



## Development or self-destruction? Evald Ilyenkov vs. Slavoj Žižek on the problem of radical negativity

Maxim Morozov<sup>1</sup> 

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### Abstract

The article presents a theoretical analysis of the extramural polemic between Slavoj Žižek and Evald Ilyenkov, undertaken in the context of the search for the foundational underpinnings of the two philosophers' perspectives on the limit-logical definitions of being. It shows how this apparently “abstract” search grows out of the socio-historical circumstances of the thinkers' lives, which are inscribed in the dramatic conditions of existence of the political events of the twentieth century. The active life-political position of the follower of Marx's ideas, figuratively expressed in the text by Lenin's term “tactics of social democracy” (Lenin 1962), is justified by one or another cognitive position: the unified attitude “not to explain but to transform the world” breaks down into various “tactics” precisely in the attempt to solve the problem of radical negativity (as Žižek formulates it). This is expressed in the division of Marxism into “Western” and “Eastern”. This article analyzes the legitimacy of such a division and shows the conditions for a disintegration of the divide. The relation of Ilyenkov and Žižek to Hegel's works turns out to be the key to understanding this division, and consequently to the essential difference in socio-political attitudes and “tactics”, of which they are creative representatives. The analysis leads to the formulation of the “germ cell” of disagreement between Ilyenkov and Žižek—the problem of the universal—which unfolds in the difference between the thinkers' positions on certain theoretical points. The limitation of Ilyenkov's position, established under the fire of Žižek's criticism, is removed, according to the author, by the development of a new category of “fractality”, which acts as a counterpart to the main dialectical category of “totality” and provides a concrete (in the Hegelian sense) solution to the problem of radical negativity in the spirit of the classical philosophical tradition.

**Keywords** Dialectics · Ilyenkov · Totality · Radical negativity · Fractal · Žižek

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✉ M. Morozov  
[maxdiscovery22@gmail.com](mailto:maxdiscovery22@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> Belgorod National Research University, Belgorod, Russia

## Instead of an introduction: two tactics of social democracy and radical negativity

Philosophy—though it seems to be detached from real life and to be “above the fray”, above the transitory interests of any parties, constant (though with different strength)—is always deeply rooted in earthly interests. Philosophy is the expression of the deepest, most fundamental, essential interests; “philosophy is its own time apprehended in thoughts”, as Hegel put it (Hegel 2001, p. 19). And today’s epoch is an epoch of acute crisis, which in turn is an external-antagonistic manifestation of the unresolved contradiction of social development. Every appeal to the heritage of philosophy and its history is made because in its problems, in its content, we see, as in a mirror, ourselves, the present time and the ways of overcoming it. Therefore, it is not surprising that today’s attempts to resolve contradictions do not take the form of reasonable communication, but rather of a clash of positions, and sharp polemics. This is probably directly related to the nature of the circumstances that characterize our time: economic and political contradictions are rapidly increasing before our eyes.

How do we reckon with or understand our past? From our vantage point, making sense of the experience that humanity had in the twentieth century remains a huge challenge. There have been a number of notable attempts to make sense of our past historical and theoretical experience, but such attempts have often been characterized by a kind of “post-traumatic stress disorder”, suffered by leftist social-democratic intellectuals as a result of the collapse of the first attempt to build a new type of society in communist projects. The Soviet Union is here often seen as a continuation of the Enlightenment at its worst: a stale, dogmatic, and destructive system. For this reason, many authors in the West developed philosophical projects precisely in opposition to the vision of the Soviet system. This opposition arose at many levels which we could consider, but in this essay we will primarily be interested in the fundamental, epistemological level.

Contemporary attempts to grasp our present crises, within critical theory and beyond, often begin with a rejection of the Enlightenment. The strategy of opposing the “logic of the Enlightenment” includes various kinds of “breaks” with classical philosophy and a rejection of “Totality” and the “Absolute” as productive concepts. Of course, the single concept most problematic in the eyes of these critics—central as it is to both the thought of Hegel and Lenin—is “Dialectics”. There is a fear that these ideas are irrevocably tied not only to totalitarianism but also fascism. If we do not want to repeat the horrors of totalitarianism (to which the whole “dissident’s set” is usually uncritically related: GULAG, “Prague Spring”, Moscow trials, Stalinist purges etc.) the blame must apparently be placed on Hegel and the idea of totality. Critical theorists and other left-wing academics try to find possibilities for “escaping” from the logic of wholeness, totality, to find the possibility of thinking with “difference”. Briefly, this alternative epistemological strategy can be formulated as follows: overcoming *the principle of the identity of being and thinking*. All classical philosophy rests on this principle: This concrete (contradictory) identity is the most important definition of truth. The “first” rational negation, which generates a bad infinity of repetitions and does not reach the fixation of the result in a positively-reasonable form (Hegel called it speculative, or theoretical), is the dominant way of

thinking of the representatives of the non-classical line. This, one way or another, is connected with the attitude to the category of contradiction, from which all other clashes and disputes follow. Avoiding contradiction, escaping totality, bypassing necessity, and restoring the rights of chance, taking the plurality of differences out from under the power of identity, neutralizing negativity as the leading force of development, eliminating the repressive dictate of pure reason—all these traits are more or less characteristic of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bergson, and their successors. The leading role in this line, in my opinion, is played by the figure of Gilles Deleuze, in whose work the abstract negation of the classical principle was most vividly and impressively expressed.

Some thinkers in the West, most recently and perhaps most influentially Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou, have sought to defend Marxism and dialectics, as well as the classics of philosophy, against a post-structuralist onslaught. Their thought represents an attempt to affirm the classical tradition in the context of a polemic with postmodernism and involves the assimilation of arguments that prove fruitful in the context of this polemic. Žižek, for example, dialectically inverts Deleuze's idea of ontological excess, and as a result it turns into lack in being itself—into emptiness, into nothingness, into Heidegger's being-to-death, into *radical negativity*—which, as Žižek believes, is the Hegelian source of dialectical development.

However, Žižek and Badiou have done this while still endorsing Deleuze's central methodological positions, for instance, with respect to how texts should be read. This is evident in the position adopted by Žižek in denying totality (the most important Hegelian category), in the inability to stay within the monistic logic of wholeness and in the attempts to solve the problem of radical negativity by assuming a split of the Whole—Žižek's philosophy is centered on categories such as gaps, cracks, splits, and failures. With this categorical apparatus, which he undoubtedly inherits from the Frankfurt School (particularly from Adorno), he tries to find another way of justifying the Marxist emancipatory project that would not lead to its deviations and degenerated forms, which, according to Žižek, is the Soviet experience most vividly embodied in Stalinism. Badiou, wishing to overcome the Lacanian criticism of philosophy as psychosis, formulates this position as the main thesis of his (anti)philosophy: Truth should not be linked to the One, but instead a radical democracy of multiple truths that do not relate repressively to each other must be approved. Accepting Deleuze's critique, but seeking to root subjectivity in history, he relies on a "pure multiplicity" that enables us to ground the subject as a generation of this plurality, as generated by a fundamentally random event. Badiou thus wants to preserve the space for the act of subjective freedom (Badiou 2011, pp. 95–104). The alternative option—to paraphrase Lenin, another tactic of social democracy—consists of a more thorough, deeper attempt to substantiate Marxism as a theoretical science from its "sources", from its theoretical roots (without admitting what is alien to Marxist theory, as Maria Chekhonadskikh rightly notes (Chekhonadskikh 2022, p. 82)), deducing it as the result of the movement of all human culture: "communism is the solution to the riddle of history, and it knows that it is this solution" (Marx 1959). It was also in this vein that Soviet philosopher Evald Ilyenkov worked in.

