Performing Žižek: Hegel, Lacan, Marx, and the Parallax View

Alex Mangold

Slavoj Žižek is a cultural phenomenon. Throughout the last three decades, the Slovenian philosopher has become one of the most influential thinkers of our time. He has been described as 'the most despicable philosopher in the west' (Kirsch),[1] the 'Elvis of cultural theory' (Taylor)[2] and a 'cross between guru and gadfly, sage and showman' (Eagleton).[3] His work has been the subject of numerous analyses and commentaries; it has been reviewed dozens of times. His more than fifty books have been translated into twenty languages, and – as Sharpe and Boucher put it in a recent introduction to Žižek – he has 'radically divided critics and commentators, often along political lines.'[4] Yet despite his undisputed success as a cultural critic and philosopher, there are still a great number of people who simply don't like him very much.

There is no doubt about Žižek's claim to fame as one of the most-well-known Marxist thinkers of our time; he is witty, openly subversive, and more than just a little weird. But there is something about his cultural criticism and his train of thought that sometimes makes it hard to grasp and controversial, even for some of the most passionate Marxist academics. Žižek knows how to portray himself as an eloquent advocate of the left, as a critical thorn in the side of a neoliberalist and conservative elite. But although his subversive attitude and his critical comments towards so-called 'ethical' capitalism and our current climate of financial and sociocultural crises have seen his fan base increase massively in recent years, he still produces a range of mixed feelings when it comes to his alleged communist agenda,[5] his view of other academics[6] or his downright hostile attitude towards academic teaching and administration.[7]

The fact that Žižek draws his examples from an eclectic mix of popular culture, complex continental philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis further adds to his controversial reception. To outsiders, Žižek's confrontational attitude and his argumentative flexibility not only illustrate his chameleon-like qualities as a philosopher and leftist critic; they also make it next to impossible to openly argue or to convincingly disagree with him.

His ongoing disputes with theorists such as Judith Butler, Peter Sloterdijk and Noam Chomsky are certainly very entertaining, but they limit the (potentially positive) effect a more general critique of his methods and his popularity could have on his philosophy. Žižek's train of thought can be both purposefully complicated and enlightening at the same time, but his arguments, in other words, are ultimately always framed by a controversial media persona. As a cultural icon, he thus builds on the very controversy he (re)creates; leaving only little room for a detailed evaluation of his methodology. Žižek once famously claimed that 'making me popular is a resistance against taking me serious[ly]!'[8] Yet while this may hold true for more conservative circles and for the public domain in general, in academia, his often contradictory arguments and his Marxist radicalism have been reason enough for some to take considerable offence.[9]

Žižek wouldn't be Žižek, however, if '[u]nlike many other intellectuals', he didn't 'thrive on this controversy.'[10] And Žižek also wouldn't be Žižek, if – behind all the controversy surrounding him as a person – he didn't have quite a number of important things to say. His alleged persona as the 'leftist terrorist'[11] of cultural studies may sometimes cloud the unique appeal of his more challenging work, but it also provides him with a rare set of media opportunities. Over the years, his presence in almost every leftist media outlet and his popularity on the Internet have enabled him to communicate his ideas to an unprecedented international audience. His ticks and his constant rambling and shaggy appearance have furthermore successfully established a performative *alter ego* which allows for an almost convincing outsider's perspective on contemporary culture and politics. Via a great number of confrontational statements and an almost idiosyncratic desire to subvert, Slavoj Žižek has slowly assumed an authority that transcends traditionally Marxist audiences and that, by now, curiously spreads across the whole range of the political spectrum.[12] As the 'cross between guru and gadfly, sage and showman' Terry Eagleton sees in him, the Slovenian 'Elvis of cultural theory' has successfully established himself within the media, in the philosophical and in the academic world; and he has spoken on such a broad range of topics as Batman, Nelson Mandela, new ecology, Hollywood cinema, feminist Lacanian psychoanalysis, continental philosophy, on the Occupy movement and on the London student protests of 2010. In short, by creating the most controversial and non-academic persona imaginable, Žižek has in fact found a way into almost every critical public outlet there is. And it is probably this particular performative quality Adam Kirsch was referring to when he responded to the most 'despicable' philosopher in the West.

