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## The Slave, Antigone and the Housewife: Hegel's Dialectics of the Weak

This article moves across the wide spectrum of feminist interpretations of Hegel, starting with Carla Lonzi and revisiting the queer analysis of Judith Butler, in order to re-interpret the famous figure of “Unhappy Consciousness.” From a feminist perspective, these passages in *Phenomenology of Spirit* should be read as a re-evaluation of the care and reproductive labour, which the Subject experiences as miserably repetitive and mundane, at the stage of dialectics focused on symbolic realm of recognition. The dialectics of the weak can be established based on an in-depth re-evaluation of the material, life maintaining activities traditionally neglected in the discussions of Hegel's legacy. Here these marginalized elements of the Subject's lived experience are taken into account, thus allowing the introduction of the Housewife into the dialectical process.

Keywords: dialectics, weakness, reproductive labour, Antigone

In this way, she becomes the voice, the accomplice of the people, the slaves, those who only whisper their revolt against their masters secretly.

Luce Irigaray, *The Eternal Irony of the Community*

This article is divided into three sections. The first presents a generalized genealogy of my feminist reading of Hegel's philosophy, situated in the broader feminist debate over his philosophy and recognition. The second part focuses on my reconstruction of the "dialectics of the weak" in Hegel, which I situate partly in the theory of *sittlichkeit* and Hegel's discussion of Antigone, and partly in the central moment of his dialectics, one marked by his interestingly ex-static notion of the Subject recognizing themselves<sup>1</sup> as "other"—in the dialectics of slave and master. The third part of my paper is a discussion of the possibility of reconceptualizing reproductive work and maintenance, built on a new reading of the chapter "Unhappy Consciousness" of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This chapter has been traditionally understood as one merely concerning the rejection of the body and finding unstable, temporary and partial reconciliation in religion (see Butler 1997a; Nietzsche 2004; Kojève 1980). I argue that this chapter ought to be read differently, as an account of the disenchantment of the subject (focused on the symbolic) with the mundane, repetitive reality of the material sustainability, including the body and its maintenance, which mainly consists of reproductive and care labour. In such a reading, the "unhappiness" of consciousness can be understood not merely as a sense of loss and its overcoming in religion, but rather as an account of the impossibility of accepting the material realm of sustainability and care, which becomes the abstract rejection of any form of repetitive materiality, and is finally sublated by the sense of participating in the general process of maintenance of life in its materialized form. In such a perspective, this chapter can be seen as a short passage of *Phenomenology...*, where Hegel announces an early version of the analysis of reproductive labor and the precarious, vulnerable figures of those who accomplish this work allowing the continuation of the species—the reproductive labour performed by housewives, servants and other care-givers. I also argue that such a reading cannot be made from an individualist perspective. Concluding, I argue that there is more to Hegel than gender stereotypes and clinging to tradition,

1 In this article I try to use trans-friendly pronouns.

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and perhaps the notion of the “dialectics of the weak,” based on the three elements of dialectics discussed earlier in this article, allows the struggle for recognition to be reclaimed in an interesting, materialist and historical way.

The feminist discussion of Hegel is particularly diverse. Some feminist authors embrace the dialectics as a model for women’s emancipation (Benhabib 1996; Beauvoir de 1956). The Hegelian notion of dialectics is central in the works of several French feminist authors, such as Simone de Beauvoir, who shapes the gender conflict based on the dialectics of the slave and master, indebted to Frantz Fanon and other anti-colonial thinkers, as well as Julia Kristeva, whose discussion of the abject is an effort to express the other Other of the production of culture—the borderline between Object and Subject, is indebted to dialectics (Kristeva 1982). Feminists coming from the critical theory tradition, such as Seyla Benhabib, also affirm the notion of recognition as central for addressing gender inequality and producing egalitarian claims (Benhabib 1994).

Among the main feminist theories contesting Hegel, perhaps the most visible is that of Carla Lonzi, who in 1970 advocated rejecting Hegel entirely in her manifesto *Let’s Spit on Hegel*, demanding a new “unknown subject,” neither masculine nor feminine, one deprived of the limitations of the traditional divisions of gender based on motherhood and war (Lonzi 1991). Within poststructural feminist theory, another strand of anti-Hegelianism can be found in cyberfeminism—such as that depicted in the *Cyborg Manifesto* of Donna Haraway, where binary codes and distinctions are replaced by the ironic myth of hybrid entities rather than a self-transparent, solely conscious notion of a subject (Haraway 1991).

