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Hegelian Geographical Sensibilities

Antonio Augusto Rossotto Ioris

Professor of Human Geography and Director of the Msc in Environment and Development at The School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University -UK. E-mail: iorisa@cardiff.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

Although rarely recognised, Hegelian philosophy also encompasses a rich geographical knowledge, which has great value for scholars working across multiple scales of socio-spatial interaction. The article offers an analysis of the geographical sensibilities of Hegel that are immanent in the main body of his philosophical system, particularly in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where it is possible to find a very original elaboration on the metabolism of reason, the articulation between the particular and the universal, and the function of otherness in socio-spatial interaction. The main argument here is the contrast between the more explicit references to nature and space, on the one hand, and the deeper and more immanent theorisation of world relations, on the other, which constitutes Hegel's major geographical contribution. The discussion revolves around the key question of the totality of relations and how space encapsulates the unfinished struggles for change and for self-consciousness. The complex evolution of self-consciousness, via the experience of otherness and the insistence of moral duties, not only takes place in time and space but is also an expression of socially produced and perennially disputed spaces. Hegelian dialectic is ultimately an anticipated rendering of the contemporary understanding of socially produced and contested spaces. Geography, as interpretation and critique of lived realities, can be an important translation of philosophy into life, but because space is always lived space, geography becomes the actualisation of philosophy and also its complication.

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The Geographical Significance of Hegel

For almost two centuries, Hegel's oeuvre has been some of the most divisive philosophy in the world, equally criticised as it has been admired across historical epochs and national boundaries. One common excuse to avoid his dense philosophy and treat it as something almost incomprehensible is the extremely ambitious task Hegel set for himself, which was basically an attempt to revisit the whole philosophical edifice and to develop an innovative method to critically inquire into knowledge, being and history, among many other fundamental categories. Hegel has remained a central figure of philosophy and many theorists who came afterwards, including Marx, Dewey, Adorno, Heidegger, Derrida and Badiou, were all deeply challenged and one way or another influenced by Hegel. At the turn of the twenty-first century, Hegel continues to be a key intellectual reference, especially because neoliberal modernity still has not tackled the problems of early modernity/liberalism (such as colonial expansionism, mounting risks, individualism and privatisation of the commons) and new rounds of contradiction continue to accumulate (lack of ethical behaviour and the capture of politics by corporate business interests). It is even possible to speculate that, had Hegel been better understood, Europe and the whole world could have spared a great deal of two centuries of massive mistakes and great confusion.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the Hegelian system also encompasses a rich geographical knowledge, which has great value for scholars working across multiple scales of socio-spatial interaction. Nonetheless, Hegel-the-geographer is still to be discovered and properly recognised. It has to do with the shrewdness of his interpretative work, as much as with his method. Hegelian philosophy does not come ‘only’ from his obstinate study of Greek, German and other schools of thought, but also from the creative reflection on the historical developments and the spatial transformations unfolding before his very eyes. Hegel’s lived and visited spaces and places offered him an important geographical experience, as he witnessed the attacks by Napoleon on German soil, the tenacious resistance of the aristocracy and the strengthening of bourgeois institutions, which informed his thinking and writing. Those forces have had profound geographical repercussions and play a central role in the collective production of space out of social relations and political disputes. For Hegel (1892) the rise of philosophy is due to experience, which leads to consciousness and the crucial repercussions from it. In that way, one self-consciousness expects recognition from another self-consciousness, that is, an individual externalises and through the other becomes more itself. This article offers an analysis of the most acute Hegelian geographical sensibilities that are immanent in the main body of his philosophical system, particularly in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where there is a very original elaboration on the metabolism of reason, the articulation between the particular and the universal, and on the function of otherness which are of great relevance for the production of space.

The main argument here is the contrast between the more explicit references to nature and space, on the one hand, and the deeper and more immanent theorisation of world relations, on the other, which constitute Hegel's main geographical contribution. The next section will examine the more direct (unmediated) references to space and nature, followed by an interpretation of the major (mediated and determinate) geographical elaboration, found primarily in the *Phenomenology*. In the subsequent pages of the text, there is a discussion of the application of Hegelian philosophy to the social production of space and, finally, the overall lessons, perspectives and conclusions.

