

THE PANDEMIC IN EXCLAMATORY MODE!

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Abstract. The present approach operates with the exclamatory method delivered by Slavoj Žižek in *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World* (2020), as an identifying and analysing study for a philosophical-political diagnosis fulfilling the imperative issued by Susan Sontag (1995), that of avoiding (abstaining or trying to abstain!) from involving the disease/(here, the) virus in a series of metaphors, as sequence-parts of the equation *real event – imaginative projection*. Punctually, the exclamatory context strongly suggested in the title of the volume will be expounded by recourse to chapters placed, with an extra exclamation point, in the corpus of the mentioned paper: “*Calm Down and Panic!*” – “*Monitor and Punish? Yes, Please!*” – “*Communism or Barbarism, as Simple as That!*”; and will contain three exclamatory reflections that unitarily define the *monstrous-anxiety/insecurity-barbarism/crisis* relationships. If *The Guardian* (April 23, 2020) interrogates (in the manner of Žižekian humour) and deciphers the prevalence and intensity of viral spread/contamination by correlating it with the (more, less, or equal) impact of the spread of Slavoj's Žižek's book, this article will decree that, at least for a case of Coronavirus (see the review signed by Caroline Green Whitcomb), the exclamation point can be the cure!

Keywords: *Pandemic! Slavoj Žižek; Exclamation as Philosophic Method; Monstrosity-Barbarism-Crises.*

The exclamatory method!

In comments on *Disease as a metaphor*, Susan Sontag¹ experimented with the finality of an ideational diagnosis, considered a remedy-by-overcoming the prospect of using the disease itself as a figure of style, or an expressive rendering formula belonging to an ornamental approach already filled with prejudice. Detached research/evaluation corresponds, in the Sontag-ian option, to the act of studying, elucidating the disease itself and freeing it from any metaphorical envelope attached to it: “there are some metaphors we must absolutely refrain from using, or try to do so”².

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¹ Susan Sontag, *Boala ca metaforă. SIDA și metaforele ei* [Illness as Metaphor. AIDS and its Metaphors], Dacia Publishing House, 1995.

² *Ibidem*, p. 75.

The undoubtedly topical actuality issued by Susan Sontag considers that rapid epidemics become practice runs for avoiding and excluding contamination, being explained and formulated as precautions that have their own status and end up being integrated into social morals (see, in the Romanian pandemic space, the manifested fear of ritually resorting to the cup of Communion, the prohibition of physical closeness, abstinence from emotional gestures – greeting with a handshake, hugging – the obligation of wearing a mask, etc.), in order to increase the role of prevention, relying on individual responsibility and conscious involvement. The landmarks that mark the pandemic picture invest with an exclamatory meaning the *monstrous-unimaginable-disastrous* triad, revealing the bifurcating effect of reality arranged in the interval between *real event* – *imaginative projection*.

*Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World*³ (2020) illustrates those premises which Susan Sontag imagines and incorporates in an articulatory-exclamatory gesture, as a way of renouncing the metaphor in favour of the presentation – in a clear tone! – of (a) reality that reveals its serious/strong intonation. Thus, impregnated by a revised symbolic act – the imperative recommendation/phrase *noli me tangere*⁴ is now held accountable for observing the exigencies of a saving attitude of distancing/ non-touching, governed by the desiderata of solidarity and love of one's neighbour⁵.

From the very *Introduction*, Slavoj Žižek resorts to a double Hegelian appeal⁶ – one's discovery/rediscovery in the other/the loved one; the identification of one/the one with our own being, which does not become “us”, but remains an

³ Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the world*, OR Books, New York, London, 2020.