The following looks beyond the more controversial facets of Žižek's media persona to the most defining aspects of his cultural critique and his philosophy. Although Žižek has often been criticised for what seems to be an impenetrable style interspersed with random analyses,[13] I will show that his

work is actually structured around three to four clearly recognisable themes. The chapter then closes with a more general overview of this book's particular aims and contents.

Žižek and ideology

> If our concept of ideology remains the classic one in which the illusion is located in knowledge, then today's society must appear post-ideological: the prevailing ideology is that of cynicism: people no longer believe in ideological truth; they do not take ideological propositions seriously. The fundamental level of ideology, however, is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself. And at this level, we are of course far from being [a] post-ideological society.[14]

At the heart of Žižek's work lies a detailed critique of ideology and its contemporary political and cultural manifestations. Contrary to the belief that our current social order may in fact be 'post-ideological', Žižek argues that ideology as a cultural and sociopolitical concept is well alive and remains highly influential and manipulative. As members of a democratic, capitalist society, we may no longer be openly oppressed by fascist regimes; there is no official dictatorship in place which opposes the idea of individual freedom, political opponents are no longer imprisoned or deported, and democratic elections are usually held with more than one party to choose from. Despite this apparent freedom, however, our choices and our individual belief systems are still structured on a fundamentally ideological level. For Žižek, our political and social climate suffers from an imbalance in our relationship with the meta-level of ideology; that is with what we consider to be real and what our sociopolitical environment and its defining power-relations are actually based upon. As consumers of a so-called 'post-ideological' society, we are unaware of the manifold workings of ideology because what we 'do not know is that […] social reality itself, [our] activity, is guided by an illusion, by a fetishistic inversion.'[15] We may well know that things are structured in such a way as to preclude the notion of real choice or of actual individual freedom, for example. But by *acting as if* we did not know, we in fact willingly accept and further the very ideological illusions we wish to avoid.

'Ideology today', as Žižek would have it, is 'unfreedom which you sincerely personally experience as freedom'.[16] Freedom as part of a neoliberal agenda usually comes attached to consumerist imperatives: express yourself!, be yourself!, consume, shop, enjoy, be happy! But even if we know that none of these actions could ever make us truly happy, we are still urged to subscribe to their conceptualised structure. Žižek's most fundamental critique of neoliberalist capitalism therefore ties in with the psychoanalytic

notion of 'fetishistic disavowal': although we know very well that the media and our current cultural climate are influencing our behaviour and our choices as consumers to an extremely problematic extent, we still like to pretend that we are free to make our own choices. The problem is of course that, although we may think we can successfully resist ideology this way, we are in fact aggravating the problem by elevating it to a meta-ideological level: even 'if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*.'[17]

Žižek's critique of ideology consequently focuses on the dilemma of *apparent choice:* as democratic individuals, our cultural, political and social selves are free only in relation to an actual rather than to an abstract notion of freedom. What Žižek never tires to point out, however, is that – following the neoliberalist utopia of self-regulating markets and of relative free choice – as capitalist individuals, we are more and more being manoeuvred into a situation where actual freedom of choice can no longer exist. Capitalism, in its current form and with its whole range of neoliberal politics and cultural manifestations, has *de facto* installed a performative environment in which choice is no longer an option but has already become a predefined (i.e. uniform) necessity. As performers in such a totalitarian economic environment, we are literally forced to make choices 'without having at our disposal the knowledge that would enable a qualified choice.'[18] We might have gained the right to choose; yet choice itself has already been turned into a collective duty. This way, real choice has become replaced by a range of pre-selected offers; offers which will ultimately undermine and remove any remaining notions of actual democratic participation.