Carole Pateman, with her discussion of the social contract as “fraternal,” reduces Hegel’s philosophy to the traditionalist ideology of family and marriage, repressing femininity and reducing women to the “disorder to be tamed” (this is actually Rousseau’s statement) or the “irony of history” (Hegel’s words; see Pateman 1989). In this spectrum of anti-Hegelian feminism there should also be a place for Judith Butler, who rejected the ideas of reconciliation, the end of history and linear progress, she also disagrees with Hegel’s interpretation of Antigone, rejecting the idea that she represents femininity and emphasizing her gender contradictions (Butler 1987; 1997a; 2000; Malabou and Butler 2011). Arguing that Sophocles’ tragedy itself contains persuasive arguments contradicting Antigone’s femininity, for example Creon’s exclamations to Antigone, such as “you are not even a woman!” or “You are a boy!,” and reconstructing Antigone’s claim as one equally eloquent to those made

by Creon, Butler undermines the presumption that cis-femininity immediately legitimizes the interpretation of her voice as “woman’s” (see Butler 2000; Honig 2013; Majewska 2007). By such a challenging of Hegel’s interpretation of Antigone, not merely is femininity contested, but more widely—so is the general idea of binary gender division. This can be seen as queering Antigone, but Butler portrays her not only as a character embodying gender contradictions and thus sublating them, but also as a person with a peculiar affective predisposition—to affectively invest in the process of dying rather than living. Paradoxically, it can thus be seen as a properly Hegelian reading of Antigone, written against Hegel, not merely a critique of his work. Butler can also be seen as one of the most interesting defenders of such notions as recognition or struggle, and as she clearly embraces the centrality of Antigone in Hegel’s notion of the ethical. Perhaps against Butler’s own arguments, I am thus placing her analysis at the threshold between the feminism rejecting Hegel and that which embraces or at least continues some parts of his work.

In more recent discussions of such ideas as the end of history and dialectics, different perspectives have been offered by Catherine Malabou, Frank Ruda and Rebecca Comay (Malabou 2015; Ruda 2011; Comay 2010). Contesting the inevitability of reading “the end of history” literally, as the only possible closure of the historical process, these authors undermine the notion of finitude, determinism and linearity in Hegel, thus making his thought more accessible for poststructuralist and feminist readings. The *Xenofeminist Manifesto*, partially rooted in Haraway’s poststructuralism, embraces Hegel’s interest in alienation and otherness, situating it at the core of women’s experience, as well as rationalism, which in their view, should become feminism (Laboria Cubonix 2015). Although not directly inspired by the German philosopher, the XF Manifesto may be seen as preserving the sense of culture as the environment, where one encounters themselves as “other.”

A particularly original, distinctly anti-Hegelian feminist thinker is Luce Irigaray, who rejects the phallogocentric, patriarchal cultural fundamentals of the gender division in search for the prior origins of women’s subordination—the “murder of the mother,” preceding in her view that of the father and thus establishing the symbolic order of patriarchal culture as that based on the foreclosure of femininity and relations between women (Irigaray 2004). For Irigaray, it is Ismene who embodies the characteristics of femininity. Antigone, on the other hand, neither yields to the laws of the king, state or patriarchy, nor allows a foreclosure of her voice, according to Irigaray, who emphasizes the shift of relations between men and women to those of brother and sister, which for Hegel

constitute “true kinship.” Irigaray argues that “The war of the sexes would not take place here. But this moment is mythical, of course... It is a consoling fancy (...)” (Irigaray 2010, 101–102). As Irigaray further claims about Antigone, “In this way, she becomes the voice, the accomplice of the people, the slaves, those who only whisper their revolt against their masters secretly” (Irigaray 2010, 103). Antigone thus becomes a voice of the unheard, yet she is not—and never has a chance, to become—a woman, by force of her isolation and risk of premature death. As I will argue later, following Bonnie Honig, this isolation is perhaps only supposed, as another interpretation of Sophocles’ tragedy is possible, one emphasizing the “anti-patriarchal sororal pact” between Ismene and Antigone (Honig 2013).

Irigaray dwells on the impossibility of becoming a woman, recreating, following Hegel, Antigone’s sudden nostalgia for a bond that is close, even erotic, yet—which does not go as far as the sexual act. Irigaray further suggests that “if Antigone gives proof of a bravery, a tenderness, and an anger..., this is certainly because she had digested the masculine. At least partially, at least for a moment” (Irigaray 2010, 105). The moment of tenderness and pain makes such transition of a “private” person, a woman, into a person who can produce a claim publicly—a man.