References to Space, Geometry and Nature

Although Hegel's contribution to philosophy and other sciences is regularly acknowledged in academic texts, his work is still surrounded by controversy. By and large, this has less to do with the complexity of his writing and more with the sophistication and originality of Hegel's ideas, which are comparable to the philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Spinoza. Even so, almost two centuries since Hegel's death in 1831, what prevails today are reductionist interpretations that wrongly connect Hegel with totalitarianism, European supremacy and historical determinism. As an unfortunate consequence of these misconceptions, the discipline of geography has so far benefited only marginally from the Hegelian dialectic. Most references in this field, in the last four decades, have been provided by Marxist geographers. This body of work, primarily inspired by the meta-philosophy of Lefebvre (1991) and the capitalist spatiality of Harvey (1982), has been an attempt to extend dialectical logic to encompass the contingencies of space, particularly the politics of scale, economic exploitation and the controversies of development, but rarely engage with the Hegelian philosophical categories more directly; the exception is the 'master-slave dialectic', which was certainly a great influence on the work of Marx and his followers. It is more common to see references to secondary bibliography and comments on Hegel, instead of confronting his main texts, such as *Science of Logic* and *Phenomenology*. Interestingly, if some geographers have tried, even indirectly, to engage with Hegelian categories, several philosophers have also tried to systematise the Hegelian treatment of space, nature and worldness. For instance, Heidegger (1988, 122) affirms that time and space are primarily problems of the Hegelian philosophy of nature, as movement requires that "space goes over time, and vice versa." The search for a more geographical Hegelianism and, at the same time, for a clear Hegelian geography remained wide open.

It is important to demonstrate how Hegel deals with space in the development of his logico-dialectical system. Already in the early academic years, at Jena in 1801-1802, his notebooks recorded a comparison between the positive and objective pole represented by space with a subjective and negative pole represented by time (Harris, 1983). Subsequent notes, written during this formative period in 1803-1804, considered matter 'in' or 'as' motion, with periodic

motion characterised as the temporalisation of space and the spatialisation of time. The main concept of the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* is supreme self-consciousness, which has a complex, multifaceted explanation but can be also understood as the union of space and time. These are the two parts of force and operate as an outward image of the notion (Hegel, 1977, 94). It observes an ontological symmetry in that spirit is present in space and time, while space and time are differences in the universal medium (Hegel, 1977, 106). A large elaboration on space and geometry is found on the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Science of Logic* initially published in 1817 with a second edition in 1827 and a third edition in 1830 (Hegel, 2010a). A parallel work, called the Greater Logic (Hegel, 2010b), published between 1812 and 1816 and later revised, also deals with the relations and conceptualisations space, geometry, time, reason and matter. For Hegel (2010b, 166), "these are continuous magnitudes in that they are repulsions from themselves, each a flowing forth out of itself which is not, however, a going over, or a relating, to a qualitatively other." Hegel's direct treatment of space undoubtedly reverberates the synthetic geometry of Euclid, which was already under attack during his own lifetime and later criticised as only a good approximation for short distances or small magnitudes. According to the geometrical perspective, the line is the negation of space because it limits the continuity of space; but there is a negation of the negation: the totality of space (3D) is the sublation of the plane (2D) which is the sublation of the line (1D). Space for Hegel, at this stage, is a multiplicity of different 'heres', where each here is an instance of the same universal space (there is thus space and more space). Space is taken as continuity, with no gaps, and its logical structure is not just that of externality but that of self-externality (being contradictory continuous and external-to-itself). This Hegelian interpretation of space according to Houlgate (2005, 123), is a "self-determining *reason* existing in the form of externality." Space becomes the lack of difference but is likewise negated by spatial differentiation (Ioris, 2023).

Hegel gives mathematics a stronger connection between material reality and a clear consideration of the genesis of quantity as the result of the dialectic of quality (Kol'man and Yanovskaya, 1983). Nonetheless, such ingenious, but scant treatment of space is might be called Hegel's more immediate geographical contribution, that is, a non-mediated, in Hegelian terms, consideration of spatiality, geometry, and mathematics. There is tendency here to present space as a pure abstraction, the very first determination first moment of logic. Space as such is often conceptualised by Hegel as a simple form or an abstraction (the form of immediate externality). It is taken as the universal indeterminate, a distance from bodies, a general idea, as "there is no deduction here" (Hegel, 2009, 138). Nonetheless, this more explicit geographical elaboration contains an implicit incompleteness because it is a journey towards the genuine totality at the expense of space, which is relegated to the less significant area of immediacy and self-certainty. Time is considered the truth of space because it is the self-transcendency of space (space that transcends its own spatiality, as the basic being); it is the active pole and the negation

or overcoming of space. Spatiality turns into a perpetual collapsing to infinite 'heres' that are negated and reinstituted indefinitely in an undifferentiated continuous. Pure space, which is unmediated or an indeterminate immediacy, is here considered equivalent to pure being, which is the first category of logic but it is still empty; needless to remember that the final category of logic is the Absolute Idea, which transcends space. Hegel (2004, 40) defines space within itself as "the contradiction of indifferent asunderness and differenceless continuity, the pure negativity of itself, and the *transition, first of all, into time*."