> It is thus not enough to vary the standard motif of the Marxist critique: 'although allegedly we live in a society of choices, the choices left to us are effectively trivial, and their proliferation masks the absence of true choices, choices that would change the basic features of our lives …' While this is true, the problem is rather that we are forced to choose without having at our disposal the kind of knowledge that would enable us to make a proper choice – more precisely, what renders us unable to act is not the fact that we 'don't yet know enough' (about whether, say, human industry is really responsible for global warming, and so on) but, on the contrary, the fact that we know too much *while not knowing what to do* with this mass of inconsistent knowledge.[19]

The problem with ideology today, as Žižek sees it, is that even the most rational and emancipated subject will invariably be bound by the very system he or she inhabits: 'The contemporary era constantly proclaims itself as post-ideological, but this denial of ideology only provides the ultimate proof that we are more than ever embedded in ideology.'[20] What is at stake is not the system's inherent instability, but our own sense of individuality

and our choice of a free alternative. As agents of capitalist cynicism ('there is no alternative, we are already living in a pretty safe and healthy environment' etc.), we are in fact furthering the system's ultimate inescapability. We may all know that our financial markets have a tendency to act irresponsibly and very much need to be regulated; we know that we are on the verge of economic and ecological global disaster, and yet we do not act according to our knowledge. We remain in constant denial of the truth and its actual implications because the 'paradox in all these cases is that *stepping out of (what we experience as) ideology is the very form of our enslavement to it*.'[21]

For Žižek, contemporary manifestations of ideology take the form of an ideological inversion because they dress up as factual truth. If we try to step out of what we perceive as the actual nature of ideology, we are invariably feeding into its most precarious social and political dynamics. On a meta-ideological level, the problem with current forms of manipulative ideology is therefore not their fabricated nature but precisely their apparent honesty:

> We are within ideological space proper the moment this content – 'true' or 'false' (if true, so much the better for the ideological effect) – is functional with regard to some relation of social domination ('power', 'exploitation') in an inherently non-transparent way: *the very logic of legitimizing the relation of domination must remain concealed if it is to be effective*. In other words, the starting point of the critique of ideology has to be full acknowledgement of the fact that it is easily possible to *lie in the guise of truth*.[22]

Žižek and Lacan

All of the above would be simple enough, if we could just leave it at that.[23] But Žižek's critique of ideology goes much deeper than what has so far been outlined. Žižek is not only interested in new meta-levels of ideology and how they structure our everyday (capitalist) realties, he also wants to know how ideology *per se* can be in a position to influence and determine the subject on a fundamental and psychological level. Stating that ideology is in a position to mask the real state of things because it is in fact 'an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself'[24] invariably opens up a whole range of questions in relation to ideology's many-layered psychodynamic dimensions. To Žižek, this is where Lacanian psychoanalysis can lend more than just a helping hand.

It is first and foremost Lacan's notorious formula for fantasy, *$<>a*,[25] which provides Žižek with a stable reference point in most of his writings. As a reflection on Freud's famous dictum '*Wo es war, soll ich werden*',[26] Lacan's formula emphasises that the subject's most tragic disposition can be found within the fact that it can never assume a fully completed position within its own symbolic order. As subjects structured by language, as 'enunciated

subjects', we are always already split between who (we think) we are and who we want to be within any given cultural or political order (i.e. the law). The subject as such is therefore a mere (w)hole, it is split from the moment of its actual realisation in the Mirror Stage, and it assumes a barred position (*$*) within its own symbolic reference frame, halfway in-between the realms of the Symbolic (ideal ego) and the Imaginary (ego ideal). What this means in turn, however, is that the subject is consequently always looking for a way to fill the very gap his or her enunciation leaves; and it is here where the structure of ideology enters on a most fundamental psychological level: 'In short, fantasy *fills out the empty set of the intersection:* its wager is that this set is *not* empty.'[27]

Žižek argues that ideology enters into the Lacanian equation of *$<> a* in such a way that it tries to stand in as a potential remedy to the subject's innate articulatory gap. As an 'empty' promise, it is of course highly dangerous, because it offers an apparent answer to the subject's ongoing question of '*Chè vuoi?*': 'What do I (really) want in relation to (what I perceive as) my own desire?' While the 'aim of the psychoanalytic cure is to induce the subject to assume his constitutive lack heroically',[28] ideology offers a decisively simple alternative: it claims to be in a position to fill the primordial gap between our perceived selves and the self we want to be in relation to the cause of our desire. This way, ideology hijacks our individualised notion of desire and hands us an empty gesture in return. *Qua* ideology, instead of being made whole, the subject as a victim of ideological manipulation is consequently rendered substantially pathological. This process is severely problematic (and circular) because it prohibits any real attempt at a proper psychological cure.