Žižek, polemicizing with Ilyenkov, who represents orthodox Marxism, also criticizes precisely this position: The One, the Whole, the Total cannot be preserved in

the new projects of materialist dialectics if it wants to “remove” the threat of post-structuralist (more broadly, nonclassical) critique. Here is Žižek’s main claim against the Soviet thinker:

If reality is (spatially and temporally) without limits, then there is overall, with regard to its totality, no progress, everything that could happen always-already happened: although full of dynamics in its parts, the universe as a Whole is a Spinozean stable substance. <...> Ilyenkov supplements this vision of the universe by two further hypotheses. First, the movement in the cosmos is limited downwards and upwards, it takes place between the lowest level (chaotic matter) and the highest level (thought), with there being nothing imaginably higher than thought. Second, thought is not just a contingent local occurrence in the development of matter but possesses a reality and an efficiency of its own, it is a necessary part (a culmination) of the entire development of reality. <...> Ilyenkov’s mistake resides in his very starting point: in a naïve-realist way, he presupposes reality as a Whole regulated by the necessity of progress and its reverse. Within this pre-modern space of a complete and self-regulating cosmos, radical negativity can only appear as a total self-destruction. The way out of this deadlock is to abandon the starting point and to admit that there is no reality as a self-regulated Whole, that reality is in itself cracked, incomplete, non-all, traversed by radical antagonism. (Žižek 2019, pp. 12–13, 18)

It should be noted that this criticism poses a serious problem for materialist dialectics as Ilyenkov understood and developed it. The motivation for our study is to determine the validity of Žižek’s reproach to the logic of wholeness, and to consider how this might constructively influence the development of Ilyenkov’s own position, which could seriously benefit from a cross-critique of Deleuze on the one hand and Lacan on the other. Let us take a closer look at these theses especially since, too often, the dialogue between representatives of different traditions remains at the level of external mutual criticism and does not reach the point of actual notion, i.e., an understanding of the essence of the matter itself.

Let us emphasize that our choice should not be between a lifeless state of official Soviet DiaMat and a world of radical breaks and gaps in which we can only await the Event that will save us. The philosophy of Evald Ilyenkov demonstrates a “creative Soviet Marxism” (in Mikhail Lifshitz’s more accurate phrase, “ordinary Marxism”) that operated within the USSR and did not abandon many of the commitments of the Marxists in the West. In this essay, I show how Ilyenkov’s theory and method contrasts with that of Žižek and introduce the concept of “fractality” to describe how Ilyenkov’s dialectics avoids the stagnation and determinist teleology of Soviet Textbook Dialectics. The article will also offer a new reading of Ilyenkov’s early article “Cosmology of the Spirit”, defending it against criticisms by Žižek and his supporters (cf. Penzin 2018).

## The split of the one: the truth of Western and Eastern Marxism

Marxists who wish to remain “orthodox”, and who subjectively define themselves as materialists, have little idea of the direction in which “Western” thought (assuming

the problematic division into “Western-critical” and “Eastern-dogmatic” Marxism of the Stalinist model) has moved since Marx. They consider the discourse of “phallus in the flow of signifiers”, of “being-to-death” and “anal objects”, of “deterritorialization”, “deconstruction” and “simulacra” (Anderson 1995)—and often rightly so—as something fundamentally alien to Marx’s theory that cannot be integrated into the existing field of problems and meanings in any way.<sup>1</sup> They do not understand, and, moreover, *refuse to understand* what problem, on what grounds, and by what means this or that author is addressing. However, even representatives of so-called “modern” thought<sup>2</sup> often have a very vague idea of the “Stalinism” and “dialectical materialism” that they criticize. Žižek himself signifies this trend:

We use the term ‘dialectical materialism’ in its fullest sense, as the name which designates the dimension that is irreducible to the problematic of ‘historical materialism’. Historical materialism *qua* the theory of socio-symbolic processes presupposes the horizon of symbolic *praxis* as always-already there, and does not raise the question of its ‘genesis’. Thus conceived, dialectical materialism is strictly opposed to mechanical materialism, which is reductionist by definition: it does not acknowledge the radical heteronomy of the effect with regard to the cause—that is, it conceives of the sense-effect-surface as a simple appearance, the appearance of an underlying deeper material Essence. (Žižek 1994, p. 126)

That dialectical materialism is the opposite of mechanistic materialism, that it does not reasonably separate cause from effect, is of course true: one can read it in any Soviet textbook with the title “Dialectical Materialism”. But, that can hardly be called the “fullest sense” of the term. Already, Georg Lukács showed in the 1920s that historical materialism is dialectical materialism “completed to the top”; he rightly criticized their break into two independent disciplines as a deep vice of the nascent official “DiaMat” (Lukács 2003). Historical materialism is by no means reducible to *dialectical materialism applied to history* (as many manuals on Marxist philosophy claimed), or, in other words, to a *theory of socio-symbolic processes* (as Žižek writes in the quote above). Sergey Mareev, in his book on Soviet philosophy, traces the emergence of this rupture historically, contrasting the “Plekhanov line” (which degenerated into dogmatic positivism hidden behind a Marxist phrase) with the “Lenin line”, outlining it only in strokes. To its undoubted representatives he includes Evald Ilyenkov, Lev Vygotsky and Georg Lukács himself (Mareev 2010). However, in order to investigate the question of the basis of the historical-dialectical movement, it is necessary to delve into the theoretical premises of Marx as the creator of the materialist understanding of history. Marek Siemek, Polish colleague of Ilyenkov, rightly points out the main problem with the widespread understanding of a “philosophy of practice”:

The fact that Marx never formulated *explicite* the epistemological premises and implications of his critique of political economy and the theory of historical materialism has led one to look for the Marxist conception of cognition rather in a few aphoristically extreme formulations, which—as above all the 2nd, 6th

<sup>1</sup> A representative of French thought would prefer here to say: “into discourse”.

<sup>2</sup> Since its modernity must be problematized, as must the very *notion of modernity* itself.

and 11th theses on Feuerbach—can be read in the sense of a complete dissolution of all theory, of all cognition and thinking in an all-encompassing and all-explaining mythical ‘practice’. Later, almost the entire Marxist tradition followed in this direction: The slogan ‘philosophy of practice’ was most often used here to explain its own avoidance of any serious epistemological problematic. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the tradition of Marxism the philosophical problematics of *cognition* become a matter of real concern. Unable to identify Marx’s real epistemology arising from the aforementioned nomination of ‘practice’ as a central philosophical category, Marxists revived the traditional (pre-Marxist or even pre-Kantian) ‘theoretical-cognitive’ approach, diluting it with a few platitudes about the ‘role of social practice in cognitive processes’. (Siemek 1988, pp. 3–4)

The provocativeness of the thesis and the problematic nature of the division into Western and Eastern Marxism require further clarification. After the victory of the October Revolution, the “only true doctrine” (with materialist dialectics as its obligatory component) became the ideology of the proletarian state. Quite dialectically, the widespread dissemination of Marx’s ideas not only brought them worldwide popularity and fame, but also generated an associated large influx of “theorists” concerned not with the purity of their epistemological position, but with the conjuncture of the political market. Although far from being a unique event in history, it had special consequences that directly affect the current state of things: “There is nothing in common between the three dominant philosophical traditions at this time [in the second half of the twentieth century]—French poststructuralism, German phenomenology and American analytic philosophy—except the denial of materialist dialectics (and dialectics in general)” (Syutkin 2019, p. 48).

The split occurred not only along the boundary of the acceptability of dialectics as a form of activity. The split within the movement that sought to make materialist dialectics its own mode of thought took different forms (most often as a division into Western and Eastern Marxism), which different authors tried to conceptualize in their own ways. Žižek, considering the ways in which Marxist thought branched out in the question in relation to dialectics in the twentieth century, singles out the followers of Engels (“Soviet DiaMat”, to which, with minor reservations, Ilyenkov is also attributed), the lineages of Lukács, Korsch, Althusser and Adorno (Žižek 2012, pp. 195–196; Žižek 2019, pp. 5, 18). Syutkin, agreeing in general with this classification, and based on Schelling’s division of criticism and dogmatism, uses the latter as a conceptual framework for understanding the split. In “dogmatism” the Soviet DiaMat with its excessive reliance on Engels and Spinoza falls, and Lukács and his lineage fall within “criticalism”, to whose works the genealogy of Western (“critical”) Marxism goes back (Syutkin 2019).