⁴ The very evidence that recharges the meaning-giving exclamation – *Ecce Homo!* – proves to be revealing for the exclamatory meaning of the pandemic, rounded to a Biblical-standard passage including the symbolic threshold of today's foreshadowed reality: “When Pilate saw that it was of no use at all, but rather stirred up a tumult, he took water, and washed his hands (...)” – Matthew 27: 19-24. *The scene of hand washing* can be perceived as a standard framework of an *immunizing act*, of investing Pilate with the status of *biopolitical decision-maker*. Žižek believes that through *Ecce Homo!* an exposed sign of “Pilate's objective irony” is communicated (Behold, not a tortured human being, but God Himself! – “Christ represents the minimal difference between man and superman!” – *The Puppet and the Dwarf. The Perverse Core of Christianity*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2003, p. 80) which we can equate – here – with the feeling of that *sovereign irony of looking at ourselves living in the moment of tragedy. No longer being useful* overlaps with inaction/immobility, a weakness-neutrality recognized by questioning the authority, decisions and binding valences of politics. The scene of hand washing remains a symbolic act, able to immunize only up to a point if we review it through its stated warning, especially pertinent today: “A simple rinse is not enough to remove all traces of the virus from your hands”!

⁵ One's neighbour is punctuated (in the same exclamatory manner, underlining the vocative), named and mentioned by Žižek through a double reference. The first concerns the dedication of the volume to the architect, urbanist and professor Michael Sorkin, whose Covid-19-caused death he refuses to accept; a refusal which transforms the Žižek-ian work into a political and artistic exclamatory endeavour – in [the *Against the Wall* interview with Aleksandra Wagner, in *Covjek I Prostor (Man and Space)*, Croatian Architects Association, no. 07-08, 2006, pp. 39-47, Michael Sorkin placed his career inside a political event of practical criticism and artistic significance, conceived and admitted in the sense of substantiating and applying a strategy of reconciling the autonomy of artistic practice with social involvement.]

The second considers the *Appendix* of the volume (*Two Helpful Letters from Friends*, pp. 107-114) which puts on file an email of Lacanian psychoanalyst Gabriel Tupinamba pointing out that in the absence of any major change felt in one's own daily reality, any threat becomes a spectral fantasy with serious and augmented accents (p. 109); as well as correspondence with the German journalist Andreas Rosenfelder (*Die Welt*), according to which distancing (staying at/working from home) implies a heroic duty of revised ethical commitment.

⁶ Not coincidentally, Žižek's anthology of jokes (*Žižek's Jokes*, edited by Audun Mortensen, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014) *proposes* as suggestive subtitle a triggering element of premeditated humor, by-reporting-to-Hegel: *Did you hear the one about Hegel and negation?*

enigma or a miracle; and the revelation of the meaning of night, that emptiness and nothingness which contains everything and which captures the finality of experience in/through the act of looking the other in the eye⁷.

From the triad proposed by Susan Sontag – *monstrous-unimaginable-disastrous* – Slavoj Žižek preserves and retains the connection of the terms *monstrous-anxiety/insecurity-barbarism/crisis*. The first is superimposed as an interpretive-metaphorical register for AIDS, in the idea that (in the same Sontag-ian manner) “*the monstrous* (we note), as a metaphor for AIDS, omits the crucial truth that AIDS owes its huge impact not to its reality of terrible disease, or to its immediate biophysiological effect, no matter how horrible, but the extraordinary libidinal energy invested in it (...). AIDS occupies a pre-established place in our ideological imaginary space, and *the monstrous* (we note) only materializes, embodies this fantastic dimension”⁸.

The opinion is reaffirmed in the *Appendix* of the volume dedicated to the pandemic, in the Žižek – Tupinamba virtual dialogue which highlights a *monstrous paradox*, in the sense that the invisible spread of the HIV crisis has become a disturbing reality due to the impossibility of proportionately relating to the amplitude of the phenomenon. The positive verdict imbues the situation/reality with metaphorical and symbolic contours measuring the strength of the virus, and re-arranging, in the hypothesis of contagion, “the small freedoms we still have”.⁹ With the absolutely necessary statement that, according to Žižek, monstrosity is inserted in the very thresholds of decision, recognized, on the one hand, in the “decision of the other in me” and in the task of a “decision to decide”, symptoms manifest in “monstrosity of Antigone” in the sense that “Antigone is not only in relation to the Other – the Thing, but she – for a passing moment, exactly the moment in which she decides – is directly the Thing, thus excluding herself from the community controlled by the intermediary agent of the symbolic regulation”. The symbolic level is equated by Žižek (in the same Lacanian way) with the substance of social existence, and is superimposed on a set of impersonal rules that

