

Hegel's Minor and Major Geographies: Space, Consciousness, and Change

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Abstract: It is still largely ignored that Hegelian dialect can be of great assistance to comprehend the intricacies of the production, experience, and contestation of space. Hegelian philosophy can significantly help to enrich geographical scholarship, although Hegel-the-geographer is yet to be discovered and properly recognised. Considering the metabolism of reason, the articulation between the particular and the universal, the externalisation and supersession of objectified consciousness, and the function of otherness in the production of space, among other insights of great socio-spatial relevance, this article offers a comparative analysis between Hegel's minor geography (the more explicit and immediate considerations of space, spatial dimensions, and geometry) and the more substantial, major geography, which is immanent in the main body of his philosophical system. The most remarkable geographical accomplishments of Hegel are possibly the detailed investigation into the pursuit of higher reason through practical, collective action and the convergence of various shapes of consciousness that constitutes the politico-spatial absolute.

Resumo: A dialéctica, lógica e ontologia hegelianas são ainda geralmente ignoradas pela maioria dos geógrafos, mas poderiam ser de grande ajuda para se compreender os meandros da produção, vivência e contestação do espaço. A filosofia hegeliana pode enriquecer, em muito, a teoria e prática geográfica, embora "Hegel-o-geógrafo" ainda não tenha sido devidamente reconhecido pela academia. Entre as realizações mais notáveis de Hegel estão a investigação detalhada da busca da razão através de ações coletivas e a convergência de várias formas de consciência que permeiam as relações político-espaciais. Considerando o metabolismo da razão, a articulação entre o particular e o universal, a externalização e superação da consciência e a função da alteridade na produção do espaço, entre outras questões de grande relevância, este artigo oferece uma análise comparativa entre a pequena geografia (considerações mais explícitas e imediatas do espaço, das dimensões espaciais e da geometria) e a grande geografia de Hegel (mais substancial e imanente no corpo principal do seu sistema filosófico). A principal conclusão é que a filosofia hegeliana é fundamentalmente permeada por uma rica sensibilidade geográfica e os geógrafos devem envolver-se e beneficiar-se mais diretamente da contribuição de Hegel.

Keywords: production of space, nature, conflicts, geography, agency

Hegel's Geographical Reason and His Reasons for Geography

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is certainly one of the most prominent and intriguing philosophers of modern Western thought. Hegel belonged to that very special group of so-called German idealists, whose contribution had a major and lasting

impact on the discipline (Pöggeler 1977). Later in life he became a celebrated professor and even rector of Berlin University, having lived through the turbulent years of the French Revolution, the occupation of (what would later become unified) Germany, and the growing hegemony of industrial Europe. As a controversial scholar, Hegel has been equally celebrated and criticised since his lifetime.¹ One main reason to resist his philosophy and treat it as something almost indecipherable is the ambitious task Hegel set for himself, which was nothing less than an attempt to revisit the whole philosophical edifice since before the Greeks and to develop a novel method to critically inquire into human existence and world knowledge. Hegel (1892:19) properly observed that the “rise of philosophy is due to these cravings of thought. Its point of departure is Experience; including under that name both our immediate consciousness and the inductions from it”. It is no secret that all philosophers who came afterwards, including Marx, Adorno, Heidegger, Lefebvre, Derrida, Deleuze, and Badiou, were all deeply challenged by Hegel. Hegelian ontology and his cumulative system of analysis represented a turning point in the evolution of philosophy, and we are still beginning to understand its full potential. Hegel remains a key intellectual reference, especially because late (neoliberal) modernity still hasn’t tackled the problems of early modernity/classical liberalism (i.e. expansionism, risks, privatisation, reification, individualism) and new rounds of contradiction steadily accumulate (e.g. post-political modes of governance, climate catastrophe, and North–South, East–West politico-economic disputes).

Our starting point is that Hegelian philosophy is also, and fundamentally, permeated by a rich geographical sensibility and, more importantly, geographers should engage and benefit more directly from his far-reaching ideas. The Hegelian system did not come “only” from his obstinate study of Greek, German, and other European schools of thought, but also from the creative reflection on the historical developments and the politico-spatial transformations unfolding before his very eyes. Having been born in Württemberg, he lived in Bavaria, Switzerland, and Prussia, having travelled to Austria, Holland, Belgium, and France. Those various residences, jobs, and trips certainly had an impact on Hegel’s thinking. Kojève (1947:11) noted that “*L’homme qui contemple est ‘absorbé’ par ce qu’il contemple*”² and that Hegel personally witnessed the attacks by Napoleon on German soil, the stubborn resistance of the aristocracy and the strengthening of bourgeois institutions, which considerably informed his interpretation of reality. For Hegel, knowledge is real only when it comes out of science employed to question the human condition and necessary interactions. A main consequence is that the Hegelian philosophical programme can be of great assistance for geographers dealing, for example, with the genesis of space, the politics of scale, and the interplay between the local and the universal. According to Hegel, truth is the entirety of relations and the whole is formed by individual circumstances that encapsulate and defy the totality. All that reinforces the call made by Lucas Pohl (2019) for a “geographical turn” to Hegel. Nonetheless, it is necessary to first scrutinise Hegel’s minor geography vis-à-vis his major geographical reasoning. The latter evolves around the key question of how space encapsulates the

perennially unfinished struggles for change and for individual and collective self-consciousness.