Despite the arbitrariness of this last classification, it is worth noting the important role it plays: First of all, it makes it possible to clearly express the moment of difference between these directions, as well as to obtain a support for thought in the form of a certain structure, without which the abundance of written texts and expressed thoughts turns into a disordered multitude of terms, names and titles. It is not without reason that Hegel remarks that cognition is advanced by opposition: the

identified boundary allows us both to look beyond it and to outline possible ways of transformation and identification of opposites.

It is worth mentioning that none of these conceptual schemes includes the name of Lenin, who is not considered an original theorist today. However, reasoning from a position free from ideological layers, this absence should be considered a serious disadvantage, since Lenin's influence on the formation of the epistemological position of the supporters of materialist dialectics is very difficult to overestimate. The concepts of Alexei Savin (2020) and Sergei Mareev (2010) do not suffer from this drawback. The former draws a line from Marx to Lenin, and from him to Deborin, whose position is presented as the position of "pure", orthodox Marxism; they are opposed, as in the aforementioned schemes, to Lukács' line. In Mareev's view, it is Lukács who is categorized as belonging to Lenin's line, as opposed to Plekhanov's line, of which Deborin is the continuation. The structure of the split here is essentially different: The boundary is the epistemological relation to dialectics as a method of thinking, as "the soul of Marxism". The focus of the discussion shifts, turning the divide into an opposition between Lenin's dialectics and the metaphysics of positivism—an opposition that Ilyenkov powerfully articulated in one of his books (see Ilyenkov 1982). Lifshitz also adhered to this position:

There is a certain divergence between creative Marxism, which is the basis of the conquests of the October Revolution, and that boring imaginary Marxist scholasticism which still litter our press. We may call it the backwardness of criticism or anything else we like, but the fact remains. There is dogmatic Marxism and creative Marxism—a living, versatile Marxism, devoid of any professorial or sectarian limitation, a Marxism that is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of revolutionary dialectics. We are standing on the soil of the latter, that is, on the soil of Leninism. (Lifshitz 2012, p. 324)

In this case, what becomes important is not which side of the border of the Soviet Union the author is on, nor what he subjectively defines himself as a supporter of, but how he thinks. And this is, to a certain extent, a process conditioned by objective necessity, although it finds its expression through subjectivity. It is this position that allows us to define not only the moments of difference, but also the moments of unity and identity of what in the history of thought is known as "materialist dialectics", thus removing the opposition between DiaMat and "critical Marxism". In general Chekhonadskih, the author of a very interesting study on Western and Eastern Marxism comes to a similar conclusion, understanding the latter as abstract ideological constructs:

The critique of *Leniniana* and the partisanship of theory correspond to our intention to rethink Soviet Marxism from the perspective of its epistemological construction. What follows from this methodological decision is that, epistemically, Soviet Marxism cannot be seen separately from the event of revolution. De-centering this category from the discourse of the party, we return it to the historical place to which the very adjective 'Soviet' belongs—to the event of revolution. This minor step helps us to see that the revolution, which aimed to establish a communist society, treats any theoretical and practical effort as a Marxist effort, given that it is made in the context of a society struggling with

the remnants of feudalism and capitalism and that a theorist shares the aims of the revolution. (Chekhonadskih 2022, p. 84)

As for the relevance of the reproaches made by Siemek in the 1980s against the insufficient grounding of Marxism as a theoretical science, in order to clarify the measure of truth that lies in them, one must ask: Has the Marxist theoretical community moved in the direction of developing a “philosophy of practice”, as Siemek writes about it? Has it utilized the opportunity that Marx provided? We must admit that it has not: The development of Marxist theory was practically frozen with the collapse of the socialist bloc countries and turned into a kind of “guerrilla warfare” in the enemy’s territory. This does not exclude, of course, the existence of individual bright studies and researchers. We do not at all want to devalue their contribution, but it is worth emphasising that we are talking precisely about a global tendency, which is expressed in philosophy. This tendency lies in the absence of a revolutionary attitude towards the revolutionary tradition itself, as articulated by Alexander Nogovishchev (Nogovishchev 2024).

It is easy to see that the problem of radical negativity (which can be solved either by self-destruction or by the subject as a crack in the Absolute; cf. Žižek 2009) is rooted in a different understanding of subject and substance—it is the clarification of the theoretical positions of our polemicists on this issue that constitutes the “battlefield” we are looking for. It is in this dispute that the difference between the “new” and the “classical” materialist dialectic is manifest and can be sharpened to the point of contradiction. Žižek embarks on a Lacanian revision of these notions polished in classical thought in order to provide a “gap” for the justification of the freedom and creative independence of the subject, which he sees as suppressed, repressed in the classical (“pre-modern”) understanding of substance as a single “All”. In this approach, there seems to be no room for spontaneity, contingency, and all development is “given in advance” and drowns in a teleological scheme. Žižek fears the ontological restriction of matter to lower and upper limits, but for Ilyenkov the restriction of the forms of development to thought (which he, following Engels, calls “the highest point of matter”) is fundamental: only in this case can thought serve as an attribute of substance and not as one of its accidental forms. For thought “to be an attribute of substance” it must be a condition of the fundamental cognizability of the world by the human, for if there is a form which is higher than the form of thinking, then this higher form cannot be grasped, embraced understood by thought. It follows from this that the attributivity of thought is also a condition for the realization of its actual freedom, understood as “the human definition of its essence”. That is, creativity and freedom are not excluded by Ilyenkov’s position, and, furthermore, only in such an understanding do they become possible:

Nevertheless, this is the one point about which there appears to be two distinctly incompatible viewpoints in logic, especially in trying to understand the “common” (universal). One is that of dialectics, and, the other that which stipulates the ultimately formal conception of the problem of the “common” and is



unwilling to admit into logic the idea of evolution as being organically linked to the concept of substance both in essence and in origin. (Ilyenkov 1974, p. 32)<sup>3</sup>

To allow for a split in the Absolute to justify freedom (either as the idea of “pure multiplicity” in Badiou’s or Deleuze’s version, or as the recognition of the subject as this crack) is to go against the Hegelian position of the “identity of identity and non-identity” (Hegel 2010, p. 51), which means the disintegration of the *identity of thinking and being*, after which inevitably follows the disintegration of the reasonable form of being and the complete disorientation of the subject, up to its annihilation, which is what postmodernism claims. This fundamental position of Parmenides on the identity of being and thinking is completely misunderstood by Lacan and Badiou, who, interpreting it in the spirit of panpsychism or solipsism, call it “the first symptom of philosophical madness” (Badiou 2011, p. 98).

This means that Hegel, in whose philosophy this Eleatic position receives its highest expression and development, is again the stumbling block of the disputing philosophical parties, and a new “discussion of Hegel” is therefore inevitable.

## Hegel and Modernity

The understanding of subject and substance that Žižek contrasts with Ilyenkov’s understanding is inseparable from their theoretical foundations. From Žižek’s reasoning in this article and in his other books, one can fairly accurately establish the way in which he approached the philosophical classics and the general direction of his thinking about them. He himself formulates it as follows: “My work is based on a full acceptance of the notion of modern subjectivity as developed by the great German idealists from Kant to Hegel <...> The heart of my whole enterprise lies in the endeavor to use Lacan as a privileged intellectual weapon to make German idealism relevant again” (Žižek 1999, p. 7). These two theses, however, contradict each other: The “full acceptance of the notion of subjectivity developed by the German idealists” requires neither turning to Lacan “as an intellectual weapon” nor putting into practice the philosophical and political slogan of reinvigorating German idealism and its study. An amusing analogy can be seen in the reaction of a classical music teacher, who, in response to a student’s complaint—“I’m already tired of playing Beethoven’s *Appassionata!*”—replied: “Maxim, it’s not you who is tired of the *Appassionata*. It is the *Appassionata* that is tired of you”. And if German idealism seems irrelevant to us, the problem is that *we ourselves* are irrelevant to it. Or, as Žižek correctly observes in another book:

The first thing to do here is to invert the standard form of the question ‘What is still alive today of the philosopher X?’ (as Adorno has already done apropos Croce’s dull and patronizing title-question ‘What is alive and what is dead in Hegel?’). Far more interesting than the question of what of Marx is still alive today, of what Marx still means to us today, is the question of *what our contemporary world itself means in Marx’s eyes*. (Žižek 1994, p. 183)

<sup>3</sup>How infinite development is realized precisely in a finite number of forms is also perfectly shown by Lifshitz in his article “What we should not be afraid of” (Lifshitz 1980, pp. 556–582).