In response to such a register, in the equation of the present text, Žižek's confession about his own isolation, nuanced by Ernst Lubitsch's famous joke from *Ninotchka*, which Žižek re-contextualizes, becomes important: “coffee remains the same, what changes is whipped-cream-free coffee into milk-free coffee or, more simply, the addition of the implicit negation and the transformation of plain coffee into milk-free coffee. The same thing happened with my isolation. Before the crisis, it was a *milk-free* isolation I could have gone out, I chose not to. Now it is just the simple coffee of isolation, without any possible denial involved” (*Ibidem*, pp. 107-108).

On the other hand, the exclamatory variation is required geared to the nuance *red-blue ink* with reference to the coded joke about the worker-citizen from the late German Democratic Republic, who arrived in Siberia. Žižek concludes that in the presence of the exercise of all freedoms, what is missing is the “red ink” itself, which makes it impossible to articulate a language of lack of freedom or to project imaginative alternatives (*Žižek's Jokes*, p. 95). The option also refers to the message of scenes projected in *Matrix: the blue pill* - the story ends and you can believe what you consider appropriate; *the red pill* keeps you in *Wonderland* (see, for more details, Slavoj Žižek, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, 2006), thus agreeing that the exclamatory meaning *Pandemic!* is written/marked in *red ink!* We can imagine Žižek, in isolation, serving his coffee without milk, but having at hand/on the desk (at home!) the two containers of artificial sweetener one *blue* and the other *red!* (*Žižek's Jokes*, p. 46).

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Zăbovînd în negativ. Kant, Hegel și critica ideologiei* [Tarrying with the Negative], All Educational Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 43.

⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the world, quoted work*, p. 110.

guide and coordinate existence.¹⁰ In itself, the localization of the ethical act related to reality designates the decision to modify the register of coordinates of the principle of reality, a compelling space for experimentation in the corpus of social architecture, an intervention that redefines an acceptance of all that is good.

What prevails, exclamationarily, is the very reconfiguration of interpretations regarding the context of a question such as: *why is this so?* – by referring to a *new* ethical norm, or highlighting a *new* reality, materialized by *another* duty. Duty has real effects and intervenes in reality by redefining it, delimiting us and alienating us from the way in which sui-generis reality exists and appears: “the monstrosity of the Real is brought to our notice (...) when the reality our daily life is enriched with new unnatural objects”.¹¹

“Until a week ago, I was looking forward to the end of the day (...) Now it's the exact opposite: I'm afraid to fall asleep, because nightmares haunt me and I wake up panicking. The nightmares are about the reality that awaits me (...) What reality is this?”¹². Žižek's confession re-enshrines, this time, a personally applied/lived experience, identified in the *enounced context* of *why is this so?* The changing coordinates of reality trigger and produce radical social changes, unprecedented transformations of society, future uncertainties, economic crises, the stagnation of world dynamics, the exercise of the absurd and the impossible. The symptoms are explained by Žižek through a threatening regression to open/human-faced barbarism, acknowledging that the virus survival/counteracting measures offer anxious predictions – the pandemic will last about two years and the virus will infect 60-70% of the world's population, registering millions of deaths – a prophecy that rethinks the whole scaffolding of social ethics – care given to the elderly and the vulnerable. Monstrosity overloaded with anxiety/insecurity fuels barbarism based on the ambiguity of a virus that threatens the whole world, whose reloaded ideology is inserted in the very corpus of individual responsibility. Interpretations are used by Žižek for answering unresolved questions about necessary changes in the social and economic system. The effects of the crisis are triply felt – on the medical, economic and psychological level – delimiting it from the political factor. In this sense, the Žižek-ian warning induces an explicit exclamation point: “what is needed now is a real policy, and decisions about solidarity are eminently political”¹³! (we note).