As Judith Butler suggests in her article “Longing for Recognition”—it is in a moment of vulnerability and weakness that the possibility of a claim begins (Butler 2010b). To some extent, Butler agrees with Hegel and his concept of recognition, as one not only resisting a vision of an all too easy reconciliation in the formation of intersubjectivity, but also one formed in a condition of impossibility, of a need to fight for one’s life. This is the core of contemporary discussions of recognition, where some theorists—like Jürgen Habermas, or to some extent, also Axel Honneth—allow the vulnerable core of struggle to evaporate in the communicative process. Butler argues that the confrontation with “the other” can become a successful sublation, where the destructive becomes the negative in the process of building and recognizing claims. For her, the dialectics of the subject and the Other neither begins in a moment, where the subject is fully disconnected from the Other nor can lead to their complete absorption. Recognition is, in her words,

“neither an act that one performs, nor is it literalized as the event in which we each “see” one another and are “seen.” It takes place through communication, primarily but not exclusively verbal, in which subjects are transformed by virtue of the communicative practice in which they are engaged. (Butler 2010b, 110)

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It is important to emphasize the possibility of verbal and non-verbal expression of a claim—such a distinction allows the claims that would otherwise not be seen as such—the emotional, irrational, artistic, feminine, incomprehensible acts; those which are performed, not articulated with words. The reductive perspective, allowing a sudden hegemony of the act of seeing and thus marginalizing the embodiment necessary to discuss labor as central element of the master-slave dialectics, as well as any cultural and social production, by which the historical process can materially form, is criticized by Butler not solely because her understanding of gender requires embodied performances, not just words, as was shown in her *Bodies that Matter* (Butler 1993). She needs such an embodied and verbalized understanding of the process of recognition also to foreground her notion of violence in concrete, material acts and words that carry meaning, and result in psychic and psychosomatic states of injury (see Butler 1993; 1997b). Thus her notion of the discursive practice of gender formation, violence, or even “excitable speech,” all rely not only on the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics, but also on the Hegelian idea of recognition gained in overcoming the impossible, threatening condition the forming subject finds themselves in. While in her article “Longing for Recognition” she is most preoccupied with resisting and undermining the Lacanian notion of the Other, as well as the Levinassian promise of reconciliation, in her other texts and books, especially in *Bodies that Matter* and *Excitable Speech*, she needs the notions of conflict, struggle and recognition, in order to argue for the subversive, non-heroic, ordinary, quiet forms of subjectivity, resisting violence or hate speech, which take place in artistic and queer responses to violence, in subversive performances of gender and sexuality, or in the daily struggles of millions of queer, non-normative or refugee lives across the world. It is thus how her perspective in fact preserves the Hegelian image of the core of subjectivation through overcoming. But if Butler’s perspective is Hegelian, then is Hegel who we thought he was?

Butler’s emphasis on Antigone’s dismantling of femininity rooted in the gender binary is perhaps an interesting case in which Hegel is somehow tacitly congratulated on his promotion of queer identities as those representing the anti-authoritarian voice in history. In *Antigone’s Claim* Butler suggests that Hegel’s choice to depict Antigone as the representative of femininity is rather peculiar, as Antigone is neither fully recognized as a woman nor a subject; neither Creon, nor her sister recognizes her as such; her desire also betrays her, as she always loves against the rules, and in a somewhat lawbreaking way (Butler 2000). According to Butler, the choice of Antigone as the representative of femininity is

strange, as she can and indeed does articulate her claims in front of Creon in ways opposing the traditionally feminine, which would either be incomprehensible, too emotional, “irrational” or otherwise impossible to express in a public forum. The lack of inhibitions and the fluency of Antigone’s claim is her main weapon but also the main obstacle in understanding her gender performance as one typical of femininity. If this is how Hegel imagines women, we could actually say that he was ahead of his time and speaks of a modern, contemporary woman of today, with all her contradictions, rather than about what was seen as “feminine” in his days, or still ours in some more traditional parts of the globe. For Butler this constitutes an argument to oppose Hegel, and to prove Antigone’s queer gender, which is not untrue; however, perhaps we can carry her argument further, and claim that in his supposedly failed choice of women’s public representative, Hegel nevertheless strengthens the women’s voice by offering an image of the rebellious, disobedient heroine at the core of the social?