This is not to say that efforts to popularize German idealism (including through examples from popular culture and through dialogue with non-classical forms of thought) are empty efforts. Ilyenkov was himself engaged in popularizing classical philosophical thought, and, in his own words, this is what he did in general—he tried to make the classics understandable to his contemporaries. But the fundamental difference between him and Žižek in this respect is that Ilyenkov popularized philosophy, while remaining within the *logic of the movement of philosophical thought itself*, above all, its central principle, of which modern philosophy is “tired”: the principle of the *identity of being and thinking*. This means that Ilyenkov, who popularizes philosophy, nowhere deforms or loses its basic principle, but shows the relevance of the classics in modernity precisely in the light of this principle. Whereas Žižek, at least according to my analysis of his theoretical position, tries to popularize German idealism by finding in it those aspects that lead to modern thought (Althusser’s structuralism, Deleuze’s differentiation, Lacan’s psychoanalysis, etc.), but which are fundamentally hostile to the foundations of the classical line from Thales to Hegel.

Without this principle, the “full acceptance of the notion of subjectivity developed by the great German idealists” remains only a bare declaration. Slavoj Žižek wrote in his *Organs without a Body* that “all the great ‘dialogues’ in the history of philosophy have often been misunderstandings: Aristotle did not understand Plato, Thomas Aquinas did not understand Aristotle, Hegel did not understand Kant and Schelling, Marx did not understand Hegel, Nietzsche did not understand Christ, Heidegger did not understand Hegel” (Žižek 2004, p. 9). Žižek celebrates such misunderstandings as the consequence of the gaps, splits and failures in our relation to each-other and the world, but it is surely still possible to ask the question: did Žižek himself understand the classical philosophers well? There is something ironically problematic here. It can be seen already in his characterization of Parmenides’ position: “thinking and being are the same” (*τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι*; Graham 2010, p. 207). The following discussion of Lacan’s “being-in-the-world” and “primordial impossible-forced choice” by Žižek (Žižek 2004, p. 10–14) makes it clear that for him this is rather a characteristic of the “the mode of action of the thinking body” (Ilyenkov 1977, p. 44). This is indeed fundamental for the resolution of the psychophysical problem, but is not central to the principle of the identity of thinking and being (as Ilyenkov understood it), and certainly does not capture the nuances of what was meant by Parmenides. For Parmenides, it is precisely the *universal* unity of thinking and being which forms the ontological characteristic of the Absolute. In Žižek’s formulation, which draws on Lacan’s concept of subjectivity, the emphasis is shifted to a *particular* form of subjectivity. The distinction seems subtle and insignificant at first glance, but these are precisely the details in which the devil hides, and to which we must be extremely precise in our treatment of Ilyenkov’s texts, *which are simple to the point of being deceptive*.

What is important for the classical tradition here is *the identity of thought and the object of thought*, which is expressed in the original formulation and which differs only slightly from Žižek’s formulation: “For the same thing is for thinking and for being” (Graham 2010, p. 213). This seemingly insignificant point sets the divergence of the *conceptual paradigms* of Žižek and Ilyenkov: it is not the identity of the two forms of the state of the body (“to be” for the *thinking body* means “to think”), nor

even the identity of thought and the object of thought as the correspondence of *some* image to *some* object, but such an identity in which the Universal, *which exists in being itself*, unfolds in its pure form in thinking; and it is only in thinking that it—the universal *as* universal—can be unfolded. Hegel emphasizes the same thing: “thought is made the true essence of things” (Hegel 2016a, p. 304). It’s easy to see the idealism here, which, Žižek says, “denies that the sense-effect is an effect of bodily depth; it fetishizes the sense-effect into a self-generated entity; the price it pays for this denial is the *substantialization* of the sense-effect: idealism covertly qualifies the sense-effect as a new Body (the immaterial body of Platonic Forms, for example) (Žižek 1994, p. 126). However, Hegel’s actual thought is deeper and cannot be understood without Ilyenkov, who developed Marx’s idea of the ideal as represented (*ideelle oder vorgestellte Form*): there is *Vorstellung* (representation) as a psychological capacity of imagination, and there is *Vorstellung* (representation) as a circus or theatre performance. Just as a diplomat *represents* his country, so thought represents (expresses itself, reflects itself) the true essence of things. This essence is the *really existent Universal*, which outside the ideal form, i.e., thought, remains “obscured”: “In non-human nature, a thing’s own form and measure is always ‘obstructed’, ‘complicated’ and ‘distorted’ by more or less random interaction with other such things”—Ilyenkov writes (Ilyenkov 1964, p. 258). This idea is put into different words by Hegel when he comments on the teachings of Anaxagoras: “This universal for itself, sundered, exists in purity only as thought; it exists also in nature as objective existence, but in that case no longer purely for itself, but as having particularity as an immediate in it” (Hegel 2016a, p. 329). That is why Hegel has every right to assert that it is *in thought* that the object is what it is *in itself*; it is only in thought that the object reveals itself in its truth. And it should be noted that there is nothing *idealistic* in this thesis:

With this principle comes the determination of an understanding as of self-determining activity; this has hitherto been wanting, for the Becoming of Heraclitus, which is only process, is not yet as fate, the independently self-determining. By this we must not represent to ourselves subjective thought; in thinking we think immediately of our thought as it is in consciousness. Here, on the contrary, quite objective thought is meant, active understanding—as we say, *there is reason in the world*, or we speak of *genera* in nature which are the universal. The genus animal is the *substantial* of the dog; the dog itself is this; the laws of nature are themselves nature’s immanent essence. The nature is not formed from without as men make a table; this is also made with understanding, but through an understanding outside of this wood. This external form, which is called the understanding, immediately occurs to us in speaking of the understanding but here the universal is meant, that which is the immanent nature of the object itself. The *νοῦς* is thus not a thinking existence from without which regulates the world; by such the meaning present to Anaxagoras would be quite destroyed and all its philosophic interest taken away. For to speak of an individual, a unit from without, is to fall into the ordinary conception and its dualism; a so-called thinking principle is no longer a thought, but is a subject. But still the true universal is for all that not abstract, but the universal is just the determining in and out of itself of the particular in and for itself. In this activity,

which is independently self-determining, the fact is at once implied that the activity, because it constitutes process, retains itself as the universal self-identical. (Hegel 2016a, p. 332)

Žižek, on the contrary, argues “the Hegelian Universal is such a “fiction” as “exists nowhere in reality” (there, we have nothing but exceptions) but is none the less implied by “reality” itself as a point of reference conferring on it its symbolic consistency” (Žižek 2008, p. 167). The Hegelian *Universal* “can realize itself only in impure, deformed, corrupted forms; if we want to remove these deformations and to grasp the Universal in its intact purity, we obtain its very opposite” (Žižek 2008, p. 166). Despite Žižek’s misreading of Hegel, this idea about *deformation* is very important: From it unfolds a profound *dialectic of pure and fractal* form, which will be defined in the following general terms.

It is from the question of the *reality of the Universal*—a kind of “germ cell” of theoretical disagreement—that the divergence between Ilyenkov and Žižek on all other questions, which can only be outlined here, grows. For convenience, we present these disagreements in the form of a table.