Exclamation 1: “Calm Down and Panic!”

Slavoj Žižek's exclamatory statement, expressed by the assertion that “panic has its own logic, triggering real deficits”¹⁴, is/represents in fact a particular re-anchoring in a context marked by a prolonged pandemic situation against its

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *Ați spus cumva totalitarism?* [Did Somebody say Totalitarianism], Curtea Veche Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, pp. 130-131.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 138.

¹² Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the world*, quoted work, p. 85.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

sudden, intense, alarming and often considered unfounded effect; all of these being definite coordinates specific to the feeling of panic. The intensification of the phenomenon is situated between the manifest boundaries recognized in/by two obvious *caputs*: from the absence of panic – at a time when (post-SARS and post-Ebola) not only prophecies, but also informed comments announced an even stronger epidemic – to excessive panic, inappropriate as a reaction formula for dealing with a global threat – “when we react in panic, we do not take the threat seriously – on the contrary, we simplify it”.¹⁵

Rather than pointing to the limits of market globalization, the pandemic warns about the fatal repercussions of nationalist populism, underscoring the deficit of thinking within the horizon of primacy (...*to be first!*) and reaffirming the need for non-hierarchical global solidarity and cooperation: “China has recently suffered from severe swine flu and is now threatened by a locust invasion (...) The climate crisis is killing more people around the world than Coronavirus, but without causing panic.”¹⁶ What this exclamation misses is the very content of the mythological episode – Pan is the god of hidden fears, the one who disturbs/maddens reason and darkens the senses, exerting fear from the shadows of lonely expanses of desert, but never generating any effect associated with observed, seen and therefore predictably quantifiable realities!

From the file of receptions/reviews dedicated to the Žižek-ian work, the approach launched by *The Guardian*¹⁷ can be considered (in its turn) an exclamatory possibility evaluatively referring to the context (equally exclamatory) of the pandemic debate. The first exclamation point concerns the very ironic way of attaching, in a series of dated events of maximum intensity (information transmitted by China to the World Health Organization on unknown-cause pneumonia in Wuhan; the first scientific warnings about the pandemic potential of a new virus; Italy's entry into quarantine/ blockade) a signal from Slavoj Žižek's editor on the completion of a book on the pandemic, questioning, in the manner of Žižek-ian humour, the prevalence and intensity of the virus's spread and – more, less, or equally – the spread of the book dedicated to it.

The second considers the political formula of translating epidemiological reality, insisting on Žižek's solution of “latent Communism”, considered to be similar to a “global organization of economic regulation, able to limit the sovereignty of nation states when needed”, positioning solidarity in the terms/areas of necessity. What Žižek misses – the spread of his ideas is much lower than the disseminating power of the virus! – is precisely the consideration of deficient areas (both economic and in terms of population density, inflow of investments, etc.) for which the proposed alternative/ solution has no concrete stake, the logic of power-influence prevailing over any approach to the rationale of “biological” solidarity.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/apr/23/pandemic-by-slavoj-zizek-review-the-philosopher-provides-his-solution>, in *The Guardian*, 23 April 2020, accessed on 13 January 2021.

Exclamation 2: “Monitor and Punish? Yes, Please!”

Compared to the semantics of a “more nuanced vocabulary”, Slavoj Žižek's assertion notes, with premeditated inflections, that “the measures needed for epidemics should not be automatically reduced to the usual surveillance and control paradigm propagated by thinkers like Foucault”.¹⁸ The quoted statement has the role of individualizing the Žižek-ian work, giving it a distinct note/evaluation. In the sense of the same research goal, Bernard-Henri Lévy insisted in *Ce virus qui rend fou*¹⁹ /*The Virus in the Age of Madness*²⁰ on an intrinsic duality of principles; one that does not make him an unconditional supporter of Foucault or his explicit policy and another which supports precisely that story/lesson which the author believes and on which the text is built.