Žižek has often been criticised for using examples from popular culture and from the Hollywood film industry to illustrate this point. But it is here where his Lacanian reading of ideology becomes most palpable. Lacan not only posits the subject as a 'barred' subject, he also appreciates and upholds the very notion of the gap as an important factor in our psychodynamic relationships. For both Žižek and Lacan, it is the gap of the deficient subject and its unique relation to (unconscious) fantasy and desire which first allows for the emergence of the Real; the emergence of the symptom, in turn, relies heavily on the gap in our subjectivity and its innate connection to desire. As Žižek admits, his entire work 'circulates around this gap that separates the One from itself, for which the Lacanian designation is the Real.'[29] As symptoms of mass culture and relics of our immediate sociopolitical environment, Hollywood films and pop culture are therefore in an ideal position to illustrate cultural pathologies on a most fundamental level.[30]

> What we are […] arguing is not simply that ideology permeates also the alleged extra-ideological strata of everyday life, but that this

> materialization of ideology in the external materiality renders visible inherent antagonisms that the explicit formulation of ideology cannot afford to acknowledge. It is as if an ideological edifice, in order to function 'normally', must obey a kind of 'imp of perversity', and articulate its inherent antagonism in the externality of its material existence.[31]

Žižek, Hegel, and the parallax view

> I always emphasise: don't expect this from me. I don't think that the task of a guy like me is to propose complete solutions. When people ask me what to do with the economy, what the hell do I know? I think the task of people like me is not to provide answers but to ask the right questions.[32]

Reading Žižek without Hegel would be similar to reading Lacan without Freud. Both Žižek and Lacan find themselves indebted to a great extent to the work of their intellectual predecessors. But in addition to his aforementioned involvement with Lacanian psychoanalysis and his unique take on cultural studies, Žižek has a few more theoretical tricks up his tatty sleeve. As a theoretical philosopher, his understanding of Hegelian dialectics, for example, is nothing short of revolutionary; and his idiosyncratic view of contemporary Marxism is of course far from being average Occupy material.

For Žižek, philosophy proper is always caught in a theoretical 'double-act'; it is both an intellectual process and an actual subversion of the status quo. But it can only successfully challenge the sociopolitical dimension of human interaction when it argues from a 'parallax' position; i.e. when it actively encourages an intellectual short circuit between two formally opposing poles. Not unlike Hegel, he argues that only a genuine shift in our original perspective can provide us with new forms of philosophical (in)sight; only a decisive shift in our observational position can grant us an alternative perspective on what we, as cultural subjects, perceive as our ontological reality. It is not least for this very reason that he mixes Lacanian psychoanalysis with the philosophy of German Idealism.

Žižek's main contribution to our understanding of Hegel is his insistence on the negativity inherent in the dialectic process itself. In stark contrast to more traditional readings and their simplified sub-categorisations (thesis, antitheses and synthesis), Žižek proposes that Hegelian philosophy should always be read (or indeed 'tarried with') from the perspective of the negative. To him, the Hegelian subject can only be one of absolute negativity; it is

> nothing but the very gap which separates phenomena from the Thing, the abyss beyond phenomena conceived in its negative mode, i.e. the purely negative gesture of limiting phenomena without providing any positive content which would fill out the space beyond the limit.[33]

Following this abyss in Hegelian dialectics, subjectivisation, as Žižek understands it, can only be read as a continuous and ongoing process, as a phenomenon which can be split from the idea of substance; it needs to be understood as '*stricto sensu* correlative to the very being of the subject.'[34] Or, to put it in more Hegelian terms, 'subject and object are inherently "mediated", so that an "epistemological" shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an "ontological" shift in the object itself.'[35]