	Žižek	Ilyenkov
view of contradiction	“A ‘hole in the Logos’”	an essential expression of the Logos itself
cognizability of the world substance	a non-representability of the Real stable and static	an ideal-represented form an evolving totality
free subject	“A ‘crack in the Real’”	an attribute of substance and its necessary highest form
meaning	a symbolic order-event	an ideal form of object activity

It is not difficult to explain all this by the well-established reception of Hegel in “Western” thought through the prism of the existential–subjectivist interpretation, which was formed after the lectures of Alexandre Kojève, where the Hegelian emphasis on negativity, totality, and teleology comes from.<sup>4</sup> These notions are so widespread today that they have the status of prejudice. Hence it is easy to understand the intention of Žižek, who, with the help of the concepts of structural psychoanalysis, tries to overcome the difficulties of such a narrow interpretation, by stating that today one can only be a Hegelian by reading Hegel with the help of Lacan. Peter Thomson characterizes Žižek’s position quite accurately:

What Zizek is trying to do here is to try to reorientate our appreciation of Hegel <...> as the philosopher of the whole and of totality and the absolute and representing him as someone who sees necessity and the absolute as emerging from the contingent workings of the real. He is trying to get away from the idea

<sup>4</sup>This question seems to be controversial and requires a detailed explication. However, it is easy to trace, both historically and logically, that Kojève’s particular interpretation of Hegel grows out of Husserl’s phenomenology (and bears its very glow), with which he was fascinated at the moment of his acquaintance with Alexander Koyré. This acquaintance played a decisive role in Kojève’s decision to start seminars on Hegel.

of Hegel as a purely teleological thinker, presenting him as someone who sees the endpoint of history in the present moment as a product of the contingent events which have led to this moment. <...> A retrospective teleology has to also be open to the future, to possibility and process not as a predetermined and inevitable course but as one in which the contingent will continue to create necessity even while recognizing that the necessity which emerges from that process is not a necessary necessity, but merely a contingent one. (Thomson 2012)

But, here too there is a misunderstanding of Hegel, who in the *Logic* writes of the absolute idea as “a totality which gives itself its own laws”, thus shifting the focus to the problem of the creativity of the actual subject. For Hegelian dialectics, however, the problem remains: the failure to realize *pure repetition* and to convey thematically the singularity of what Lacan called *object a*. In another place, Žižek phrases the same question differently:

The same point could also be made in the terms of the dialectic of Good and Evil, as the coincidence of the Good with the supreme Evil. The “Good” stands for the balanced order of symbolic exchanges, whereas the supreme Evil designates the excessive gesture (the expenditure and/or loss) of disruption, disjunction, which is not simply the opposite of the Good—rather, it sustains the network of symbolic exchanges precisely in so far as it becomes invisible once we are ‘within’ the symbolic order. <...> There is, however, a debt that can never be honored, since it sustains the very existence of a system of exchange—indemnification. (Žižek 1994, p. 193)

Interestingly, Ilyenkov in *Cosmology of Spirit* also thinks of “cosmological apocalypse” as “repayment of thermal debt to Mother Nature” (Ilyenkov 1991, p. 443).

This “repayment of debt” through self-destruction is what Žižek protests: He sees it as a way out of the repression and the resentment that inevitably follows from the “flat ontology” of a self-developing totality conceptualized as wholeness. It can be assumed that the problem of the target cause (*έντελέχεια*) of consciousness, which for Ilyenkov coincided with the plot of “Cosmology”, remained unsolved for him: His tragic passing away can even be understood as an inability to solve it. Perhaps this is indicated by his later letter to Alexander Suvorov, where Ilyenkov admits that the question “why?” cannot be answered by a materialist at all, and suggests turning to the book of Ecclesiastes (Ilyenkov 1991, p. 448). But is it the “premodern” understanding of substance that is really to blame here, especially since the “modernist” understanding, which is proposed to replace the classical one, either condemns the subject to remain eternally split in its attempts to free itself from the oppression of a substance, where “everything has already happened”, to never achieve it and even to find pleasure in it (Žižek), or abolishes the subject at all by reducing it to an ontological game of difference and repetition (Deleuze), or else makes it dependent on the contingency of the Event as in Badiou? None of these options substantiates the necessity of the subject in the cumulative development of the world whole, its attributive rather than its accidental essence.

The emphasis on the coincidence of the cosmological and psychological problems has to also be made because Ilyenkov’s early “phantasmagorical” work is occasion-

ally proposed to be too “ontological” to his later works devoted to the theory of activity. Let us emphasize, following Gennady Lobastov, who shows and substantiates the unity of the “beginnings and ends” of Ilyenkov’s philosophy (Lobastov 2019), that for the Soviet thinker both *Cosmology of Spirit* and the late essay *Psychology* solve the *same problem*. It is what Žižek calls the problem of radical negativity: “Why did mankind acquire such a troublesome faculty as consciousness?” (Ilyenkov 1991, p. 448).

The solution to this problem is affected by different attitudes to the key problem of philosophy: self-reference, the relation to the self, which Hegel calls “the truth of the subject”. Does the Whole have to include itself in the Wholeness? Is it possible to bypass necessity? Hence, the interest in Spinoza by Deleuze, Lacan, and Ilyenkov becomes understandable. It is not surprising that, for Badiou, who relies on set theory (and thus condemns himself to face all the famous paradoxes of this theory), the attempt to resolve this problem results in the statement: “Every truth-process [*processus de vérité*] has its uncountable external surplus, which I call an event” (Badiou 2011, p. 103). This residue, which testifies that every multiplicity is always a “Non-All”, is the inevitable price to pay for the attempt to represent qualitative difference as quantitative, to reduce it to a formal-logical basis, although the very search for a theoretically rigorous basis is, in general, worth recognizing as fair.

It is in the attempt to solve this problem that we should see the limits of Ilyenkov’s approach. However, the variants from the opposite camp do not solve the problem either. We have a pure contradiction. In order to resolve it, it is necessary to generate a new category.

## What does this have to do with fractals? Psychology–history–cosmology

This problem constitutes the watershed between the line from Socrates to Ilyenkov<sup>5</sup> and the line opposing it, which is expressed in the form of the opposition between the principles of *totality* and *fragmentarity*. Žižek elaborates this latter principle in *The Parallax View* (Žižek 2006). In the dispute between these two principles, we grasp an important point: The bifurcation of the unified notion of the Whole, of totality, as requiring justification in its own–other, which as a category Hegel does not have. Indeed, Hegel’s “identity of identity and non-identity” turns out to be rather assumed as a principle, but not quite explicitly substantiated (Hegel 2010, pp. 50–52). Of course, this is explained by the cumulative search of the entire classical philosophical tradition, which is an ascent to the cognition of the *identity* of the One. This ascent begins with Thales and culminates in the concrete resolution of the problem of the logical beginning in *Hegel’s system*. That is why, after Hegel, only the dissolution of philosophy is inevitable—by analogy with what Marx called the dissolution of the Ricardian school in political economy or a further development of the absolute—but no longer predominantly in forms of thought, not on a philosophical basis proper.

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed discussion of the Socratic lineage and its connection to Ilyenkov, see the essay “Socrates, Jesus Christ and Evald Ilyenkov: Reminiscences of Meanings” (Lobastov 2003, pp. 11–26).

This means that, for the Hegel–Marx–Ilyenkov theoretical line to be carried out quite consistently, the abstractness of the category *totality* needs to be removed to show the mediation within it itself, and, to reiterate, *not only in the forms of thought, but in the social-educational practice itself*. The first step towards this is developing *fractality* as a logical category. To define their relationship further is to remove the abstractness of totality, to comprehend it through its complete negation, mediating its own–other. This own–other turns out to be the notion of *fractality*, which crystallizes in the theory as an answer to very complicated problems: The dialectical form of development identified by Hegel somehow fails, universal logical development is irreplaceable, but it can “stall” when faced with an obstacle (meaning the discontinuity of development cycles at every point, the constant incompleteness, the failure of these cycles, the unattainability of reaching a new “turn”—this is a real problem for Hegelian dialectics,<sup>6</sup> which also explains all the diverse empirical “setbacks” and failures of social-educational activity; Žižek mentions such fruitless repetitions when commenting on Deleuze’s attempt to materialistically solve the problem of the generation of meaning by appealing to Freudianism (Žižek 1994, p. 125)). It is this side that critics of Hegelian dialectics clearly show by demanding that thinking be taken out of the grip of binary oppositions. In order to justify *fractality* as a category, it is necessary to show its necessity in a cumulative movement, in a universal development.