If Lévy resorts to Foucault twice (*Foucault 1*, specified in the very title of the introductory chapter of the first edition – *Ce virus qui rend fou* a Foucault directly invoked and deliberately caught-in-debate, whose ideational presence substantiates the Lévy-ian reflexive equation; and a *Foucault 2*, from *The Virus in the Age of Madness*, whose invocation is supported and justified by any supplementary meaning given to the statement “we need you!”)²¹, Žižek *never does this*, opting instead for participation in a problematic conversation about perspectives (which he considers radical) proposed by Giorgio Agamben. The interpretive context uses the Agambenian formula to question the set of “frantic, irrational and absolutely unjustified emergency measures”, meant to create a tense climate of panic, proportional to scepticism towards the managerial powers of the State to establish a *state of exception*, a mandatory measure used as a paradigm of normal/normalizing governance.

Žižek and Agamben intersect in the very reaffirmation of their Leftist position taken as a strategy for “reading the physiognomy of exaggerated panic”, advocating a “different and nuanced crisis vocabulary” and correcting the reflex of subjective interpretation of forms of detection and supervision, combined with the social control procedures of active governance²².

If the normalcy of reality is fragilizing, Žižek proposes a revision of philosophy itself through a revolution that reorients thinking towards cohabitation with the paradox of viruses, germinated in/by the coincidence of opposites elementary organisms and parasites – or, in the ideational spirit of Schelling, as “a remnant of the lowest form of life which appears as a product of the malfunctioning of higher mechanisms of multiplication and continues to haunt (infect), a remnant which can never be reintegrated in the subordinate moment of a higher standard of living”; or, in rethinking and updating Hegelian primacy “the spirit is a virus” (“the human spirit is a kind of virus that parasitizes the human animal, exploits

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

¹⁹ Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Ce virus qui rend fou*, Bernard Grasset, Paris, 2020.

²⁰ *Idem*, *The Virus in the Age of Madness*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2020.

²¹ For further details, see Viorella Manolache, “Come back, Michel Foucault – we need you!” ...but wear a mask, in *EON*, vol. 1, no. 1, Agnos Publishing House, Sibiu, 2020, pp. 5-16.

²² Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic!*, quoted work, p. 77.

it for self-reproduction and sometimes threatens to destroy it”); or, in a Tolstoy-Dawkins intersection, in the sense of revising *meme-language* (“the human subject is an empty, passive environment, infected by affect-laden cultural elements that, like contagious bacilli, spread from one individual to another”).²³

A Foucault-ian follower of the method engaging the structural reality of disciplinary schemes, and hence received with an extra evaluative scepticism (in the sense of a perspective geared to impossible, useless and harmful knowledge – therefore *invented*), Giorgio Agamben²⁴ analyses “frantic, irrational and completely unfounded emergency measures” – issued by the National Research Council, a warning that he considers not only disproportionate, but part of a context/*threshold* delimited by two conjugated factors: on the one hand, the establishment of a *genuine state of exception* (with severe and extensive zonal restrictions, monitoring and restraints upon daily life), an integrated element of a legally imposed normalization/*disciplinary* paradigm (“frantic” – “irrational” – and “completely unfounded”; and, on the other hand, the intensification of a state of fear, a stressful and disturbing phenomenon, a germinated reaction against the background of the panic situation felt at a collective level.