Judith Butler’s interpretation of Antigone offers some integration of the otherwise scattered character, lost in contradictions by the earlier analysis of this important figure. However, emphasizing Antigone’s exceptionality even further distances her not just from the rest of more conventionally gendered or less heroic humans, but also and most sharply—from her sister. As I already mentioned, however—their relation might not be what it seems at first glance.

For Hegel, Antigone stands as the key figure of the regime of the social, the *Sittlichkeit*. As Marek Siemek eloquently argued, Hegel is *the* philosopher of the social. If so—perhaps Antigone should be seen as one of the main figures of his philosophy, together with the slave, the tired cultivated bourgeois of the Enlightenment and the tired housewife we find, as I will show later, in the chapter on Unhappy Consciousness? If this is so—Hegel is not only a philosopher of “the rabble,” as Frank Ruda argued, not only a philosopher of the emancipating enslaved, as Susan Buck-Morss claims, but also he expresses the voices of the women and gender misfits, as I try to prove, following Judith Butler to some extent (Ruda 2011; Buck-Morss 2000; Butler 2010a; Majewska 2007; 2009).

In her discussion of Antigone’s gender, Butler follows the observations of Irigaray and those formulated by Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick, and she claims—following Hannah Arendt, that Antigone represents resistance and disagreement, queer identity and desire, but not necessarily femininity. Butler is not particularly interested in Ismene, who—as Irigaray and other authors claim, represents the traditional version of femininity.

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In her important book *Antigone, Interrupted*, Bonnie Honig takes this argument further—she reclaims Ismene’s ability to perform care and affective labor and suggests that there is a sororal, anti-patriarchal bond between the two sisters, because of which they can defeat the patriarchal laws and oppose male domination (Honig 2013). Ismene’s caring attitude throughout the tragedy enables Antigone, prompts responses to her own care and kindness, provides necessary reminders of the presence and needs of others, and resists her and her claim’s complete alienation from the specific, familial and social context, thus preserving each of these from becoming complete fetishes.

In her interpretation, Honig rehabilitates the non-heroic, common (as in: ordinary), caring agency performed by Ismene, as well as the humane, loving aspects of Antigone, emphasizing that one is impossible without the other, that only in an alliance can both heroines perform their acts of resistance against the patriarchal state power. This interpretation is a powerful lesson not only of a careful reading of the ancient text of the tragedy, but also of feminist solidarity, in which differences are seen less as obstacles and more as advantages. Honig re-evaluates political agency as that requiring a pact between the one who is tender and caring, and the other brave sister, to actually produce a claim, which—and here it is interesting—requires an alliance, not an individual; solidarity, not heroism. We can take Honig’s observations further, and notice that the sororal pact between Antigone and Ismene is actually a necessity, that the bond connecting their lives provides meaning, sympathy, courage and safety, for the both of them. Their solidarity should thus be seen as an overcoming of their weakness, and weakness itself—the core of their togetherness. It is why in the title of this article I argue for a “weak dialectics.” In Hegel, we merely see Antigone’s weakness—as a representative of the historically older order, she will be sublated and state order will be installed on the ruin of her claim. The ruin however will not disappear, it will be a foundation of the new construction, fulfilling its aims, it will signal *asocial sociability*, as Kant named it, the conflicted interests of the social core in the scaffolding of the state. Antigone’s exceptionality in Hegel’s argument can thus be seen as her weakness, to be sublated by the community imposed in the rigid form of state law, in which totality clearly opposes singularity at the moment of the intensification of contradictions allowing/enforcing sublation.

The title of my article announces the housewife. Where, if at all, can she be found in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*? Unsurprisingly, she is mentioned directly only in the sharp, antiracist chapter about phrenology, where the possibility of deducing someone’s intellectual abilities solely