Hegel's Minor (Immediate) Geography: Limiting Space

One must concede that the influence of Hegel on geography and other social sciences may be frequently acknowledged (Bond 2014), however his work is still surrounded by ambiguities and misconstructions. That leads Bourgeois (2007:649) to rightly claim that “no other philosophy has been the subject of such diverse and conflicting interpretations as Hegel”. By and large, this has less to do with the complexity of his writing and more with the sophistication and originality of Hegel's contribution. As an unfortunate consequence of persistent misconceptions, the discipline of geography has so far benefited only marginally from Hegelian philosophy. Most references, since the 1970s, have been provided by the so-called “radical [neo-Marxist] geographers”—primarily inspired by the metaphilosophy of Lefebvre (1974) and theorisations of capitalist spatiality by Harvey (1982)—who have attempted to extend dialectical logic to encompass the contingencies of space, particularly the politics of scale and urban development (Collinge 2008), but rarely engaged with the Hegelian categories and its analytical system more directly (most only deal with the “master-slave dialectic”). Interestingly, if some geographers have tried, even obliquely, to connect with Hegel's ideas, 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”. Already in the early academic years, at Jena in 1801–1802, Hegel's 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 annotations, 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. For that reason, “Time is [thus] the moment of ‘infinity’ (i.e. of endless succession, transience, othering) and space the moment of self-identity (since any point can be regarded as fixed once and for all)” (Harris 1983:244).

Most of Hegel's explicit elaboration on space and geometry is found in the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, Part I: Science of Logic* (Hegel 2010a) and in a closely connected work, known as the *Greater Logic* (Hegel 2010b), which both deal with the relations and conceptualisations of space, mathematics, time, 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. They possess the absolute possibility that the one may be posited in them anywhere”. Such argumentation clearly echoes Euclidian synthetic geometry, which was already under attack during Hegel's time and later criticised by Einstein as only a good approximation for short distances or small magnitudes. Space for Hegel, at this stage, is a multiplicity (*Vielheit*) of different “heres”, where each here

is an instance of the same universal space (there is thus space and more space). The line becomes 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). This ingenious but still scant treatment of space is what we might call *Hegel's minor geography*, that is, a very immediate (i.e. non-mediated, in Hegelian terms) handling of spatiality as the natural basis of social agency. There is a tendency here to present space as a pure abstraction, the very first determination, first moment of logic. Hegel's more candid interpretation of space, according to Houlgate (2005:123), is rather a "self-determining *reason* existing in the form of externality". This category of space is conceptualised by Hegel as a simple form or an abstraction (immediate externality) and it is taken as the universal indeterminate, a distance from bodies, a general idea, as "there is no deduction here" (Hegel 2009:138).

The minor Hegelian geography—expressed in his more explicit mathematical and geometrical texts—is in effect ontologically incomplete (as it contains an inherent incompleteness) because it is a journey towards totality at the expense of space. Instead of fulfilling its ontological primacy, space is still relegated to the lesser sphere of immediacy and self-certainty (pertaining to the lowest realm of consciousness). Pure space is considered equivalent to pure being, which is the first category of logic but it is still empty. Spatiality turns into a perpetual collapsing to infinite "heres" that are negated and reinstated indefinitely in an undifferentiated continuous. Consequently, time becomes the truth of space because it is its self-transcendence (space that transcends its own spatiality, as the basic being); time is the active pole and the negation or overcoming of space. Contrasting with the immanence of history:

Everyone knows that he or she begins from experiences, from sensations, from wholly concrete states, and that general ideas come later in time. They have connection with the concrete [object] of sensation; the general ideas are contained in it. When I see this sheet of paper, I see something spatially extended, for the universal [aspect], space, is also contained in it. This universal, space, only comes to my consciousness later than what is in space ... To draw out the universal in the operation of my consciousness. (Hegel 2009:135)

Elsewhere, Hegel (2004:40) treats 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*". Likewise, 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).

It is evident in this part of Hegel's work the influence of Plato's *Timaeus* and the understanding of space as basically the receptacle where material and spiritual things take place: in the Greek text, God made the world "a single visible living thing, which contains within itself all the living things whose nature it is to share its kind" (Plato 1997:1236). Hegel's minor geography also reflects his contradictory attitudes towards German nationalism (Avineri 1962) and Germany as the

realisation of the unlimited self-determination of freedom (see Hegel 1956). Intriguingly, his naïve argument in favour of the German state contradicts his own critique of the “bad infinite”, a notion developed by Hegel in relation to mathematical calculus but with wider applicability (Hegel 2010a:149). A “bad infinity” is a mere quantitative, hence limited, category, as it results from the process of addition, contrasting with the genuine infinity is a qualitative, dynamic self-relation of the interminable process of surpassing (sublation). In addition, the minor geography encompasses his explicit ontology of nature (going beyond the original influence of Schelling in this regard, as shown by Taylor [1975]), whose basis is essentially space, which is nature's 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 (as surrogate of nature) as the initial 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 defined as 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]).