In these more explicitly geographical texts the notion of place becomes the "*posited* identity of space and time"; place is "spatial and therefore indifferent, *singularity*"; there is a "*vanishing* and *self-regeneration* of space in time and time in space, a process in which time posits itself spatially as *place*, but in which place, too, as indifferent spatiality, is immediately posited as *temporal*: this is *Motion*" (Hegel, 2004, 41). Related to Hegelian comments on place and space, there are references to climate, race, landscapes and continents, that is, to physical geography (Bond, 2014), which betrays the influence of this Berlin colleague and geography professor Karl Ritter (as registered on his letters, in Hegel, 1984). The ontological basis of nature, according to Hegel, is space, which is its immediate determination (that is, not yet mediated or transformed). Because of this immediacy, space is "the abstract *universality of Nature 's self-externality*" (Hegel, 2004, 28). Notably, the *Philosophy of Nature* opens with a section on mechanics that posits space or nature as the first category and the idea of externality as such: "The first or immediate determination of Nature is *Space*: the abstract *universality of Nature's self-externality*, self-externality's mediationless indifference" (Hegel, 2004, 28). Because to be in space is external, this concept is deemed primitive and only explains the physical world in an immediate, largely unreflexive manner. Time, on the other hand, is the negativity, the negation of the negation of the indifferent self-externality of space; even so, it is an exaggeration to say that for Hegel "nature is constituted by externality all the way down", cf. Furlotte (2018, 33). A related concept is the notion of a 'bad infinite' developed by Hegel in relation to the internal contradictions of the being and the relation between the being and the many (Hegel, 2010a). The bad or spurious infinity is open-ended, whereas a true infinity is a totality, it has no essential nature and is not even properly an infinite but delimited by negating something else.

The fact that the more explicit dealings with space and geometry occupy a less prominent in his ontological texts suggests that geography was left rather implicit and does not constitute for him a top discussion priority. In regard to the philosophy of nature, for instance, his contemporary and, for a while, close friend Friedrich Schelling (2004) theorised in greater detail the evolution from inorganic to organic forces, as much as on nature and speculative physics. There are also elements of Eurocentrism and Judeo-Christian theology permeating his dealings with nature and matter as the opposite of mind and society (Colletti, 1969). Nonetheless, Hegel's more overt geographical points have important consequences for his civilisational

thinking and, although for him history culminates in Protestant Germany above the rest of the world, it is also a political stand against German fragmentation and in favour of a new geographical totality. Hegel's historical account, reflected in his system of logic, is a progression from the universalist world of the Orient (from China to Egypt) to the particularism of Judaism, Hellenism and Rome, which culminates in the Western civilisation (the Occident, basically the Germanic nations) that apprehends the absolute as singularity. According to this mega-historical framework, Africa represents the pre-historical absolute that corresponds to the immediate singularity (which is somehow paradoxical because it presupposes a differentiation that it takes up in itself). Hegel has been time and again criticised for such linear and strict interpretation of historic change, something that was uncritically absorbed by Marx (who referred to "the riddle of the unchangeability of Asiatic societies" and "their never-ceasing changes of dynasty", Marx, 1990, 479). Hegel proposes a curious, but original geographical explanation: the German Reformation was considered the single key event since Roman times and the entire period from the fall of the Roman Empire up to modern times as "The Germanic World." It should be noted that this model makes sense from the perspective of Spirit, the great Greek/Roman period and the obscure, scholastic scholarship of the Middle Ages.

As examined in the next section, despite the modest and rather implicit geographical elaboration, Hegel provides sufficient elements in his main logical, ontological and ethical system for dealing with space and inform critical geography today. Hegel admits an identity between space and its negation (time) through the positivity of motion. Through 'mechanic' phases, logic returns to its beginnings (nature) and becomes the sheer being of space. More significantly, the Hegelian apparent 'dualisms' are always elements of the dialectic and destined to transform themselves into opposites to be reconciled at a higher level and through their very diversification. It is reassuring that in his lectures there are deeper geographical (ontological) sensibilities on space-time; inner sensations are subjective but these have a universal sensible element, which is space time. For Hegel (2009, 174), "Space and time therefore are something, universal, the universal of the sensible itself, or what Kant calls the a priori forms of sensible nature." "Hegel is emphatically realist in his conception of Nature, out of which, he teaches, spirit is dialectically generated… [and] Nature becomes aware of itself" (Harris, 1993, 256). Hegel overcomes the Kantian dualism between known phenomena and things-in-themselves to claim that nature is an expression of the Idea and the true infinity. It is significant the spatio-time connection between reason and ontology, as stated by Hegel (1971, 198, addition), "… things are in truth themselves spatial and temporal." In the next pages, it will be demonstrated that Hegel's immediate spatiality was never otiose, but paved the way for his main geographical contribution.