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from the shape of their head is compared to the deduction made by proverbial housewives, who argue that since it is the day of washing, there should be rain (Hegel 1979, 193). The short chapter on the Unhappy Consciousness allows this stage of the Spirit to be discussed as one immersed in the mundane existence regulated by the repetitive performances of caring and reproductive labor. The Unhappy Consciousness is a moment when: “Consequently, the duplication which formerly was divided between two individuals, the lord and the bondsman, is now lodged in one” (Hegel 1979, 126). In contrast to the usual understanding of this passage, which suggests a detachment from earthly bonds, I would argue the contrary—that, both logically and based on Hegel’s own narrative, it can as well be expected that the prevailing part will be materialistic, nonsensical on its own, in its immediacy, and deprived of any reflexive mediation. This chapter tends to be understood as one depicting the perturbed unity of the spirit that discovers and experiences its own existence as split. But what would that actually mean? Hegel’s text is quite ambiguous in this chapter. Would that solely express the fight of two opposing perceptions of oneself—i.e. the role of master and the role of the slave? Or would it rather be a moment where the “I” is torn by “desire and work,” as Hegel has it? If so, would that thus denote the automatic duties fulfilled to maintain one’s own existence and perhaps also the existence of the surrounding others? Such an interpretation results from the general idea that Hegel was not an idealist, which is sufficiently supported by authors as diverse as Slavoj Žižek, Catherine Malabou and Susan Buck-Morss, to name just a few (Žižek 2020; Malabou 2015; Buck-Morss 2000), as well as from the close reading of this chapter, revealing the possibility of viewing it as a story of an artificial, immediate abstraction from the material everyday to spiritual eternity, which contains both moments although the material is preserved only in the form of a too quickly rejected, merely negated, not yet sublated, lived experience.

We should perhaps reconstruct the conditions in which the Unhappy Consciousness makes its appearance in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It begins after freedom is experienced by the spirit in the forms of the ultimate negative—Stoicism and Skepticism—it accomplishes the adventures of the spirit before it encounters the external, materialized world and after it won recognition in the battle of master and slave. Already at the start of the chapter, Hegel emphasizes that:

Freedom in thought has only pure thought as its truth, a truth lacking the fullness of life. Hence freedom in thought, too, is only the Notion of freedom, not the living reality of freedom itself. (Hegel 1979, 122).

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At first, “the Notion as an abstraction cuts itself off from the multiplicity of things” (Hegel 1979, 122). And:

This thinking consciousness as determined in the form of abstract freedom is thus only the incomplete negation of otherness. Withdrawn from existence only into itself, it has not there achieved its consummation as absolute negation of that existence. (Hegel 1979, 122)

The next stage, where such negation will be accomplished, is Skepticism, and then the Unhappy Consciousness can develop, in confrontation with the futility, mundanity and everyday. In Skepticism, the self encounters the nullity of general moral laws and ethics, and “the Unhappy Consciousness is the consciousness of self as a dual natured, merely contradictory being” (Hegel 1979, 126). Now, a big question consists in how to understand the Notion of Spirit, which ultimately constitutes the sublation of the Unhappy Consciousness. As Hegel grants that “the Notion of Spirit that has become a living Spirit, and has achieved an actual existence” (Hegel 1979, 126), it can be understood as the presence of God, as in Christianity, or the more pantheistic presence of God, or—and this is the most classical interpretation, rooted in Hegel’s text—the church, the community of believers. Traditionally, the *ecclesia*, the religious community would be seen as the “actual existence” of the Spirit. My effort is to show that the community generated by the “life functions,” by reproductive and affective needs and labour, is the one depicted by Hegel in this chapter too. It is seen as a merely negated substrate, with which consciousness struggles, experiencing and rejecting their meaningless life, while it also despises the repetitive life functions and the efforts to sustain life, not yet understanding them as necessary, but merely experiencing them as randomly contingent. In this description however, these contingent experiences become the key inspiration for the hopeful immersion in religion; it is opposed, resisted and negated, and thus deprived of any reflexive mediation, becoming the rejected part of Spirit’s experience on this stage. While Todd McGowan argues that the material, contingent elements of experience are solely accidental, and thus somewhat unnecessary elements of experience, which properly functions as organized by notions, and thus free of all contingency, I would like to argue that those very material, random elements of experience constitute its necessary component (see McGowan 2021), in opposition to which the Spirit finds solace in religion, and comforts itself in the *ecclesia*. The material aspect of the everyday—negated, opposed, and thus understood only as an obstacle—functions as a necessary

element of the dialectics, perhaps its weakest elements, as it is most often reduced to an unnecessary substrate, and not the substance on the basis of which any historical moment can be distinguished from another. I would therefore like to argue that the figure of an exhausted, tired housewife, most symptomatic for the mundane, repetitive life maintenance in the human existence, presents itself as another weak, yet necessary, element of Hegel's dialectics, in parallel to Antigone and the slave. Reconciliation is therefore not granted by the spiritually inclined church community, but by the readiness to encounter the external, material world, then culture, by understanding the interconnectedness of all materialized, embodied life on Earth, and by appreciating care/affective labour as modes of participating in such community. I will return to this dimension of Hegel's analyzed chapter later.