On the other hand, despite these shortcomings, Hegel's minor geography provides enough ammunition for dealing with space and inform critical geography. A main contribution is that through somehow “mechanic” phases, as described in the above texts, logic returns to its beginnings (nature) and becomes the sheer being of space (Loris 2012). More significantly, Hegel's 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 relevant to observe that Hegel was always ambivalent toward the Enlightenment and critical of its arrogant attitude of supremacy, which had parallels with his relationship to Romanticism (the great countermovement to the Enlightenment). On the one hand, he was certainly influenced by many of its philosophers and can even be considered associated with this tradition; on the other, he had a very equivocal stance toward the materialists and adherents of a totally mechanistic worldview, particularly the ideas of many French Enlightenment thinkers (Liedman 1997). Already in his early writings Hegel challenged the repercussions of Enlightenment ideas, particularly on the state of nature, because for him the modern subject exists in a web of social interdependences that, following Adam Smith, are greatly influenced by “commodity exchange” (Buck-Morss 2009:10). Even in these opening texts, he was able to creatively connect his description of world-making with the civilisational role of the state, commodity trade, science, and politics. Therefore, the Hegelian elaboration on the subject is a theory of self-realisation that is radically anti-dualistic (Taylor 1979).

Hegel went beyond idealism and realism and “is astonishingly up-to-date” and “both his conception of Nature and the dialectical pattern of his reasoning and of

this philosophical schema are precisely suited to contemporary physics" (Harris 1993:247), as much as to geography and other social sciences. 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 mobilised a good deal of Spinozism to bridge the Kantian dualism between known phenomena and things-in-themselves; he claims that nature is an expression of the Idea (which is "God in himself" and related to the "true infinity"). The spatio-temporal connection between reason and ontology is significant, as stated by Hegel (1971:198):

things are in truth themselves spatial and temporal ... [however] space and time are extremely meagre and superficial determinations, consequently, that things obtain very little from these forms ... Cognitive thinking does not halt at these forms: it apprehends things in their Notion in which space and time are contained as ideal moments ... free intelligence is the self-existent dialectic of these forms of immediate asunderness.

Ultimately, Hegel's minor geography was never otiose, but paved the way for his major, actually transformative geography, examined next.

Hegel's Major (Mediated) Geography: Immanent Geographical Forces

The treatment of geometry, nature, and space, briefly mentioned above, is often taken as all Hegel had to say about spatiality and geography. That is attested in the various Hegelian dictionaries and suchlike commentaries published over the last decades (for instance, the passing references to alienation, dialectics, otherness, and production in Gregory et al. [2009]). However, despite its obvious philosophical and historical importance, this most apparent and immediate spatial elaboration constitutes nothing else than Hegel's minor geographical contribution. Persistent in most intellectual circles is an unhelpful disconnection between Hegel's vast discussion on ethics and reason and the lesser work explicitly on spatiality and nature, which has resulted in a conceptual impasse and is the main reason why Hegelian philosophy is seldom mobilised by geographers or philosophers to scrutinise the social production and contestation of space. In one of the most notorious examples of a questionable rendering of Hegel's rich philosophy, Kojève (1947:37) suggests that later in life Hegel abandoned the parallelism between philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit and expressed an opposition ("negation") between nature, as existence, and essence, as logic, which stands as a tension between being and notion. According to Kojève's rather reductionist reading of the Hegelian texts, nature is inconcrete because it is an abstraction of the spirit, whereas the essence of the absolute is only fully realised and concretely revealed in the synthesis between logic and existence. On the one hand, Kojève is right to affirm that Hegel seeks the totality of existence, which is not independent of essence (although Kojève mistakenly equates Hegelian phenomenology to Heideggerian existentialism). On the other, however, Kojève seems to attribute to Hegel an over-optimistic destiny and sees the culmination of

human history as a predetermined, consummate state beyond specific times and spaces.

Le but de l'Histoire, son terme final,—c'est 'le Concept absolu', c'est-à-dire la science. Dans cette Science, dit Hegel, l'Homme supprime-dialectiquement son existence temporelle ou 'ponctuelle', c'est-à-dire vraiment humaine, par opposition à la Nature, es il devient lui-même Étendue (Ausdehnung) ou Espace. (Kojève 1947:440)³