Žižek argues that Hegelian subjectivisation shares a great deal of common ground with Lacanian psychoanalysis. In fact, as an impossible remainder of the actual process of subjectivisation, *objet a* is correlative to the subject in its very radical incommensurability with it.'[36] Seen from this perspective, the empty form of the subjective gap becomes a prerequisite for the very process of ongoing subjective development – which is, incidentally, also why Žižek repeatedly describes Lacan as a covert Hegelian.[37] He argues that 'Hegel's whole point is that the subject does *not* survive the ordeal of negativity: he *effectively* loses his very essence and passes over into his Other.'[38] Within this very notion of the subject as one of loss in relation to the Other, Žižek effectively places a Hegelian wager on Lacan's understanding of the subject's inherently split nature: it is already in the very process of articulation itself, within the essence of the question of desire, that the subject finds his or her own individualised answer. The process of subjectivisation is also its ultimate goal: 'for Lacan (as well as for Hegel) subject is precisely that which is not substance.'[39] Read this way, the Lacanian *Chè vuoi?* becomes more than just an essentially rhetorical question. As part of the dialectical process, it already entails its own *raison d'être*:

> Hegel's thesis that 'subject is not a substance' has thus to be taken quite literally: 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*.[40]

In Žižek's opinion, contemporary philosophy should be challenged by a forceful re-appreciation of this particular form of dialectical materialism. Instead of articulating higher syntheses, he argues, philosophy as such will need to move away from its traditionally historical perspective and find its way towards a more 'hands-on' approach (it should implement pop culture, it could facilitate short circuits between cultural artefacts and psychoanalysis and so on). Arguing from a parallax position, it should be in a position to ask the right questions; questions which are posed from the perspective of two incommensurable points of view. Instead of being located in dialectic opposites, philosophy proper, according to Žižek (and Marx), therefore 'emerges in the interstices *between* different communities, in the fragile space of exchange and circulation between them, a space which lacks any positive identity'.[41] It is of course within the process of negative dialectics

that the 'negativity of thought' emerges '*in the very gap between thought and being*.'[42] By displacing the 'difference between the universal and the particular into the particular itself', Žižek's philosophy tries to find its way to a more 'performed' dialectic which will eventually be in a position to assert the gap between two opposing perspectives as the 'gap between humanity and its *own* inhuman excess'.[43] It is consequently also here, in the very perspective of what he calls the 'parallax view', that Žižek locates contemporary philosophy's most subversive potential.

This volume features essays on each of the Žižekian categories outlined above. It assumes the parallax view Žižek suggests and applies his thoughts on ideology, on Lacan, Marx, and Hegel to a wider range of contemporary performance phenomena. Žižek rarely mentions performance directly in his work; his references to the performative are mostly based on film, opera, language and on a few select instances of classical tragedy. A number of essays in this book explore those references in detail.[44] But the collection goes a little further to illustrate how Žižek's thoughts can be applied to the field of theatre and performance studies in more general terms. Are there common grounds between Žižek's performative persona, his writing style and actual performative and cultural events? If so, what kind of conclusions can be drawn from them? How can performance studies profit from the Slovenian philosopher's most intriguing thoughts? Are cultural and performative events in a position to shed some more light on this 'Elvis of cultural theory' and his controversial thoughts on neoliberalism, globalisation, bio-genetics, racism and financial and economic disaster?

Žižek's reading of ideology as a performative process is taken up with regards to diverse performance practices in the essays of Stephen Greer, Natasha Lushetich, and Paul Johnson. His understanding of Lacanian psychoanalysis is picked up on especially by Geoff Boucher, in Bryce Lease's contribution on Polish Theatre and in Daniel Oliver's discussion of the 'Neighbour Thing'. Negative dialectics and Hegelian subjectivisation feature strongly in Peter Boenisch's and in Dave Calvert's contributions. The essays by Patrick Duggan, and Simon Ellis and Colin Poole look at the incommensurable gap between practice and theory, a space that in performance studies is designated by the acronym PaR – *practice-as-research*. Broderick Chow finally also refers to inhuman excess in his essay on Žižek and Comedy.

As part of the new Performance Philosophy series, this collection seeks to establish a firm link between Žižek's theoretical work, his performative *alter ego* and the world of theatre and performance studies and practice. 'Minding the gap' between philosophy and performance studies thus becomes more than just a mere motto.[45] Keeping with Žižek's inexhaustible range of references, the book examines a truly eclectic range of performance makers, events, and moments – from Eve Katsouraki's exploration of Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to Graham Wolfe's discussion of Daniel

Radcliffe's performance in Peter Shaffer's *Equus*, from Linda Taylor's essay on Forced Entertainment to Melissa Blanco Borelli's analysis of Hollywood dance; and it concludes with Slavoj Žižek's own thoughts on performing. Its aim is to firmly establish Žižek as both a theoretical and as a practical reference point for further studies.