Agamben's *clarifying* reflections²⁵ insist on the assembly of two factors, paradigmatically integrated in an extrapolated analysis context: panic certifies *the exception, the naked life*, which “blinds and separates” – and which, in the name of survival, and exacerbated caution for avoiding the virus requires sacrificing everything/*normalcy* in favour of *normalizing the state of emergency*. What results, Agamben believes, is precisely an augmented state of permanent crisis, by reducing the human to a purely biological condition, drained of any social and political dimension, deprived of any kind of emotional engagement and inter-human closeness: the exceptionality of the state of emergency “sacrifices freedom for security reasons”

Intermediated by Agamben, Žižek returns (indirectly!) to Foucault's paradigm, insisting that natural life is the inclusive part of the mechanisms and calculations of state power, and/or the alloy-formula by which politics becomes biopolitical. This inevitable process is studied through the disciplinary control of biopower, without missing a double trigger: first, the political techniques by which the state assumes and manages the natural life of individuals and the technologies of the self; and, subsequently, the exercising of powers of control/supervision. In Agamben's view and through Foucault's style and method, “the production of a biopolitical body is the original act of sovereign power.”²⁶ Today, in the manner proposed by Agamben, *exceptionality* is manifested through *the biopolitics of the state of emergency!*

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 79-80.

²⁴ Giorgio Agamben, “The Invention of an Epidemic” <https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/coronavirus-and-philosophers/>, 26.02.2020, accessed on 21 March 2020.

²⁵ *Idem*, “Clarifications”, <https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/coronavirus-and-philosophers/>, 17.03.2020, accessed on 21 March 2020.

²⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Puterea suverană și viața nudă* [Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita, I], Idea Design & Print Publishing House, Cluj, 2006, p. 11.

In dialogue with Tyler Cowen²⁷, Žižek underlines, first of all, his status as a follower of Fukuyama; secondly, he explains his ideational location in rethinking Fukuyama's dilemma. Not coincidentally, in the dialogue-debate started in *the zoom agora* (*The American Interest. Virtual Conversations*, August 4, 2020, 11 a.m. EST), starring Bernard-Henri Lévy and Francis Fukuyama, Lévy invites Fukuyama to a (careful and impartial) re-reading of Michel Foucault, applying the new grid of current remedies. Moreover, Lévy resumes the problem of identity in which he believes unreservedly from the position of *defender of social closeness*, even against distancing; between the *social* and the *physical* attribute there is a decisive semantic nuance (Foucault's method!), recognized in the symbiosis of the act consisting of “how we will think and act” and the attention bestowed on the power of the clinical model, accelerated by a reactivated biopolitics which weakens the political and favours medicine, considering that the medical system is a priority, and that the debate on remedies should be extended by involving (all) the other social levels. “We have a lot to learn from Fukuyama!” (Žižek), concludes in an exclamatory and this time mediated tone, suggesting a return to Foucault, as Lévy invites Fukuyama ... to a careful and impartial rereading (during a pandemic!)!

Exclamation 3: “Communism or Barbarism, as Simple as That!” Involved in the process of further clarification of a new form of Communism as a post-Coronavirus ideology, Slavoj Žižek places the context of the debate in the sphere of deconstruction of perspectives based on the evidence that post-pandemic capitalism will extract its strongholds from the pandemic impulse. Explainable, in the event that generalized means of supervision will become a medical-State reason-necessity, resonating to panic in an exclamatory-generalized state whose moral foundation will be rethought by considering *the other* as a risk factor. Žižek explicitly points out two particular rhythms: the first concerns the very mechanism by which openness and permissiveness become formulas and norms that are structurally opposed to the new reality, radically different poles; the second reviews the leading role of exclamation, signalling the fact that, today-more-than-ever, our situation is deeply political (!), precisely in the way we face radical choices²⁸.

Žižek's exclamation “Communism or Barbarism!” requires to be explicitly contextualized by placing it in a threefold ideational study, as it is displayed in the three volumes dedicated to *The Idea of Communism* (2010, 2013 and 2016), having as exclamatory point the statement that both Foucault and Agamben are inadequate by the very failure of their centrality of exploitation, by weakening the reference to economics, keeping the struggle/power for domination as a central node of a moral-ethical issue unable to transform the mode of production as such: “accentuating domination is the prerogative of democracy; an emphasis on exploitation is that of Communism”²⁹. The solutions recommended by Žižek lie in “avoiding the maelstrom”, by distancing oneself from blockages in the

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek on His Stubborn Attachment to Communism, conversation with Tyler Cowen, 8 January, 2020, <https://conversationswithtyler.com/episodes/slavoj-zizek/>, accessed on 13 January 2021.