As it is well known, Kojève's public conferences on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* were hugely influential in France in the middle of the last century and inspired many famous scholars (e.g. Georges Bataille, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, André Breton, Jacques Lacan, and Raymond Aron), but at the expense of lowering Hegel's phenomenology to an almost esoteric and teleological theory of evolution. It can be accepted that the *Phenomenology* is an intricate text and its publication faced many personal and editorial challenges (i.e. Hegel's precarious university job and the Napoleonic invasion of Thuringia), as demonstrated in his letters of 1806 and 1807 (Hegel 1984). Still, the structure and argument of the book render very clear the *arrière pensée* (afterthought) of Hegel, particularly the interminable trajectory of spirit (*Geist*), from one shape of consciousness (*Gestalt*) to another and in a way that maintains a cumulative interconnection between the various stages and, more importantly, happens through practical, collective action that constitutes the politico-spatial absolute. Instead of an allegorical idealism, Hegel adopts an atheistic and quasi-materialistic stance that it can be even considered a precursor of Marxism, something that was demonstrated by several authors since Feuerbach and his contemporaries (Harris 1993). Lukács (1971), for instance, reiterated the importance of Hegelian philosophy to the work of Marx, as in the case of the role of subjectivity and the notions of praxis and historical contingency (rather than the determinism of vulgar Marxists), which are located at the centre of the Marxian analysis. That can be attested also by the "march of the world-spirit" (a central thread of the Hegelian system, later converted by Marx into the mundane materiality of the world [cf. Harvey 1981]), which is ultimately the realisation of the dialectic of nature (the process of becoming or being made real, instead of taking nature as merely a steppingstone to the fulfilment of a higher ontological condition). For Hegel, spirit grasps the totality of the concrete real, which is its own essence, in an endless process in which humanity (the finite spirit) flourishes. Interestingly, the Marxian description of the transformation of value from one form into another, without becoming lost in this movement, but as a self-moving substance (Marx 1990) is closely related to the conceptualisation of spirit by Hegel (1977). The indebtedness of Marx to Hegel's achievements is so unmistakably demonstrated by Lukács (1971) that it contributed to the Hegelian turn in Marxism, notably asserted by the scholars associated with the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory (although criticised in more recent decades by post-structuralist thinkers for being reductionist and, allegedly, creating room for new forms of domination).

Another notable Hegelian assertion is that one self-consciousness expects recognition from another self-consciousness, that is, an individual externalises and through the other becomes more of itself. There exist two convergent

propositions in the dynamics of spirit: “substance alienates itself from itself and becomes self-consciousness” and, at the same time, “self-consciousness alienates itself from itself and gives itself the nature of a Thing, or makes itself a universal Self” (Hegel 1977:457). As a result, human civilisation is a journey towards higher levels of reason and morality: *esse qua esse* (being as being) depends on the spirit that is itself conscious of itself as spirit (*Geist*). The Hegelian being is the object transformed and expanded by its own actualisation. Whereas for Heidegger the essence of being is time, for Hegel it is the essence of time (considering that time “has the pure shape of space” [Heidegger 1988:145]). Hence the Hegelian insistence on actuality (*Wirklichkeit*), whose tensions are reconciled through reason and according to mutually dependent subjects and objects. It is crucial to appreciate that, what Hegel describes as the strive for self-consciousness (the trajectory of reason, as ethics) and by the immanence of recognition (as the general inter-subjective structure and pattern of Hegel’s concept of spirit, according to Williams [1997]) are the cornerstone of socio-political interactions that produce space. Concrete 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 rather a “journey” from the immediacy of self-certainty to a wiser vision of ourselves and the world. There is no golden essence to be unveiled at the expense of or in relation to nature, but essence depends on the existence and interdependency between humans and non-humans. In that sense, dealing with nature “should at least have the significance of a *universal*, not of a *sensuous particular*” (Hegel 1977:147). As pertinently demonstrated by Marx (1988) in his more openly Hegelian phase, 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. Or, as later articulated by Stirling (1898:84), “Here is the secret of Hegel, or rather a schema to a key to it: Quantity—Time and Space—Empirical Realities”. That is quite different than Kojève’s use of a meta-Hegelian approach (early post-modern?) to formulate an idiosyncratic interpretation of Hegelian dialectic, concluding that the various stages of reason and notion act separately and not necessarily connected all the way through. Yet, it echoes the claim 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.

Our main contention here is that one needs to mobilise the entire dialectical system introduced by Hegel in order to grasp its full geographical potential. Hegel’s brilliant theorisation on the interactive dynamics of consciousness, which is firmly grounded in the practical action of interdependent agents, provides a decisive clue to our understanding of his spatial sensibility. As demonstrated by Malabou (2004), Hegel believed that he had escaped from the limits of Kant’s transcendental thought and claimed he was producing “speculative philosophy”, not in the sense that his work was hypothetical or indeterminate, but because for him the predicates are gradually unfolded from the concept of the sentence’s subject. This gradual unfolding, which is hugely relevant for critical geography, is