Notes

1. Adam Kirsch, 'The Deadly Jester', *New Republic*, 2 December 2008. Accessed 19 December 2013. http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books/the-deadly-jester.
2. Astra Taylor (dir.), *Žižek!*, (2005), USA.
3. Terry Eagleton, 'The Phenomenal Slavoj Žižek', *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 April 2008. Accessed 17 December 2013. http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/reviews/other_categories/article758040.ece.
4. Matthew Sharpe and Geoff M. Boucher, *Žižek and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 1.
5. While it often seems fairly clear that Žižek is a Marxist and thus functions as an illustrious exponent of the political left, his actual politics are sometimes a bit more difficult to define, not least due to his numerous ironical comments and his critical performative persona. Compare, e.g. Sharpe and Boucher's thoughts on this particular point: 'Žižek shares the scepticism of critics on the Left about whether the "opposition" to the Right posed by the so-called Third Way politics of the Democrats and the new Labour parties is worthy of that name', and 'Žižek complains that the New Left has been directing progressives' focus away from what really matters in shaping public life'. Sharpe and Boucher, *Žižek and Politics*, 33 and 34 respectively.
6. 'Yeah, but who are the idiots? I didn't mean so-called poor, uneducated, ordinary people. If anything, most of the idiots that I know are academics. That's why I don't have any interest in communicating too much with academics.' See Luke Massey, 'Slavoj Žižek: "Most of the Idiots I know are Academics"', *New Statesman*, 8 October 2013. Accessed 19 December 2013. http://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2013/10/slavoj-zizek-most-idiots-i-know-are-academics.
7. In one of his more recent interviews with the *Guardian*, for example, he illustrates his aversion towards students by eloquently stating: 'I especially hate when they come to me with personal problems. My standard line is: "Look at me, look at my tics, don't you see that I'm mad? How can you even think about asking a mad man like me to help you in personal problems, no?"'. This is also a very good example of the more controversial and performative persona Žižek likes to create for printed media in particular. Dekka Aitkenhead, 'Humanity is OK, but 99% of People are Boring Idiots', *Guardian*, 10 June 2012. Accessed 16 December 2013. http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/jun/10/slavoj-zizek-humanity-ok-people-boring. See also his even more straightforward 'I hate students. They want to ask a question? ---- off!' in Helen Brown, 'Slavoi Žižek: The World's Hippest Philosopher', *The Telegraph*, 5 July 2010. Accessed 16 December 2013. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/7871302/Slavoj-Zizek-the-worlds-hippest-philosopher.html.
8. Taylor, *Žižek!*
9. See especially Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 'Doing the Impossible: Slavoj Žižek and the End of Knowledge', *Critical Inquiry,* 29(3), 2003, 453–458 and a few of the more critical essays in Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (eds), *The Truth of*

Žižek (London: Continuum, 2007); in particular Jeremy Gilbert's 'All the Right Questions, All the Wrong Answers', 61–81.