Hegel's Main Geographical Contribution

The aforementioned manner which Hegel theorises logic, geometry and nature is often described as all he had to say about space and geography, as attested in the various Hegelian dictionaries and similar commentaries published over the last decades. Despite the obvious philosophical and historical importance of those insights, these constituted just a more immediate spatial elaboration and only a fraction of his main geography. In other words, the unhelpful disconnection has persisted in most intellectual circles between his vast discussion on reason and understanding the more straightforward work on space and nature, which has resulted in a conceptual impasse and is the main reason why Hegelian philosophy is seldom mobilised to scrutinise the social production of space and place. In an emblematic example of a reductionist interpretation of the Hegelian ambitious system, Kojève (1947) attributes to the German philosopher an over-optimistic destiny and sees the culmination of human history as a predetermined, consummate state beyond specific times and spaces. Although the influential lectures of Kojève in France in the middle of the last century served to popularise Hegelian thinking among some famous intellectuals, it happened at the expense of reducing Hegel's phenomenology to a teleological and quasi-religious theorisation. It can be conceded that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an intricate text and its publication faced many personal and editorial challenges, such as the precarious university job and the French invasion of Thuringia, (Hegel, 1984); however, the structure and the argument of the book render very clear the incredible philosophical journey undertaken by the author, particularly the perpetual trajectory of spirit from one shape of consciousness to another, in a way that maintains a cumulative interconnection between the various stages.

Instead of a pedestrian idealism, Hegel adopts an atheistic and quasi-materialistic stance that it can be even considered a precursor of Marxism and other philosophical perspectives (Harris, 1993). The 'march' of the Hegelian world-spirit (converted by Marx into the materiality of the capitalist world, cf. Harvey, 1981) is really the continuation and realisation of the dialectic of nature, explored by Hegel in great detail in the *Encyclopedia*. Spirit grasps the totality of the real, which is its own essence, in an endless process in which humanity, which is the finite spirit, flourishes. Whereas for Heidegger the essence of being is time, for Hegel the essence of being is the essence of time (considering that time "has the pure shape of space", in Heidegger, 1988, 145). For this reason, the Hegelian insistence on actuality, whose tensions are reconciled through reason and according to mutually dependent subjects and objects. A Hegelian being is the object transformed and expanded by the actualisation of the notion, that is, social space. Space is produced through the search for self-consciousness (the trajectory of reason, as ethics) and by the immanence of recognition (as the general intersubjective structure of the Hegelian concept of spirit, as pointed out by Williams, 1997). Being is not an abstract thing or the essentiality of universality, but it is "that simple fluid substance of pure movement within itself"

and its determinateness is no other than "the movement of infinity of the pure movement itself" (Hegel, 1977, 107). It is remarkable that Hegel relates space with time, or distance and velocity, when dealing with the force and the laws of understanding. What is called 'explanation' is the positing and the reconciliation of differences by the understanding that necessarily relies on collective experience of change. Human consciousness "has passed over from the inner being as object to the other side, into the *Understanding*" (Hegel, 1977, 95).

Instead of any esoteric argument, for Hegel science is the long and cumulative exercise of reason, which "contains within itself the necessity of externalizing the form of the Notion, and it contains the passage of the Notion into *consciousness*" (Hegel, 1977, 491). Because of Hegel's complex elaboration on being, movement and on actuality, there is no justification to maintain nature as a steppingstone to the fulfilment of a higher ontological condition, as interpreted by several commentators. Existence does not emerge out of abstract nature or with the advent of history, but it is present throughout the unfolding of contingent socio-spatial relations. Loewenberg (1956, 346) insists that "Hegel is not concerned with actual genesis. His *Phenomenology* is not history" but a 'journey' from the immediacy of self-certainty to a wiser vision of ourselves and the world. There is no ultimate world essence to be unveiled, but the configuration of reality reflects the manifold interdependencies between human and non-human agents. Marx (1988), in one of his most explicitly Hegelian texts, agrees that there is no nature-out-there to be transformed by conscious humans, but humans become conscious of themselves and of their condition through the active engagement with the more-than-human elements of reality. Stirling (1898, 84) also claims that "Here is the secret of Hegel, or rather a schema to a key to it: Quantity – Time and Space – Empirical Realities." It corresponds to the observation of Massey (2005) that space and nature are not the substrate of human activity but what comes out of clashes and interaction which is a dynamic, unfinished process.

It is possible to infer from the last points that Hegel provides very relevant spatial insights precisely in his magnum opus, the *Phenomenology* where an arduous effort towards higher self-consciousness is contrived out of concrete social exchanges and eventually leads to "supreme freedom and assurance of its self-knowledge" (Hegel, 1977, 491). At the same time, the announced potentiality of freedom through reason and moral practices, as formulated by Hegel, permeates the politics of space production and the struggle for socio-spatial inclusion. The Hegelian system progresses from the conceptualisation of spirit to the logic of the world and nature (Loewenberg, 1934; Redding, 2024). This fundamental reasoning informs the production of more inclusive realities (in other words, more inclusive spaces) through the interconnected dynamics of reason, freedom and recognition. In this sense, there are evident continuities between the various Hegelian books, and it is not by chance that the three sections of the *Science of Logic* are on being, essence and notion which are directly related to the three main parts of his philosophical system (logic, nature and spirit) and the stages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (conscience, self-conscience and reason/spirit), which encapsulate the movement from the

universal to the singular through the particular (Marquet, 2007). This movement does not observe a linear, teleological progression, but as the outcome of the production of a good, qualitative infinite that connects the abstract specific with the concrete universal. The abstract and the illogical are not in nature but in human agency divested of a conscious and collective engagement with the transformation of nature (and ultimately, the production of space out of socionatural interaction).