at the centre of the analytical and ontological position of Hegel and it is not by chance that the most famous term of his argument is *Aufheben* (i.e. to sublimate, to transcend, or to supersede), which contains the meanings both of preserving and abolishing, given that each stage of thought in the Hegelian dialectic is both retained and transcended. For Hegel, philosophy must be occupied with all the scales of the world and the practical reality of the community; philosophy rests in the object and not just in abstract speculation; “it is the externalization of self-consciousness that posits the thinghood [of the object]” but at the same time “self-consciousness has equally superseded this externalization and objectivity too, and taken it back into itself so that it is in communion with itself in *its* otherness as such” (Hegel 1977:479). Overcoming the limitations of his “minor geography”, particularly the description of space and nature as self-externality, in the *Phenomenology* there is robust argument about the active externalisation and supersession of objectified consciousness, which evolves according to the interaction between individuals and social groups across time and scale. Hegel (1977:480) further contends that “consciousness must know the object [i.e. the world] as itself” in the “movement of the universal through determination to individuality, as also the reverse movement from individuality through superseded individuality, or through determination, to the universal”. In the final chapter of this magnum opus—*Absolute Knowing*—Hegel consolidates his unique phenomenological construct, after hundreds of pages dealing with knowledge and reason, and comes up with a synthesis that largely anticipates what we now describe as the “social production of space”. Not by chance, the ground-breaking elaboration of Lefebvre (1974) on social space, as much as Lukács (1971) on reification and totality, was deeply influenced by Hegelian thinking and, by the same token, his reasoning prefigured present-day geographical accounts that theorise space as intensely mediated and simultaneously abstract, lived, and political. Merriman (2022) has aptly insisted on the continual influence of different philosophical understandings of spatiality and the process of spacing on everyday imaginaries, practices, and disputes. Space remains a very important and prominent concept, especially if considered beyond abstract, reductionist positions (e.g. “geography as geometry”) or the post-structuralist obsession with non-linearities and allegory, because of its power to transcend disciplinary and ontological boundaries (Merriman 2022).

Without being anachronistic and trying to force 21st century geography back onto that seminal moment of continental philosophy, we can recognise that 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. Space is certainly the product of deeply politicised and often contested phenomena (Ioris 2014) as, for example, the agrarian question in the United Kingdom, which since the time of King John is a perennial attempt to resist the privatisation of land and regulate access to resources (including the right to move around in the landscape). The entire Hegelian system—which progresses from early texts into the *Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia*, which should be actually understood in the light of the original plan contained and announced in the *Phenomenology*, and not the other way around, that is, first came the conceptualisation of spirit and later the logic of the world and nature (Loewenberg 1934)—is

vitality about the production of more inclusive realities (in other words, more inclusive spaces) through the interconnected dynamics of reason, freedom, and recognition.⁴ That does not unfold in a linear, teleological progression, but is the outcome of totalising agency, described as the production of a good, qualitative infinite that connects the abstract specific with the concrete universal (different than argued by some, Hegel's totality leaves open its supplement or difference, leading to potential transformation). The abstract and the illogical are not located 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 socio-natural interaction). Spirit becomes an "other" to itself, enters into existence as being-for-another and "creates a world" (Hegel 1977:467). The Hegelian dialectic is, thus, not just a sophisticated elaboration of concepts and categories, but 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 those many dualisms constitutes a clever plan for the pursuit of higher reason and moral progress. It is the first, crucial moment for the production of equitable 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 (a self-fulfilling otherness) is another definition of the social production of space. For Hegel (1977:93), motion is split into "time and space", or "space and velocity", and in themselves these are independent parts or essences, but are then united through the Understanding. Our consciousness passes "over from the inner being as object to the other side, into the Understanding, and it experiences change there" (Hegel 1977:95). The object is reflected into itself and "has become Life" (Hegel 1977:106) through the quest for reason, given that thought "is charged with otherness" (Hegel 1977:468). These are crucial elements of the production of novel spatial realities and the simultaneous enlivening of the (innately socio-natural) 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) provides a comprehensive examination of the tradition of the philosophical treatment of the concept of space and on the role of subjectivity. Departing from Kant and Marx, his main influence is certainly Hegel, for instance in the claim that the relation between space and knowledge 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]). It reverberates Hegel's argument that 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).

The dynamics of space ultimately reflect the essence and lived manifestation of spirit, not as something mystical, but 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 (*Begriff*) grasping and comprehending the object. Full existence is realised in interaction (become more itself through 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*, 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 dialectic, whilst Santos (2021) asserts the importance of the totality to build a critical spatial theory. Interestingly, here the contribution of Derrida and other post-structuralist authors, often associated with a militant anti-Hegelianism, can be particularly helpful: the need to go beyond the more pedestrian, impoverished Hegel and understand that there is no "peak of reason" but a continuous material and more-than-material journey. The *Phenomenology* is a crescendo of an intricate exploration of human potentiality and no single sentence can be taken to represent the full argument; it is revealing that Hegel resorts to spatialisation to accomplish the evolution of spirit. Space is used here not to mark the end of history, but to emphasise the possibilities and challenges that Hegel envisaged at the onset of industrial modernisation. Because the progress of *Geist* is not linear nor pre-given, the production of space is wide open and the power of the negative lies in this openness, that is, in contingency as necessity. Furthermore, Hegel saw the production and challenges of the new world through the tension between external and inward changes. As mentioned above, his conceptual model was informed by the contrast between developments in France and Germany, already very clear for him at the time of Napoleon's invasion of Jena (expressed in his letters and Berlin lectures in Hegel [1984]). Hegel understood that France underwent a revolution in 1789 ("externality") without a reformation ("inwardness"), whilst Germany had a protestant reformation without a revolution; both were incomplete national processes and Germany could only surpass France with its own external revolutionary action (what happened later, with Otto von Bismarck, in a very controlled, top-down way).