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Pandemic!*, quoted work, p. 99.

²⁹ Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *The Idea of Communism*, vol. 2, Verso, London, New York, 2013, p. 194.

research of strategic risks, and detaching from the historical linear-evolutionary time frame arranged within the limits of choosing between alternatives of action, by accepting threats “to our fate”, by moving away from the logic of catastrophe, and by an assumed approach. In this way, the full rationality of interconnections makes the given situation dangerous, capable of changing the overall coordinates that would correspond, according to Žižek, to the characteristic data of a new Communist project. More than positioning and political foresight, this approach is a hermeneutic one, of subjective and partially implicit act of overcoming the zero/ apocalyptic point of capitalism by resuming the unrealized potential of Communism, as a movement reinvented in the new historical situation. The result would outline a double horizon – the preservation of the matrix-oriented profit bias of capitalism trying to support the remnants of social welfare vs. the reactivation of communism justified against the background of severe antagonisms that prevent the indeterminate reproduction of capitalism – and of course, Žižek unreservedly opts [“as Simple as That!”] for the second solution!³⁰

Two reaffirmed directions are required at this stage of the research.³¹ The first, as decreed by Gianni Vattimo, reaffirms the view that *hermeneutics* is similar to Communism insofar as the Truth-Being-Necessity triad is perceived as a historical synthesis to the detriment of its validation as a result of theoretical discovery or as a possible logical correction of previous errors, being labelled, rather, as an expression of the “end of metaphysics”.³² *Hermeneutic Communism* requires to be detached from an obsession with competition and the fixation of overcoming or defeating capitalism, as well as the *counter-productivity* of the violent acquisition of power, through an adaptive recourse to the formal rules of democracy.³³ Far from being “another” philosophical-miraculous discovery in the long line of discoveries of thought, indifferent to any excessive ambition, without the prerogative of a potent representation, as a form of reality and objectivity abstaining from any hypothetical intervention infusing Communism with the energy of a philosophy, *hermeneutic Communism* values the destiny of the event by admitting a type of existence without mysterious and transcendent factors, by the definitive separation from any metaphysics determined by the theory of the dominated classes. *It is appropriate to place the same Žižek, before Vattimo, in the role of promoter of “immaterial materialism”;* that philosopher who, unlike Badiou, opts for a new/different materialism: *materialism à la Durkheim* (enhancing the collectively effervescent experience by finding new possibilities, outside of individualization, that allow the subject to see himself as part of the universal – negative/ real – to the detriment of self-limitation to a specific – determined/everyday reporting).³⁴

³⁰ Alex Taek-Gwang Lee, Slavoj Žižek (Eds.), *The Idea of Communism*, vol. 3, Verso, London, New York, 2016.

³¹ See for further details, Viorella Manolache, “A gândi ideea comunistă” [Thinking the Communist Idea], in *Comunismul între ideologie și practică* [Communism between Ideology and Practice], History National Colloquium, edition 20th, vol. II, coord. Ioana Dragulin, Adenium Publishing House, Jassy, 2019, pp. 23-48.

³² Gianni Vattimo, Santiago Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism. From Heidegger to Marx*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011, p. 110.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 120-121.

³⁴ Geoffrey Dennis Pfeifer, *The New Materialism: Althusser, Badiou, and Žižek*, University of South Florida, Graduate Theses and Dissertations, 2012, <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/4202>, accessed on 5 March 2019, pp. 157-158.

After Žižek, Vattimo's *weak position* is outlined, similar to the *soft analysis* professed by Badiou who does not hesitate, as a structuralist, to ideatically impregnate his theory by/with the notes of *formalistic idealism*.