10. Sharpe and Boucher, *Žižek and Politics*, 2.
11. Slavoj Žižek, 'Connections of the Freudian Field to Philosophy and Popular Culture', in Rex Butler and Scott Stephens (eds), *Slavoj Žižek: Interrogating the Real* (London: Continuum 2005), 75.
12. While regularly writing and giving interviews for left wing papers such as the *Guardian* and the *New Statesman*, Žižek is also well known and makes a regular appearance in, e.g., more conservative German newspapers such as *Die Welt* (see, for instance, his interview on cinema with Thomas Lindemann 'Kino ist perverse Kunst, meint Slavoj Žižek' (22 September 2009) or his own contribution titled 'Kino ist, wenn der Vater mit dem Sohn schläft' (15 July 2013), both accessed on 20 December 2013. Incidentally, he is also one of the featured cultural icons on the German Goethe-Institute's *Europa Liste* and has commented repeatedly on their selection of the most valuable European films.
13. See, for example, Robert S. Boyton, 'Enjoy Your Žižek: An Excitable Slovenian Philosopher Examines the Obscene Practices of Everyday Life Including His Own', *Linguafranca*, 26 March 2006. Accessed on 21 December 2013, http://www.lacan.com/Žižek-enjoy.htm. Also compare Denise Gigante, 'Toward a Notion of Critical Self-Creation: Slavoj Žižek and the "Vortex of Madness"', *New Literary History,* 29(1), 1998, 153–168 and Sarah Kay, *Žižek: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2003). Matthew Sharpe, *Slavoj Žižek: A Little Piece of the Real,* (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2004) offers a more critical overview.
14. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 33.
15. Ibid., 32.
16. Massey, "Most of the Idiots I know are Academics".
17. Žižek, *Sublime*, 33 (emphasis in the original).
18. Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), 10.
19. Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2011), 360.
20. Žižek, *Tragedy*, 37.
21. Slavoj Žižek, 'Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology', in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London & New York: Verso, 1994), 6.
22. Žižek, 'The Spectre of Ideology', 8.
23. Also note that there is a good chance Žižek would agree we should. In keeping with his performative *alter ego*, he has stated repeatedly that he hates analysing himself or his own work psychoanalytically: 'I never analyze myself. The idea of doing psychoanalysis on myself is disgusting. Here, I'm sort of a conservative Catholic pessimist. I think that if we look deep into ourselves, we discover a lot of shit. It is best not to know.' See Katie Engelhart, 'Slavoj Žižek: I am not the world's hippest philosopher!', *Salon*, 29 December 2012. Accessed 21 December 2013. http://www.salon.com/2012/12/29/slavoj_zizek_i_am_not_the_worlds_hippest_philosopher/.
24. Žižek, *Sublime*, 33.
25. Lacan describes the subject as 'barred' primarily in relation to his or her own desire ($). This means that our desire is always inevitably bound to an external cause (i.e. supported by fantasy). Seen this way, desire assumes an attributive function; one which brings us into contact with what we perceive to be more in the other than the other herself. In Lacanese, this surplus is called *objet (petit) a*. The fundamental formula for fantasy therefore describes our subjectivity in relation to our psychodynamic environment. See especially Geoff Boucher's contribution to this volume for a more detailed discussion of the Lacanian 'graph of desire'.

26. The 'I' shall be formed where 'id' has been.
27. Slavoj Žižek, 'The Eclipse of Meaning: on Lacan and Deconstruction', in Butler & Stephens (eds), *Interrogating the Real*, 228.
28. Žižek, 'Eclipse', 207.
29. Slavoj Žižek, 'Author's Preface: The Inhuman', in Butler & Stephens, *Interrogating the Real*, 10.
30. As Žižek notes elsewhere, there is of course also another reason: 'Why do I resort so often to examples from popular culture? The simple answer is in order to avoid a kind of jargon, and to achieve the greatest possible clarity, not only for my readers but also for myself. That is to say, the idiot for whom I endeavour to formulate a theoretical point as clearly as possible is ultimately myself'. Žižek, 'Connections of the Freudian Field', 59.
31. Slavoj Žižek, 'Fantasy as a Political Category: A Lacanian Approach', in Elizabeth Wright & Edmond Wright (eds), *The Žižek Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 89.
32. Aitkenhead, Humanity is OK.
33. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 21.
34. Žižek, *Tarrying,* 21.
35. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge & London: MIT Press, 2006), 17.
36. Ibid.
37. See, e.g. Slavoj Žižek, '"The Most Sublime of Hysterics": Hegel with Lacan', in Butler and Stephens (eds), *Interrogating the Real*, 40.
38. Žižek, 'Eclipse', 217.
39. Ibid., 218.
40. Žižek, *Parallax*, 206.
41. Ibid., 8.
42. Ibid., 6.
43. Ibid., 5.
44. See especially Chapters 1, 4, 7, 11 and 15.
45. Compare Martin Puchner's recent contribution to the ongoing discussion of an apparent gap between philosophy and theatre and what we can all do to make more productive use of it. Martin Puchner, 'Afterword: Please Mind the Gap between Theatre and Philosophy', *Modern Drama* 56(4), 2013, 540–553.