Finally, Hegel's mediation between ontology and phenomenology affords logical elements for interrogating how the world is and should be produced by conscious individuals acting collectively. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a lengthy call for a shared understanding of a reality in permanent transformation and, more importantly, that needs to change to secure higher levels of reason and freedom. This is at the centre of the geographical perspective of Hegel, which is very relevant in the contemporary world with great uncertainties and mounting individual,

national, and global challenges (Ioris 2015). The Hegelian approach has been used, among many others, by Walter Rodney to examine the perverse geographical relations and interdependencies between European colonial powers and Africa. He infers that “because of the superficiality of many of the approaches to ‘underdevelopment’, and because of resulting misconceptions, it is necessary to reemphasize that development and underdevelopment are not only comparative terms, but that they also have a dialectical relationship one to the other: that is to say, the two help produce each other by interaction. Western Europe and Africa had a relationship which insured the transfer of wealth from Africa to Europe” (Rodney 2018:86). It is remarkable that Hegel also indicated an appropriate way to reconcile socio-spatial tensions with a concept that is evocative of the social production of space: the notion of *ground* (Ioris 2023). Although not primordially spatial, ground can be associated with the causes and the 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 an “other” 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”. Those “quasi-materialistic” lessons that underpin Hegel’s major geography have important politico-spatial reverberations and are very relevant for issues of justice, discussed below.

Politico-Spatial Repercussions of Hegel’s Geography: A Non-Totalitarian Totality

In the final part of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel reiterates the immense complexity of the world and the circumstantial coexistence of different shapes of conscience, rather than a mere linear evolution of reason and practice (Pinkard 1994). The dialectical journey directs socio-spatial relations to its final stage because it contains all the other elements that were developed and apprehended earlier in the book. Hegel insists that all concepts and forms of consciousness (*Gestalten*) have to be accounted for in their internal relations, perennial interactions, and interdependencies to one another. Nothing is ever defined in advance, but for Hegel there is a radical openness and the individual is fluid, with no rigid essence, prone to self-forgetting, but this “disappearing subject” is related “to itself as a unity of identity and difference” (Malabou 2004:32). Likewise, Hegelian dialectic does lead to an increasing comprehension of human agency, as it ultimately produces a complete series, or drives, “to completion” (Hegel 1977:50). All that has major consequences for pushing the boundaries of geographical thinking, as conscience

is shaped by the world and the world is the expression of conscience. It also helps to appreciate that geographical accounts are the result of consciousness that retrospectively creates the world out of symbols, practices, and relationships. Geographical interpretations are basically acts of claiming, valuing, and ordering the realities of the world (that is, arrange something in a methodical way, as has been done from colonial cartography to post-modern localisms and exceptionalisms). Hence, the importance of Hegelian logic, his critical assessment of socio-time change and sense of what is about (and has the potential) to happen. Following the Hegelian perspective of Lacan, as interpreted by Žižek (2012), the subject is the retroactive effect of its positing as presupposition.

Nonetheless, it should be granted that Hegel's depiction of how space can be collectively produced is to some extent affected by his idealistic proclivities and hinges upon the controversial notion of the whole (the total, totality, which is already present in each constitutive part and individual action). It cannot be denied that sometimes Hegel betrays his formative theological education, as in the claim that "Nature separated from the divine Being is simply nothing" (Hegel 1977:472). Despite those metaphysical excesses, the progression towards the whole, and the struggle for totalisation, are depicted as a dialectic of negation between the individual, the collective, and the universal. The whole and the absolute may have a metaphysical dimension, but their dynamic pole is the materiality of those relations given that the Hegelian logical doctrine (Hegel 1892:143) has three sides: abstract (understanding), dialectic (negative reason), speculation (positive reason). The whole is absolute, not as the end but as a new beginning. 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 an other. "The Absolute is the Essence" but it exists through self-relation and "negation of the negative, as immanent self-mediation". According to Hegel (1892:287), 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". A concrete, lived reality is in effect a plurality, that is, the whole is itself and its continuation of equally unstable totalities in other wholes. The reflexivity of the whole comes from the interaction between three moments or functional parts of the notion form 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) (Hegel 2010b:513).

Perhaps one of the most contentious aspects of this 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 preferred theme for Badiou (2009a:109), who argues 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 the French philosopher, Hegel’s ultimate achievement 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). According to Badiou, this is the main impasse in Hegel’s philosophical system, because the multiple counts as the Hegelian One (the structure of the Absolute). Hegel’s absolute may then become 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 and 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 [somehow Platonic] “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. For Badiou (2007), the main political task of the last century, which still remains a challenge, is to re-evaluate the dialectics through the juxtaposition of the Two and the One.