The second direction is placing the act of thinking about the “Communist idea” under the sign of *an ontology of decline – weak Communism & hermeneutic Communism* – maintaining, as alternatives, Žižek's attempts to clarify unresolved problems and the ambiguities of the universe of ideas from Althusser's books. The philosophical orientation (re)leads Žižek towards a *new* reading of Hegel, frontally agreed upon as a paradigmatic materialist thinker, and mediated inside the grid launched by J. Lacan's psychoanalysis. Žižek particularizes Althusser's attempt to commit the epistemological discontinuity to the sphere of Marxism by *overdetermination*, by opposing the causality of its extensions and its *mechanical, transitive* and *expressive* transformations. *Expressive causality* explicitly refers to Hegel, to a *Zeitgeist* expressed at different levels of society, and to the formula for doubling the Lacanian triad – Imaginary-expressive causality – Real-transitive causality – Symbolic – “overdetermination implies symbolic totality”; “retroactive determination is possible only in a symbolic universe.” But Žižek considers that Althusser's critical interpretation oriented towards Hegel's *expressive causality* misses its target, with Hegel specifying in advance the conceptual framework of criticism, developing “the element of subjectivity unrestricted by the imaginary non-recognition of interpretation”; an approach Althusser lacks and which prevents him from abandoning the notion of *overdetermination*³⁵.

Pandemic exclamations include the Žižek-ian notion of “Communism” – “here comes my notion of Communism” (!), naming by *here* everything that happens/occurs, equivalent to necessity as an alternative and antidote to disaster, demanding a more active involvement of the State in the production of emergency goods (masks, tests, subsidies, etc.), cumulating an extensive and efficient system of cooperation to capitalize on and pool resources. This approach is subsumed by Žižek to the *new Communism* outside of which there can only be a *new (other!) Barbarism!*

Instead of conclusions

“The happy man will not contract the disease!”
– or if it happens, the exclamation is the remedy!

Referring (in support of the “poor knowledge of the physical terrain of the disease”) to the theory perpetuating the illusion that “a state of happiness of the mind would repel disease”, Susan Sontag draws on the claims of historian Keith Thomas who states that “England, engulfed by the plagues of the late fourteenth century and the next, believed, to a large extent, that *the happy man would not contract the disease*”³⁶ ... *Or if it happens, the exclamation is the remedy!* ... This

³⁵ Slavoj Žižek, Zăbovind în negativ. *Kant, Hegel și critica ideologiei* [Tarrying with the Negative], *quoted work*, pp. 136-137.

³⁶ Susan Sontag, *Boala ca metaforă. SIDA și metaforele ei* [Illness as Metaphor. AIDS and its Metaphors], *quoted work*, p. 50.

clarification becomes [here] the principle guiding the perspective applied by Caroline Green Whitcomb³⁷ to Slavoj Žižek's reading, resonating with her own anxieties (the same panicked insomnia that Žižek experienced!) and questions that the virus itself intensifyingly amplifies. The review is placed against a background of personal feelings, betraying a symptomatology identifiable by fever, stomach aches and headaches which defies and contradicts all precautions and rigorously implemented measures (mask and gloves, disinfection, cleaning the sinuses and gargling) and recommends quarantine as an experiment (the plain coffee of isolation!), but also a refusal of testing, on grounds of ineligibility (age). The personal environment – a family of doctors – imbues with plus-meaning the vertigo of obsessive thoughts about viral contagion power, keeping one's job, putting into practice rules transmitted through the telemedicine system, social distancing – all these contributing to the installation of panic which leads to an unpleasant result: physical and mental exhaustion. The remedy lies in an introversion mediated by Žižek's exclamations: “However, in Žižek's Appendix, I found a glimmer of hope (...) Although humanity does not act in unity, the discovery of experiencing a quiet time, (...) genuine love and the beauty of primordial elements, will bring us one step closer to each other, confirming Žižek's vision of global solidarity”³⁸.

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