1
The Lacanian Performative: Austin after Žižek

Geoff Boucher

Introduction

In this chapter, I am going to interpret the early work of Slavoj Žižek (between 1989 and 1994) as proposing what is in effect a theory of language as theatrical. That would be a theory of speech in which speaking was not only action, but also act, that is, an attempt to affect auditors by speaking, as well as to coordinate efforts through speech. In the examples that Žižek discusses, as well as the example that Žižek's own work itself provides, these effects are mainly shock and seduction, but other effects – persuading, delighting, amazing, frightening and so forth – are also possible. Regarding speech as inherently theatrical means focusing on the ways in which the speaker, in seeking to affect an audience, expresses their subjectivity as well as engages with social conventions and refers to the objective world. Based on pragmatic theories of language, a dramaturgical theory of language includes an acknowledgement that speech involves social coordination with a normative dimension, as well as information exchange in the interests of referential descriptions of things in the world. Going beyond language pragmatics, though, including theories of communicative action, recognition of the theatricality of language means acknowledgement that speech happens between embodied subjects and depends for its effectiveness upon the dialogue partners' mutual presuppositions about their speech community. On this description, speaking always centrally involves an appeal to the implied audience of the speech community, even as the speaker seeks some satisfaction of their needs, desires, beliefs, or feelings from the interlocutor.

I am going to argue, then, that one of Žižek's most innovative contributions to psychoanalytic literature is to have practised a form of cultural analysis that is implicitly based in a dramaturgical theory of language. That Žižek holds a theatrical conception of speech is evident from two considerations:

1. Žižek follows Lacan in his approach to language. Now, Lacan's theory of desire in language is framed within the potential for ironic reversal

that exists because of the speech situation, where this is conceptualised as a permanent gap between statement and enunciation. Against the background of the ironic potentials of the speech situation, Lacan's conception of the unconscious in terms of what has been called the 'scandal of the speaking body', despite its apparently structuralist terminology, is thoroughly dramatic.

2. Žižek represents his own position as agonistic and theatrical – that is, as a dramaturgy of the social – often exemplified by cinema's contemporary theatricality. For Žižek, what all dramatic media illustrate is the way that the agon between speaker and interlocutor depends on the unexpected effects of speech, whose key is the speaker's and interlocutor's libidinal investments in socio-symbolic authority.

Once I have clarified and defended these claims, I am going to show how Žižek's position makes possible a solution to a persistent problem of the speech act theory proposed by John L. Austin and developed further by John Searle – the mystery of what is called 'perlocution'. A dramaturgical theory of language will extend speech act theory, and my contention is that only psychoanalysis can successfully achieve this. I will therefore have demonstrated not only that Žižek's conception of language is dramaturgical, but also that such a theory articulates a valid solution to a pressing intellectual problem.

Psychomachia as dramaturgy

Lacan's insistence that he practised not linguistics, but 'linguistrickery'[1] and not phonetics, but 'faunetics',[2] indicates that despite strategic references to Ferdinand de Saussure, Émile Benveniste, and Roman Jakobson, his work should not be simply thought of as belonging to structuralism and its sequelae. Lacan focuses on what linguistics represses, namely, the speaking subject as both a corporeal entity and as a reality constituted in the utterance; he also blithely ignores Saussure's strictures against investigating either the diachrony of the utterance or the nature of the referent. Perhaps surprisingly, Lacan maintains that his description of condensation and displacement as metaphor and metonymy comes not only from Jakobson's paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of selection and combination, but also from the ancient rhetoric of Quintilian.[3] 'The universe is a flower of rhetoric', Lacan summarises, 'that is what I am [actually] saying when I say that the unconscious is structured like a language'.[4] And he adds, possibly more precisely, 'I have developed a theory of the effects of the signifier that intersects rhetoric'.[5]

Now, what on earth would it be, this intersection of the signifier with rhetoric, of language as communication with language as persuasion? Whatever it is – and clearly my bet is that the answer is, 'drama' – it really only depends on two findings of structural linguistics, best summed up in Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* (1971 [1966]).[6]