The Hegelian dialectic is, thus, more than just a sophisticated elaboration of concepts and categories, but comprises an ontological proposition that seeks the reconciliation between *Logos* (thinking) and *Sein* (existence) beyond old and new dualisms between nature and society, body and mind, north and south, etc. (needless to observe that those sterile dualisms have permeated European language, religion and politics, and also paved the way for the European conquest of the world and the advance of capitalist modernity). The overcoming of many dualisms is a major step towards the pursuit of reason and ethical life. The object has to be posited as difference of itself and ultimately in itself for the attainment of truth: the 'I' holds and interacts, in a transformative manner, with the 'non-I.' In that way, being or the immediacy, which is "the content-less object of sensuous consciousness", "externalizes itself and becomes the 'I' for consciousness" (Hegel, 1977, 458). These are crucial moment for the production of equitable and inclusive spaces, as the best hope for a genuine synthesis and the possibility of the conscious transgression of obstacles on the way. Reconciliation between conscious agents, who can only seek completion through their externalisation and recognition in the other is another definition of the social production of space. These are crucial elements of the production of new spatial realities and the simultaneous enlivening of the world. As demonstrated by Lefebvre, space is not the backdrop or the leftover of history but it is through the politicised production of space that social asymmetries and commonalities are materialised and contested. Lefebvre (2009) gives a political perspective on the tradition of the philosophical treatment of the concept of space. In his work it is rightly shown the role and place for Hegel, regarding his understanding of the notion of space and its relation to subjectivity. This relation is not exclusively an epistemological problem, but more importantly, it is tied to the thematising the agency in the sense of social practice and political character of knowledge within social reality ("there is a politics of space because space is political", (Lefebvre, 2009, 174).

The relationship between reason and the production of space certainly reflects the lived manifestation of spirit, as the movement of reason unfolding through differentiation and shared struggle for unity, not as the end, but always new beginnings. Space is not simply the realm of matter and energy exchange but is the outcome of the notion grasping and comprehending the object. Full existence is realised in interaction with the other, which is the basis of the production of space. Socio-spatial differences are consequences of self-estrangement and externalisation of the self, of its incompleteness and the need to be actualised in the other, or in the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the subject developed into the predicate (the other).

Space *qua* socially produced space is not only intrinsically dialectic and dynamic but it is the endless accumulation of experiences and knowledge by people who are interdependent of each other and of the more-than-human elements of reality. It is the totality of relations that Lukács (1972) describes as the territory of the dialectics, because contrary to Engels there can be no such as a thing as dialectics of nature, but only in the 'laws; of human society. There is a need to go beyond the description of a cryptic, impoverished Hegel in order to realise that there is no 'final peak of reason' but a continuous material and more-than-material journey. Hegel sees the production and the challenges of the new world through the tension between externality and inwardness changes. Hegel (1984) understands that France had a revolution in 1789 ('externality') without a reformation ('inwardness'), while Germany had a protest reformation without a revolution; both were incomplete national processes and Germany could only surpass France with its own external revolutionary action (which happened later, with Otto von Bismarck, in a very controlled, top-down way). The argument of the *Phenomenology* is consequently a crescendo of an intricate exploration of human potentiality and no single sentence can be taken to represent the full argument. That is at the centre of what is now considered as the production of space, not to mark the end of history, but to emphasise the possibilities and the challenges that Hegel already visualised at the onset of industrial modernisation (Gottdiener, 1993). Because the progress of *Geist* is not linear nor pre-given, this space production is wide open, the power of the negative lies in this openness and immanence. This is further examined in the next section.

Production and Reasoning of Space

Even if Hegel did not provide direct references to what is now called 'the production of space' or on 'social space', his mediation between ontology and phenomenology provides the necessary logical elements for interrogating how the world is and should be produced by conscious individuals acting collectively. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a wide-ranging examination of how reality should be understood in relation to possibility of gradual transformation and, more importantly, that needs to change to secure higher levels of comprehension and freedom. His sophisticated interrogation of reason and understanding is at the centre of Hegel's geographical perspective, quite relevant in the contemporary world with great uncertainties and mounting individual and global challenges. From a different, but not unrelated contemporary perspective, Deleuze (1995) renders becoming ontologically independent from being, with being as a post-facto social abstraction of the becoming of forces that encounter each other and manifest themselves together. All 'becomings' are, first and foremost, becoming-minor, such as becoming-woman, becoming-animal and becoming-world. The Deleuzean spatial or cartographic approach is centred around the notion of rhizome, a nonlinear network that fosters connections between semiotic chains, power organisations and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). For

instance, Braidotti (2004) mobilises the notion of rhizome to examine the contradictory trajectory of European Union becoming, which is simultaneously an attempt to universalise its own reading of civilisation and a solid social democratic and hence progressive project which counteracts the aggressive neo-liberalism of USA on a number of key issues (such as privacy, telecommunication, genetically modified food and the environment).