Badiou (2022) insists that the being is non-contradictory but the effort to speak of wholes results in contradictions. According to him, the being belongs to the world and to the place of its operation, but this is a condition where there is no whole 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). Materialism, for Badiou, is the negation of the idealism of “the One”. Hegel’s journey towards world-spirit (*Geist*), as the spirit of the world as it unveils itself through human consciousness and knowledge, cannot ignore that two worlds with the same constitutive things can be different because of their transcendental identities of the same multiplicity (Badiou 2009a). Whilst Hegel centres his interpretative system in relation to the Whole (the One as totality), Badiou concentrates on the Event (multiplicity as another One). Materialism, for Badiou (inspired by Plato’s *Parmenides*), is the affirmation of an irreducible multiplicity (in opposition to the idealist One) but one must derive it not from nothing (which counts as One) but from the void, that is, “less than nothing”; the void is less than everything, it exceeds everything (the One) because it is less than nothing (Žižek 2012). The incompatibility between the truth and the whole, for Badiou, is the decisive tenet of modernity and its humongous impacts around the planet (Hallward 2003). Nonetheless, Badiou, despite his well-founded reservations with Hegel’s idealist inclinations, recognises the critical and significant amount of materialism in the Hegelian argument (Ruda 2015). In addition, Badiou himself does not completely avoid dealing with duplicities and handling dualisms. For instance, a multiple world (or multiple logics of worlds), for Badiou (2009a), is possible if it is divided by two, separating the reflexive from the non-reflexive multiples.⁵

More important is that the Hegelian totality paves the way for a reading of philosophy that takes the inevitability of contradiction as absolute (McGowan 2019). Consequently, even situations of acute spatial inequality and politico-economic asymmetries contain the germ of their modification and the possibility (potentiality) of alternative spatial configurations because of the intervention of the whole

and the ensuing historicised, grounded possibilities. 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 insisted 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 (actualised) 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 organised the progression of spirit as a collective mediation between our 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. Accordingly, 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 and their action. The Hegelian spatial whole is immanent in the development of consciousness and the advancement towards the absolute that is perennially open to be challenged.

Žižek (2012:78) further argues that the Hegelian truth is “measured by the inner (in)consistency of the discursive process, the gap between the enunciated content and its position of enunciation”. The totality has always a residue or a supplement that ends up challenging it, as in the case of the spatial intervention of the proletariat and Indigenous peoples in the capitalist world (Ioris 2022). Likewise, the nothing of Hegel is not a dead nothing, out of nowhere, but a nothing directly related to the whole (a nothing of the whole). That is the reason why Hegel is the thinker of totalities, not as dead asteroids but erupting volcanos that even encompass Badiou's scission between the One and the Two. Instead of the end of all differences and the eradication of agency, the (perpetually unfinished) journey 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 the moment of the “I”, its pure negativity acts as force (Hegel 1977:19). Different but related to Badiou's system, the reality for Hegel is dialectic and infinite that contains finite things. There is an identity of identity and contradiction, as Hegel tries to reconcile apparent inconsistencies. The French philosopher agrees with Hegel that philosophy is a scientific system working itself through speculative thought substantiated by (socio-spatial?) practice. Badiou sponsors a “dialectic of subtraction” articulated around the event, that is, it is the outside that disrupts the world, which is not too distant from Hegel's dialectic. In any case, Hegelian dialectical negation is superior in this regard to “subtraction”, because Badiou's subtraction is nothing more than the recognition of difference and supplement (subtraction is the effect of the outside of the whole which disrupts the whole).⁶ 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 (Calcano 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, curiously, but extremely revealing of his acute geographical awareness, in the final paragraphs of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where being is ultimately portrayed as space. After hundreds of pages dealing with civilisation, religion, and ethics, dwells with a new beginning, which suggestively departs from space and acknowledges human limitations and hardship:

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. (Hegel 1977:492)

This philosophical exchange has reached a point where the geographical perspective not only benefits from Hegel, but can also creatively contribute to the debate. The disagreement between Hegel and Badiou on totality and change can, and perhaps should, be resolved in space, or at least in the unending production and contestation of spaces out of the interaction between individuals, social groups, and nations. This is not a random process, but it follows the human endeavour for freedom, enhancement, and recognition that takes place in, and in relation to, space. Honneth (1995), informed by Hegel, rightly asserts that the possibility of autonomy and freedom is necessarily based on experiences and relations of recognition (a just society is one in which all recognitive conditions for freedom are met; this is a normative theory of democracy that connects economic redistribution and social justice with intersubjective recognition). Those dynamics dialectically presuppose, produce, and rationalise space (Batista da Costa et al. 2015). Although some geographers have argued that dialectics does not need to be Hegelian, because of its supposed totalising and ideological excesses (e.g. Harlow and Carter 2004; Shapiro 2010; Sheppard 2008), other authors have demonstrated, despite various conceptual ambiguities, its ability to deal with contingency, openness, and many contemporary dilemmas across the various scales of interaction (Castree 1996). The crucial relevance of local specificities for thinking and acting globally is revealed by Susan Buck-Morss (2009) in her assessment of Haitian independence and anti-racist struggle. The brutal violence that permeated the formation of the first independent country in the Caribbean and the second independent state in the Western Hemisphere (after the United States) was also a brave attempt to actualise Europe's modernising trajectory and played a role in the (re)construction of the old continent after the French Revolution. Informed by Hegel, Buck-Morss takes on the "unpopular task" of both decentring the legacy of Western modernity and trying to salvage modernity's universal intent (rather than calling for a plurality of alternative modernities). At the same time, as argued by Sepinwall (2012), what happened in Haiti not only had roots in the controversies around European modernisation, but was closely influenced by the African