Let us start with the fact that the fractal is originally a mathematical concept, which is most widely exemplified by the property of self-similarity. Despite the fact that the logico-philosophical content of this concept has been developed in a number of works, it is the property of self-similarity that is one of the keys to understanding Ilyenkov’s idea—thinking is the universal connection of the whole expressed in its pure form (“for-self”, Hegel would say), and if we designate some structural levels of the connected whole (in fractal theory they are usually called micro-, macro- and mega-levels), it would not be a great mistake to consider *psychology*, *history* and *cosmology* as such levels. In each of them, thinking fulfills a fundamentally important function: bridging the gap to ensure the development of the whole. The purpose (*έντελέχεια*) of thinking is defined as the projection of the whole onto the individual level: *Fit for the purpose* and *fit for the whole* are linked together in the philosophy

<sup>6</sup>Hegel calls it “eternal analysis and constant re-iteration within itself” (Hegel 2016b, p. 38). Schelling in his natural philosophy holds the idea that the result of the “stagnation” of the development of the system, which is reflected in the decay of the material basis and the products of this decay, makes it possible to realise this “stagnation” and overcome it:

Suppose, for illustration, a stream; it is pure identity; where it meets resistance, a whirlpool is formed; this whirlpool is not an abiding thing, but something that vanishes at every moment, and every moment springs up anew. – Originally, in Nature there is nothing distinguishable; all products are, so to speak, still in solution, and invisible in the universal productivity. It is only when retarding points are given that they are thrown off and advance out of the universal identity. – At every such point the stream breaks (the productivity is annihilated), but at every step there comes a new wave which fills up the sphere” (Schelling 2004, p. 206). Compare Žižek: “The New emerges when, instead of a process just ‘naturally’ evolving in its flow of generation and corruption, this flow becomes stuck, an element (a gesture) is fixed, persists, repeats itself and thus perturbs the ‘natural’ flux of (de)composition. This persistence of the Old, its ‘stuckness’ is the only possible site of the rise of the New: in short, the minimal definition of the New is as an Old which gets stuck and thereby refuses to pass away. (Žižek 2012, p. 483)

of Spinoza and Ilyenkov for a reason. Fractality is an expression of ultimate discontinuity, but it is in this discontinuity that the basis for the emergence (or manifestation) of a universal connection lies. For example, if we think of two separate geometric points, simultaneously with and through this discreteness we are already given their connection in the form of a spatial line.

Thinking as a connection of representations into a concept—as a function resulting from overcoming the gap between the object of need and the organism—is not something new. As for history, it is not difficult to find the idea of fractality in this area either. Discontinuity and fragmentariness are essential characteristics of contemporary society. The universal attitude of fragmentation—it is what should be called *fractality*, i.e., *total fragmentation* (as well as *fragmentation of the totality*)—is noted by many authors as the definition of the functioning of the late stage of a society of developed commodity production and has a historical (ultimately, socioeconomic) conditionality. Lukács writes about this in a reversal of the problem of the relation between the rational and the irrational in capitalist society: The behavior of individuals, rational in each individual act, leads to the irrationality of society as a whole (Lukács 2003). This motif of technological rationality is developed in the works of Frankfurt School advocates. Fragmentariness permeates the world as a whole, which finds expression in the antistubstantial concepts characteristic of non-classical philosophy (from Schopenhauer's ideas about the groundlessness of the world to the modern justification of contingency in the speculative realism of Meillassoux). It is characteristic of the historical process (think of Althusser's "aleatoric materialism"), which is subjectless (spontaneous). Fragmentariness is reflected in ideas of clip thinking or the atomization of society (the subject of many books), on the fragmentation of collectives and individuals (which would now be more accurately defined as "dividuals" as the opposite of "individual" (Bastidas 2023)—because human subjectivity itself is being severed)—in short, it is present at all scales of being (micro, macro and mega-levels), and this allows us to speak of a *fractal* universe. Fractality here reflects self-similarity, but only as *one of its moments*. It is by no means exhausted by self-similarity: The special representation in this notion of the aforementioned problems (discontinuity, randomness, irrationality, radical negativity, anti-substantiality, pure multiplicity) constitutes the specific problematics of fractality as a *logical category*, which forms an "own–other" for a category of totality, which occupies an exceptional place in Hegel's system of Logic. It is this exclusivity (by the standards of Logic itself) that necessitates another exclusivity, which is *fractality*.

Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is assumed in every act of Hegelian Logic, but is not grasped by it in the form in which Hegel left his system. Hegel rightly concentrates on *development* in pursuit of his goal: to show the development of the Absolute Idea. The moments of *regression*, decay, are marked by him only in passing, but invariably carefully: While seemingly arbitrarily passing from one category to another, he strictly traces all possible variants of development, and through their exhaustion comes to the transformation of the categories. Consequently, fractality cannot be removed by merely appealing to Hegelian arguments.

In dialectical logic, the process of development is represented as a spiral, a "circle of circles". But it is not only a matter of visual representation. It is not a matter of *representation* at all, but of the *notion* of development, which, in its essence, is a



contradiction—the identity of opposites, the resolution of which is the exit to a new cycle, a new “coil” of development. And these cycles can often remain incomplete, as Bosenko notes: “The cycle of negation of negation is often disrupted by certain phenomena from the aggregate movement that intrude on the limits of this process of negation of negation and violate the logic of its formation” (Bosenko 2001, p. 103). Fractalization at the visual-geometrical level and in essence of the development process itself is a “crumpling”, deformation of this “pure form” of development, its “slippage” through breakdown of cycles. “Drowning” in the spurious infinity of fractal iterations on the logical level is expressed in Deleuze’s concept of differences and repetitions. Deleuze’s concept of difference is a counterbalance to Hegel’s notion of difference. Difference, as Deleuze points out, does not reach, *should not reach*, contradiction and its removal, and for this it must be taken out from under the power of identity: this is the central idea that is consistently carried out in *Difference and Repetition* (Deleuze 1994). The fractal is a category of motion, but one of “wandering” motion; fractal structures emerge close to the critical point. It represents the process of transformation into another state, but this transformation is as if it were “frozen”, like a constant balancing on the edge, like movement without movement. For example, in her dilemma, Rosa Luxemburg does not consider the possibility of a third way: the potentially indefinite “fading” of the status quo. The existing order has masterfully learned to prolong its life by incorporating any of its negation into commodity logic,<sup>7</sup> and even by “borrowing” its modes of reproduction from the noncapitalist order: modern capitalism, at its virtualization stage, appears as a vivid embodiment of the logic of fractality, for the modes of direct human production (for things) are now a condition for the further self-reproduction of a commodity society.