Rhizomatic becoming keeps open the space for multiple possibilities, which could be, as a crucial dimension of what is or what was, beyond the shadows of determinism and, without a full moment of completion, could come close to the Hegelian consideration of reason, incompleteness and potentiality. Žižek (2012, 231) observes that "there is massive evidence that Hegel is the philosopher of potentiality: is not the whole point of the dialectical process as the development from In-itself to For-itself that, in the process of becoming, things merely 'become what they already are' (or were from all eternity)?" This means that even situations of acute spatial inequality and politico-economic asymmetries contain the germ of their modification and the possibility of alternative spatial configurations because of the intervention of the whole and the ensuing historicised, grounded possibilities (Ioris, 2021). These are all processes that not only can be spatialised, but that play a central role in the production of new spatial settings. As argued by Mann (2008, 930), a properly political and transformative geography is a negative geography of necessity that "captures the dialectic in this 'real movement'." Hegel repeatedly insists on the power of the negative and on the importance of necessity. "The necessity of the action consists in the fact that *purpose* is related simply to *actuality*, and this unity is the Notion of action" (Hegel, 1977, 245). Yet, necessity is not a straitjacket of human agency, but it is only revealed at the end of the process as the confirmation of what was implicit and likely to happen because of a range of converging forces and how it is understood. There is a direct interdependency between existence and truth, as for Hegel (1977, 151) "what *ought* to be, in fact also *is*, and what only *ought* to be without being, has no truth."

Hegel describes the progression of spirit as a collective mediation between human consciousness and the 'thing' (rejecting the impenetrable Kantian thing-in-itself), which helps to describe how space is produced of social interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and nations. More important, if the production of space is dynamic and permeated by an increasingly social interaction and the conscious pursuit of a more inclusive unity – that is, the production of inclusive space as reason in action and agents becoming increasingly more conscious of themselves – it still remains to be discussed the unfolding directions and the end point of such exchanges. It is even more significant that Hegel himself already indicates an appropriate way to reconcile socio-spatial tensions with a concept that is evocative of the social production of space: the notion of *ground*. Although not primarily a spatial category, ground refers to the totality of relations that produce space, the "unity of identity and difference, the truth of what the difference and the identity have turned out to be… *the essence* posited as

totality" (Hegel, 2010a, 186). The relation between ground and freedom was important for German idealists, and it was mentioned by Hegel in relation to the logic of being to inform the analysis of the basis of existence, with the argument that ground connotes freedom, reason, mediations, tendencies and what is reasonable. Ground refers to the conditions that allow something to come into existence or appear. It materialises and historicises the conditions and circumstances of existence in the contingent transition to actuality (Marcuse, 2020). Discovering the ground of something in another is part of the movement towards the dialectic of form-and-content, cause-and-effect, inner-and-outer, that is such a defining trait in this philosophical system. For Hegel (2010a, 190), "a concrete existence merely *emerges* from the ground."

Hegel also insists that all concepts and forms of consciousness have to be accounted for their internal relations, perennial interactions and interdependencies to one another. This is not a random process of change but it follows the human endeavour for freedom, enhancement and recognition. The dialectical journey directs socio-spatial relations to what Hegel calls the absolute, which is its final, unconditioned stage because it contains all the other elements that were developed and apprehended earlier on in the dialectic. Perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of this scalar dialectic is whether the absolute necessarily and comprehensively encompasses everything and, in this manner, nothing is left out of the process. In other words, there is a great deal of disagreement on whether the absolute, which is the highest concept or form of universality, means a final whole without anything else to disrupt it and, at the same time, just internal parts in non-antagonistic contact with each other. This has been a central theme for Badiou (2009, 109), who sustains that there is a fundamental ontological problem if the "multiple of *all* multiples does not count itself in its own composition" and therefore "it is not the Whole." For Badiou, Hegel's ultimate absolute project is the paradoxical de-dialecticisation of the dialectic, that is, the reconciliation of all differences into an ultimate identity, but this completeness cannot be achieved (Trott, 2015). Badiou points out that Hegel's absolute becomes a non-reflexive totality that can nurture the end of diversity and, what is worse, the exhaustion of agency. The Hegelian totality, for Badiou, is the immediacy of the result that lies beyond its dialectical construction. Inspired by the antinomy of coterminous inclusion and exclusion described by Lord Russell, Badiou argues that the whole becomes non-reflexive if it does not include the multiple in its composition (Badiou's example is that a set of five pears is a multiple but not a 'pear' and it is, thus, out of the composition). If the whole has no being, it is therefore inconsistent, because it turns out contradictorily to be and not be reflexive.