heritage and by comparable anti-slavery reactions in Africa. It serves to demonstrate that the dialectical interdependencies between the whole, other totalities, and multiple internal and external forces that transform the status quo are all firmly located at the core of geography as a discipline and as praxis.

Conclusions

Despite its defiant complexity and the need to problematise some key concepts and categories (i.e. re-explain and bring these to the 21st century), the Hegelian interpretive system offers invaluable assistance to understanding different scales and intensities of social mediation, whose tangible result is the collective and interactive production of space. Instead of the assertion of Heidegger, Deleuze, and Derrida that there is a predetermined idea of being in his philosophical corpus, in effect Hegel provides us a “roadmap” of speculative thought that develops immanently and without systematic presuppositions (Houlgate 2005). One of the great geographical accomplishments of Hegel is certainly the detailed investigation into the pursuit of higher reason and on what constitutes the absolute, not as a static condition, but a situation in which various shapes of consciousness and multiple experiences come together. This has had major geographical repercussions, even if implied and not plainly expressed, as it helps to connect socio-spatial interactions with active, shared forms of learning. The rich totality of space production emerges from the externalisation of self-consciousness positing the object and then taking it back. The dialectical movement from individuality to universality is based on consciousness grasping the object and the different scales of the object affecting the pursuit of higher levels of reason. 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 indicated by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*), but it is itself an expression of the production and contestation of space. It proves that the Hegelian philosophy on existence, reason, and change, among many other questions, constituted an insightful anticipation of the work of contemporary geographers on socially produced space and on the disturbing contradictions of mainstream development.

It all leads to the conclusion that there is a rich and emerging synergy between critical geography and Hegelian philosophy. Because space is always lived space, geography can be reinterpreted as the actualisation of philosophy and also its complication in real life. Pohl (2019:287) adds that “critical geographies are not about theories, but about the condition behind theories” and that is the main reason why geography and geographers need Hegel. Instead of the irrationality of today's socio-spatial trends (e.g. North–South inequalities; the urban, agrarian, and climatic crises; alienation, racism, and violence, etc.), Hegel's edifice of consciousness and interaction, further refined by Marx and other neo-Hegelians, is undeniably of great value to make sense of spatial conflicts, inequalities, and unreason. As an emblematic example of a radical geographical approach connecting theory and practice, Hegelian dialectic was employed by Rodney (2018) to interrogate the legacy of colonialism and imperialism and to show that foreign investment and development policies have actually underdeveloped Africa, while

each national experience reflects wider continental tendencies and the universal pressures of capitalism. Overall, a Hegel-inspired geography and its ability to systematically re-evaluate local, national, and global trends represent some of the best interpretative “tools” or “resources” available for dealing with cumulative tensions and injustices at the local, national, and global scales. These “tools” have been available for several generations, but neither seriously nor sufficiently considered. But be reassured: Hegel-the-geographer is our new “old” comrade.

Endnotes

¹ A tiny example of such controversies and misunderstandings was the phrase, written by pencil, on the first page of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* owned by the library of the University of Edinburgh, consulted in December 2022: “Abandon all hope ye who enter here...”

² “The man who contemplates is ‘absorbed’ by what he contemplates” (Kojève 1980:3).

³ “The goal of History, its final term, is ‘the absolute Concept’—that is, ‘Science’. In this Science, Hegel says, Man dialectically overcomes his temporal or ‘pointlike’—i.e. truly human—existence, as *opposed* to Nature, and he himself becomes Extension (*Ausdehnung*) or Space” (Kojève 1980:164–165).

⁴ Nonetheless, there are evident continuities and interpenetrations between these various Hegelian books. It is not by chance that the three sections of the *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* (conscience, self-conscience, and reason/spirit), which all encapsulate the movement from the universal to the singular through the particular (Marquet 2007).

⁵ This 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 (2009a: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), beyond idealist mysticism.

⁶ Evidently, the geographical complexity and sophistication of Badiou’s positions cannot be confined to this brief engagement with Hegel. On the contrary, the interest of human geographers in Badiou is gaining momentum, particularly because of his defence of truth as a necessity and as a political category, as well as his emphasis on “events” which are depicted as “being other” than “being as being”. His ontological position is not only profoundly mathematical and political, but also spatialised. The individual “exists in the world with a force that is the measure of what her relation to the event can be” (Badiou 2009b:789).

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