We would like to emphasize that the pair *fractal–total*, although related to the pair *abstract–concrete*, is not reducible to it. We should speak about a new logical relation: abstract fragmentarity and abstract totality are different sides of concrete totality, or *fractality*, although the connection between these relations has yet to be explored in greater depth. For example, when Ilyenkov writes of *totality* as synonymous with *concreteness* in Marx, it is understood by Ilyenkov as the field of cognitive activity, as its goal and result (Ilyenkov 2019). The *abstract* from this point of view is a *means* of thinking, necessary to achieve a given goal. In his analysis of the process of theoretical work, Ilyenkov separates the stage of the *production* of theoretical abstractions and the stage of the *application* of the unfolded theory to practice. In the *first* case, the center of gravity is the internal links of the subject itself, and the researcher must necessarily abstract away from contingencies and logically “straighten” the historical process. In the *second* case, the criterion of significance includes the human choice, the *human goal*. But it is no great revelation that this goal does not always coincide with the “pure form” of the goal in essence; only the Whole itself can be this pure form, which is detached in a particular subjectivity as the Goal. However, there are historical periods when the achievement of truth (the understanding of the Goal as determined by the needs of the Whole) does not coincide directly with the goals of certain groups and strata of people, and these goals themselves are situated several “structural levels” below the understanding of the Universal Goal: they are situated in

<sup>7</sup>See (Tomin 2014) on this subject.

the zone of the “small being” (in the words of Mikhail Lifshitz) of these people. This *truthfulness*, however, requires an effort to reveal the real situation of these groups of people: it is quite clear that not all representatives of the various social groups are interested in this. Lukács writes about truth as the weapon of the proletarian class for precisely this reason. However, the disorganized proletariat, which has not yet grasped the Whole that has been laid down for it as its *own* Goal, is not a subject of history and, hence, the periods in question can be characterized as periods of historical *subjectlessness* and constitute continuing revolutionary moments (periods of leap, interruption). Does such a period come to fruition or not, does becoming come to fruition? This is precisely what Deleuze and Hegel are arguing about.

The principle of *fractality* that conditions, explains and justifies this lack of subjectivity is the logical reflection of a *real overturning of the end and the means*, resulting in an analyticism retreating into a “spurious infinity” and a metaphysical way of thinking, an example of this overturning being demonstrated by Marx in the transition from classical to vulgar political economy, that is the dissolution of political economy. But it is about the theoretical side precisely insofar as this theoretical (logical) side only represents a real overturning (circulation, circumvention, negotiation—all the meanings usually associated with the pithy German word *Verkehr*). This real shift of purpose to means takes place in reality itself, in social practice: The production of goods for the sake of use-values (Commodity-Money-Commodity) shifts to the production of money for the sake of money (Money-Commodity-Money’), the purpose becomes abstractly unilateral (profit, the production of money, which was until then a means of circulation, becomes the sense and purpose of the entire economic process), and this causes a deformation of all superstructural spheres, including the logical. Sergey Mareev, commenting on Lukács, points out this very point:

The capitalist is not interested in science in itself, in objective truth in itself. He is interested in the result, the effect, which can be counted and measured—in tons, kilometers, rubles etc. Herein lies one of the fundamental contradictions of contemporary scientific and technological progress: on the one hand, the need to develop science, and on the other hand, the complete loss of interest in science and scientificity itself. The loss of that interest, which was characteristic, for example, of classical German philosophy, which investigated Science as such. (Mareev 2010, p. 66)

The movement from the abstract to the concrete is here replaced by a “movement” (more accurately, a *state* or *wandering*) from the abstract to the abstract: An abstract “fractured” form “crumples” practice, makes it imaginary. This is vividly illustrated by Lukács’ discussion of the rationality of capitalist society, which is based on calculus (Lukács 2003).

A vicious circle is formed: a non-true practice generates a non-true theory, which “goes to ground” and generates—again!—the un-true practice. How do we get out of it, when it seems as if the whole world is “standing on its head”? To do so, one must find the source, the beginning of the fragmentation. This question has long been answered by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: “In the division of labour, man is also divided” (Engels 1877).

Contingency, an essential feature of fractality, is contained in every step of logical movement, so the question of transformation, i.e., development, is always an open

question at the stage of freedom. For, while in nature necessity manifests itself in the form of blind chance through the enumeration of variants (necessity forces its way), in the case of its manifestation in the form of freedom, the basis of human action may be a conscious orientation towards the *non-conformity* with the objective logic. And, although locally it may give some benefit, globally it puts the world on the brink of destruction. Since the goal of the individual acting in this way is not coordinated with the global goal (the need of the Whole, into which he is included), interrupt, rupture, breaking the cycles of development, this “getting stuck” is the way of existence of a stagnating, disintegrating system. Anton Makarenko rightly wrote about stoppage of development as a form of death of the collective (Makarenko 2019, p. 223).

The sublation of this rupture, i.e., the removal of the principle of fragmentation itself, involves answering the question that Fichte posed to Kant<sup>8</sup>—in other words, must totality itself be total? In Hegel, totality has no “otherness of its own” and therefore has to be grounded in a mediation of fractality in order to be a truly concrete organic totality. It is not difficult to see that this question of abstract and concrete totality is linked to the relationship of formal and real communalization; history has shown very convincingly that, in order for it to arrive at its ultimate goal—the Personality, the “expropriation of expropriators” alone is far from sufficient.

Research into the question of the relationship between the *total* and the *fractal* shows that there is a deep dialectic between these principles that has an important social dimension. The sublation of fractality therefore appears to be a problem of historical movement and is not possible in an external way, but in its own discontinuous-fragmentary logic. The fractal is a total rupture, but giving birth to a new totality at each “point”. A coherent solution to the problem of radical negativity in a monistic way is possible through the *intervention of the ideal, bringing rationality into development*. The ideal is understood as a necessary product of the development of matter, arising from the needs of substance itself, without which at a certain stage this development is hindered, stalled, becomes impossible. The challenge lies only in a more rigorous and consistent justification of this position, ruling out both theological and abstract-teleological interpretations of it.

The historical-critical attitude to actual being enables us, at the micro-level, to find wholeness (in-dividuality as opposed to “dividuality”, discreteness), to look at ourselves through the eyes of all humanity, to take up the position of the absolute subject (as Fichte might say), to rise from “small being” to a movement along the logic of the whole and to reach the universal problematics, to embrace the world within it, from the origin to the transition. In other words, the one must see himself as a Whole, and to see through the prism of this Whole a measure of the truth of determinate being, and to find the limit of one’s own movement and efforts in this determinate being. This is what allows man to understand his own meaning: the image of the Whole, their needs for development are “projected” onto the individual level as a Goal. Therefore, teleology contains no mysticism whatsoever—we need only think

<sup>8</sup>“Was logic itself, as a science, obliged to follow the same principles that it affirmed as absolutely universal for any correct thinking, or was it entitled to ignore them? Should logic be a science among other sciences, or was it rather to be likened to a wilful princeling who dictated laws obligatory for all other people but not binding in himself?”, as Ilyenkov formulates the central problem of this discussion in *Dialectical Logic* (Ilyenkov 1977, p. 38).

of it as an individual expression of the universal in which this universal is reflected, as the world in Leibniz's monad. Truthfulness therefore becomes here not a luxury, not something we could acquire at will, but a condition for comprehending the most intimate and subtle layer of human existence, in which "all the existential and historical meanings of actuality collapse to the center of gravity—in the point of the Self" (Lobastov 2003, p. 8).

In this way, a "fracture" of fractal movement is made on the individual scale, then spreading self-similarly to all higher levels. The key to this "fracture" is the *role of the ideal* in bridging the gap and continuing the development of universal matter. Ilyenkov's work shows that this role is fulfilled by the ideal at all structural levels of being: from the emergence of the human psyche (Ilyenkov 2009) to the change of historical epochs, and culminates in the rebirth of the universe (Ilyenkov 2019).