The key question here is about the meaning of this totality and its role in the affirmation of reflexivity and reason. Badiou contends that the being is non contradictory but the effort to speak of wholes results in contradictions. According to Badiou (2022), the being belongs to the world and to the place of its operation, but this is a condition where there are no wholes and

only immanent truths (i.e. truths that emerge in a particular world at the break between the realm of being and the realm of the order of being). The incompatibility between the truth and the whole, for Badiou, is the decisive tenet of modernity and its impacts around the planet (Hallward, 2003). On the other hand, Badiou, despite his reservation with the Hegelian idealist inclinations, recognises the critical and significant amount of materialism in his system (Ruda, 2015). The French philosopher (Badiou, 2013) actually tries to expand Hegel's materialistic dialectic when insists on the importance of scission or division to set apart idealist biases. A multiple world (or multiple logics of worlds), for Badiou (2009), is possible if it is divided by two, separating the reflexive from the non-reflexive multiples. This controversy is also articulated as the antagonism between 'Two merging into One' (manifestation of idealism) and the 'One splitting into Two' (expression of materialism). It starts with repetition, the same thing posited twice: there is 'A' and 'A_p' (the latter is 'A in another place'), that is, 'A' twice placed (A is itself but also its power of repetition). There is pure identity and place identity, or identity and the space in which it is marked. Badiou (2009, 7) affirms that "A presents itself (it is always placed) and refuses itself (because, as placed, it is never only itself, but also its place, A_p)." As a result, the site of placement is the site of any possible reduplication (both spatial and temporal), however "the true but camouflaged contrary of A is [really] the space of placement P." It means that the space of placement is constitutive of the thing (that is pure being and also it being-placed).

Badiou may be a thinker of ontological multiplicities and the contingency of events (although in his earlier texts, Badiou gives more emphasis to totals and wholes rather than to specificities, cf. Feltham, 2008), whilst Hegelian dialectic is centred around the moment of difference which unfolds within the whole and between wholes. The concrete reality for Hegel is a pluri-totality, that is, the whole is itself and its continuation of equally unstable totalities in other wholes. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that Hegel is frequently, and unfairly, criticised for failing to reach the whole because of his idealist search for the absolute. It cannot be negated that sometimes Hegel betrays his theological education, as when claims that "Nature separated from the divine Being is simply nothing" (Hegel, 1977, 472). However, the progression towards the whole, and the struggle for totalisation, is depicted as a dialectic of negation between the individual, the collective and the universal. The whole and the absolute may have a supranatural appearance, but their dynamic pole is the materiality of those relations given that the Hegelian logical doctrine (Hegel, 1892) has three sides: abstract (understanding), dialectic (negative reason), speculation (positive reason). The whole is absolute, not as the end but as a new beginning. There is a 'clash of totalities' that basically express the inherent politics of space production. The whole is basically the product of infinite relations of finite beings (elements and subjects), which means that the being is always pushed beyond itself. The being is itself and it is more (or has the potential to be more, it is and it is not yet). For Hegel (1892, 207), essence is being "coming into mediation with self through the negativity of self" and

through its self-relatedness with another. "The Notion is the principle of freedom, the power of substance self-realised. It is a systematic whole, in which each of its constituent functions is the very total which the notion is, and is put as indissolubly one with it" (Hegel,1892, 287). The reflexivity of the whole, for Hegel (2010b), comes from the interaction between three moments or functional parts of the notion of the whole: universality (free equality with itself), particularity (the specific character in which the universal continues equal to itself) and individuality (singularity) (meaning the reflection-into-itself of the specific characters of universality and particularity).

The Hegelian whole is immanent in the development of consciousness and the advancement towards the absolute that is perennially open to be challenged. The totality has always a residue or a supplement that ends up challenging it (as in the case of the proletariat and indigenous peoples in the capitalist world). Likewise, Hegel's nothing is not a dead nothing, out of nowhere, but a nothing directly related to the whole, that is, a nothing of the whole. The is why Hegel is definitely the thinker of dynamic and expanding totalities, which may encompass Badiou's scission between the One into the Two. Instead of the end of all differences and the eradication of agency, the ongoing journey in search of the Hegelian absolute is the beginning of yet another phase of human history, which is not without its problems but secured significant gain from accumulated reason and recognition. The absolute is the result of becoming of itself through a self-transforming process that reaffirms negativity acts as force (Hegel, 1977). The reality is for Hegel dialectic and infinite, but it contains finite, interdependent things. Departing from Hegel, Badiou sponsors a 'dialectic of subtraction' articulated around the event, that is, subtraction is the effect of the outside of the whole which disrupts the whole, which is not too distant from the Hegelian dialectical ontology. Moreover, dialectical negation is superior to 'subtraction', because subtraction for Badiou is nothing more than the recognition of difference and supplement. Furthermore, the Hegelian absolute is multiply differentiated through the self-same whole (the dialectic of identity and difference), as it collects all the moments of history and consciousness in itself (Calcagno, 2015). It is a negative self-unity that is the key for unlocking space, because space is the transient unity that remains also permanent, space is the realm of ultimate dialectic. The most evident demonstration is found in the final paragraphs of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the Absolute Knowing section, where being is portrayed as space. According to (Hegel, 1977, 492), "The self-knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit: to know one's limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself. This sacrifice is the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of the becoming Spirit in the form of *free contingent happening*, intuiting its pure Self as Time outside of it, and equally its Being as Space."

Ultimately, this tension between Hegel and Badiou has to be resolved in and through space, or at least in the unending production and contestation of spaces out of the interaction between individuals, social groups and nations. More important for the purpose of this discussion, the

dynamics of the Hegelian whole presupposes and rationalises space, as much as a reflexive geography has a lot to gain from Hegelian dialectic. There is an ontological triangulation between the whole, its other and the forces that transform the status quo, which is at the core of geography as discipline. Hegel developed his logical system in a moment of great politico-spatial instability both in Europe and around the world due to the revolution in France and the military campaigns of Napoleon. Hegelianism was not only permeated by historical events, but also by geographical changes. It was not a synchrony or diachrony of totalities, but clash of totalising projects. Hegelian dialectic of identity and contradiction is key, as in the case of class struggle and geopolitics. Today, the contrast between Africa and Western Europe certainly does not form a coherent whole, but at the same time that there is a great logic in capitalist relations of exploitation, trade and oppression. Within each whole there are disputes between groups and regions. Africa is both abandoned by investors and traders and also brutally impacted by neo-colonial rentism. Africa is more than material reality but a category of global reality, in permanent formation and that contains more than 800 million people, but it is "a place-in-the-world called Africa" (Ferguson, 2006, 5). How this place is produced and functions out of preconceptions, legacies and socio-spatial hierarchies (Ioris, 2017); for instance, the derogatory treatment of African nations, governments and populations facilitate normative policies, as in the case of the spread of neoliberalism and its extractivism.

Africa is certainly a vast continent where unity and diversity have formed an intricate whole that contrasts and interpenetrates other wholes. Africa space is a synthesis of those multiple forces, the meaning of 'Africaness' is the generalisation of positive and negative feelings without this generalisation necessarily covering all situations (it is not necessary, dialectically, that the whole is always connected with all parts). Hegelian geographical sensibilities have been used by several authors to examine the perverse relations and interdependencies between European colonial powers (Habib, 2017). Hegel was particularly concerned with the determinate negation of liberal capitalism and the politico-moral inadequacies of the state (Ioris, 2015). To some extent, Hegel rationalised the market as a sphere in which subjectivity is first raised into universality, but he also rejected the pure particularity of unrestrained capitalism (Buchwalter, 2015). This argument was instrumental for the examination offered by Fanon (1961) of the suffering caused by colonial rule in Africa and elsewhere as deriving from the systematic deprivation of agency by the oppressive power. Using Hegelian categories, Fanon seeks to reconstruct the emancipatory project of the black man in close analogy to the master-slave dialectic. Violence for Fanon seems unavoidable in such a struggle, which is not violence for the sake of violence but, following Hegel, the violence that constitutes the subject as a socio-spatial agent. In the end, Hegel's historical approach may have been dismissive of Africa and other non-European nations (McCaskie, 2019), but his geography of otherness and reconnection offers sharp tools for dealing with imperialism, late capitalism and the contradictions of post-globalises societies.

Lessons and Conclusions

Hegel's most significant geographical accomplishment – his major and consequential geographical contribution – is the detailed investigation into the pursuit of higher reason and on which constitutes the absolute. The complex evolution of self-consciousness, via the experience of otherness and the insistence of moral duties, not only takes place in time and space (as obliquely indicated by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) but it is itself an expression of the production and contestation of space. Space as the outcome of increasingly conscious relations as theorised by Hegel and later associated by Marx with the consciousness is emergent from labour. The Hegelian dialectic can be fundamentally taken as an anticipated rendering of the contemporary understanding of socially produced space. It leads to the conclusion that there is a rich synergy between crucial geography and Hegelian-inspired philosophy. Geography, as interpretation and critique of lived realities, can be the translation of philosophy into life. But because space is always lived space, geography is the actualisation of philosophy and also its complication. It is well known that humans, contaminated by the illusion of capitalist rentism, which spreads like a malignant tumour, are increasingly destroying themselves and their ecological condition. The main driving force behind such suicidal collective behaviour is the persistence of cultivated ignorance, a main impact of commodified education and controlled knowledge production that go against the most basic tenets of Hegelian scholarship. Hegelian geography and its ability to critically rethink local and global trends is a relevant 'toolbox' for dealing with socio-spatial tensions and contradictions, which has been available for several generations, but not sufficiently and satisfactorily considered when dealing with cumulative risks and injustices. The Hegelian edifice of consciousness and interaction, further refined by Marx and other neo-Hegelians, is the best hope to make sense of spatial conflicts, inequalities, and unreason.

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