Alexey Penzin argues that Ilyenkov's "Cosmology" legitimizes the event, the singularity: the existence of the universe depends on the singular act of man (Penzin 2018). But this is not entirely accurate. It *does* depend on the act of man: *but such an act is every free act*. The universe is "restarted" by thinking (the gap is closed) forever and constantly: the movement towards "world fire" cannot be understood as homogeneous and linear. Every point of the Universe, where there is a mind, represents such a singularity, *the identity of the fractal and the total*. This is the *anagogical meaning* of Ilyenkov's cosmological thought of the dependence of being on thought, which incidentally belongs to Hegel: if a single speck of dust is destroyed, the world collapses. The *personality* as a form of human being, whose object-practical activity embodies thinking as an attributive form, reveals a closure on the absolute grounds of being: through sensual activity, or *practice*, humans confront nature as natural beings, but by doing so they uncover the potencies dormant in nature, intensifying the development of substance, generating what was only lurking in it as its inner, hidden content. This becomes possible through the discovery of the universal *as universal*, through its embodiment in reality through the object-practical transformation of the whole world by humans, in the limit—the whole universe, which Ilyenkov shows by skillfully sharpening the thought to a contradiction in "Cosmology". However, in his later essay on the universal, Ilyenkov expresses the same idea: The universal, substance, is not an already-occurring, pre-determined thing; it *forms* itself (at the highest stage, precisely through human activity—this is Marx's key idea, taken to its limit by Ilyenkov), i.e., strictly according to Spinoza, it is the *cause of itself*. This proves the unity of Ilyenkov's theoretical views and the kinship between his early "Cosmology" and his later works on activity theory. He formulates it as follows:

The 'universal' comprises and embodies in itself 'the entire treasure of particulars' not as an 'Idea', but as a totally real, special phenomenon which tends to become universal and which develops 'out of itself', by force of its intrinsic contradictions new but no less real, phenomena, other 'particular' forms of actual progress. Hence, the 'genuine universal' is not any particular form found in each and every member of a class but the particular which is driven on to emerge by its very 'particularity', and precisely by this 'particularity' to become the 'genuine universal'. (Ilyenkov 1974, p. 51)

The world eternally and infinitely rests on itself, in each point of *the I* giving birth to a "nested" new totality embracing the wholeness of the world. This is the logic of

fractality as its own other of totality, where the continuity of the world consists of discontinuities—singularities, each of which carries the world as a whole; this logic monistically removes the problem of including radical negativity in development. The singular individual is representative of the universal, that the self embodies a fragment of this universal. Here it becomes clear that the *path from fragment to fractal* is a necessary requirement of universal development. Only the fragment, which has become a fractal, carries the richness of the whole, and represents this whole. The *fragment* becomes a *fractal*, the *singular* becomes *universal*, the *accidental* becomes *necessary* precisely through the *activity of the Whole*, which at a certain stage takes the form of *creative free subjective human activity*. Contrary to Žižek's arguments, the Whole does not have the form of an "already-been", a kind of frozen "All", but *creates* itself, and this process is the only *absolute* that both Hegel and authentic Marxism recognized.

The solution in the spirit of this identification is presented by Asimov in his novel *The Gods Themselves* (Asimov 1976), where the human mind not only actively "intervenes" in communication between parallel universes, saving them from global catastrophe, but also gives life to new universes, shackled before in a singularity ("cosmic egg"). This is consonant with the thought of Heraclitus:

They do not know that God (i.e., people—"the gods themselves"! ) heals great bodies in the cosmos. He smooths out their excesses, connects the fragmented, warningly sets the dislocated, picks up the scattered, adorns the ugly, applies form to the formless and makes visible the unrecognizable. It penetrates all of nature, molding, smoothing, decomposing, freezing, melting. (Graham 2010, p. 184)

It is also proof of the attributivity of reason, of the non-meaninglessness and non-accidental nature of its origin and existence; it is here that the boundary between the proponents of the principles of the One (totality, substantiality, wholeness) and the Many (fractality, contingent nature, partiality) is drawn.

Abstractly understood, totality and fractality do not provide a coherent picture of development. In the first case, we fail to cope with the problem of radical negativity and are forced to assume an initial discontinuity that violates the logic of wholeness, and, reasoning sequentially, we arrive at absolute discontinuity—fractality. But further reasoning in the now obtained principle leads us to a complete disconnect in thinking, living, being, not only one's own, but that of the whole world. Eternal "stasis" or infinite pulsation without purpose and cause of arising universes is a weighty argument for a pessimistic view of the world.

## Conclusion

This pessimism is only a reflection of the prevailing state of affairs in society. The ontologization of the principle of present existence is nothing new: Aristotle thought of the world as a slave system, medieval philosophers as a hierarchical system in which God is the main feudal lord, and Modern Age thinkers as a mechanical aggregate, consisting of individual particles. When randomness is a principle of the functioning

of social market relations, the foundation of the world falls under, as Meillassoux calls it, contingency. The relations of discontinuity in social relations are expressed in the recognition of fractality as a universal principle of being.

The point is to understand the fractal as a moment of totality, at the point where the one transforms into the other and through this other exists, at the point of their identity. This can also be visualized in the countermovement of scales: fractality “works” only when one goes deeper into the thing. Totality, on the other hand, implies an increasing distance from the thing in an attempt to mentally “gaze” at the world in its entirety. These two movements meet at the point of identity; it is the fractal self-similarity that gives grounds to speak provably about the identity of macro- and microcosms: this idea appears in human history in the ascending moments of development for a reason. Fractality must therefore be understood as *logic of degradation*; decay is fractality itself. But taken in relation to totality, this definition becomes poor, abstract. Fractality mediates totality, acting as its own—other, necessary limit, without which totality turns into absolute indistinguishability, of which Hegel writes in the first volume of *The Science of Logic*, considering the Transition into Essence. Fractality is an expression of the disclosure of the totality’s organic links (speaking in Heinrich Batishchev’s words), its internal motor and potential for self-movement and self-renewal. Fractality, in its turn, is itself mediated by the total, represented ideally in each point of rupture.

The fractal in which “spirit only wins its truth by finding its feet in its absolute disruption” (Hegel 2018, p. 21) is the totality of the human Self, which has become a universally evolved Personality, which has finally conquered alienation by identifying itself with world substance through the coincidence of objective laws of development for them. This idea goes back to Spinoza’s famous position: “The connection and order of ideas is the same as the connection and order of things” (Spinoza 1954, p. 83). Here also lies the solution to the totalitarianism–individualism contradiction, where history achieves its ultimate goal, restoring the lost identity of *Mine* and *Ours* to the unity mediated by the long history of their rupture, and moves away from the relationship of domination–subordination to the genuine relationship of Man to Man. Thinking, the subject’s free action, his creativity—in a word, the Self in the fullness of its definitions—is a kind of “stopper” in the recursive–contingent production of the spurious differences and repetitions, these products of the “inhibition” of the continuing interruption, the leap. But, in order for the self to find its wholeness, it needs to see itself through the eyes of the Other. This is so because the totality is essentially the interaction of its moments, where every cause is at the same time an effect (as Marx might say); therefore the exploration of the possibilities to bridge this gap must be directed towards the problems of intersubjectivity, the dialogical exchange of freedom (as Fichte might say) and *the production of the very form of communication in the formation of the historical subject*.

Žižek claims that Ilyenkov’s philosophy represents a pre-modernist way of thinking about totality in the spirit of Spinoza, as a self-regulating whole. For Žižek, the Achilles’ heel of this “mode of spirit” is its inability to solve the problem of radical negativity, which turns out to be the total annihilation of the universe—the picture Ilyenkov supposedly paints in his *Cosmology of Spirit*. Instead, Žižek suggests turning to Lacan and his way of thinking about the subject as a crack in the real: this

seems to him to be a more promising way of solving the problem in question. However, we have seen instead that this leads Žižek to misunderstand both Ilyenkov and Hegel, in whose works the Soviet thinker's position is thoroughly rooted. An analysis of their theoretical positions leads to an understanding of the problem of radical negativity as a problem of universal development and creativity. However, there remain many weaknesses in this problem for the so-called 'orthodox Marxism' that Ilyenkov sought to support, and Žižek's critique allows these weaknesses to be exposed and taken into account. The concept of fractality can help to both recognize and productively work through these opposing views of the relation of thought and being. In this concept, which rises to the level of a theoretical principle, the concreteness (as unity in diversity) of the totality itself is substantiated and the abstractness of positions is eliminated. There is reason to believe that this principle is already established in the works of Hegel, although it is not mentioned by name in the works of the great idealist. However, this is a subject for further research. It is important to pay attention to a new step in the theoretical development of the categorical apparatus, which allows us to preserving the centrality of *bête noirs* like dialectics and Universals.

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