If for the Unhappy Consciousness, the Changeable and the Unchangeable rest separated, it might very well consist of a deity or simply existence, as in everyday life, and that would be an interpretation closer to how the other parts of the *Phenomenology...* are read by the authors I mentioned earlier, such as Malabou or Buck-Morss. Hegel's depiction of the fight at the core of the formative process of the Unhappy Consciousness legitimizes such a reading, as he wrote:

Consciousness of life, of its existence and activity, is only an agonizing over this existence and activity, for therein it is conscious that its essence is only its opposite, is conscious only of its own nothingness. (Hegel 1979, 127)

Then existence becomes more central, first—in its formless version, then with attributes, as “its efforts from now on are directed rather to setting aside its relation with the pure/armless Unchangeable, and to coming into relation only with the Unchangeable in its embodied or incarnate form” (Hegel 1979, 129). I think it is here that the hiatus between the separation from the material everyday and the hopeful yet futile lapse in the eternal occurs the strongest. The Spirit, still incapable of understanding the social dimension of its experience, tries to erase the maintenance that reproductive labour experiences by declaring itself spiritual. The tired housewife seems like an invisible figure that is necessary for the dialectical movement, but which is missing from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; an absent way to bridge between the negation and the world out there. And further “The Unhappy Consciousness is this contact; it is the unity of pure thinking and individuality” (Hegel 1979, 130). Then—the realization of the fact that on this stage, life is only encountered as its grave appears. Here—again—we can take the idealist

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route, or overcome idealism, and think of all the agency necessary to avoid death, all the fulfillment of basic needs as precisely the act of pushing the grave away, avoiding death by means of sustaining life in its basic functions by means of reproductive labour. This is a logical consequence of the earlier passages in *Phenomenology...*, where the actuality of enslavement is often contradicted with the abstracted idealization of mastery. *Per analogiam*, if plantation is the primary scene of the struggle for recognition; the household will be the space where a more ordinary and far less heroic fight takes place—one faced by the Unhappy Consciousness struggling to maintain life after big battles. Instead, what Hegel offers in the chapter is a pure negation of materiality, with materiality not represented, and spirituality artificially expanded.

Another important idea, that of heterogeneity, is introduced in the discussed chapter of *Phenomenology...* Hegel writes: “In Skepticism, now, (...) the negativity of free self-consciousness comes to know itself in the many and *varied forms of life* as a real negativity” (Hegel 1979, 123; emphasis added). The heterogeneity of forms of life sharply contradicts the supposed unity of merely spiritual lived experience, distinguishes it from the homogenous world of mere thought. In her analysis of the French reception of Hegel, Butler argues, that:

As long as emancipation is modeled on autonomy and self-realization, the emancipated bondsman will be restricted by the constraints of self-identity and will know neither pleasure nor creativity—essential features of the will-to-power. (Butler 1987, 210)

However, if we could imagine another, non-Nietzschean, collective and post-individualist version of emancipation, the Unhappy Consciousness will be seen as an expression of the confrontation of the still artificially absolute Spirit not with God, but with materialized life in its basic form of bare, physical functions and the mundane activities of sustaining life and caring. The stoic, skeptic and finally unhappy attitudes of this stage of the Spirit’s journey should thus be understood not merely as the approaches towards deity, but as moments always already negatively addressing the bare life, the material aspects of existence and the dull, repetitive activities necessary for its preservation. Such a reading allows a feminist-materialist moment to be located at the core of the Unhappy Consciousness, a moment which should perhaps have been captured by the figure of a nanny, a maid or another woman performing invisible reproductive and care labour to maintain the life functions of those who surround her, as well as herself. Such

reading of this chapter allows reproductive labour to be embraced as a necessary—yet expressed only negatively—part of Hegel’s project, as well as acknowledging, following Susan Buck-Morss’s research on the influence of actual historical examples of slave-master relations on dialectics, the role of female servants and maids in the making of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* as a philosophical project. With the slave as the general figure of material labour as submission, and Antigone as the kinship claim opposed and controlled by the state law, the (invisible and absent) maid/care giver should represent the material negated substrate of the private life of the (bourgeois) subject—the family.

Hegel continues:

Work and enjoyment thus *lose all universal content and significance*, for if they had any, they would have an absolute being of their own. Both withdraw *into their mere particularity* (...). *Consciousness is aware of itself as this actual individual in the animal functions.* (Hegel 1979, 135, emphasis added)

This is bare life in its physiological functions. The “animal functions” should be interpreted as those requiring care and reproductive labour, otherwise we imagine a Robinsonade, as Karl Marx would probably call it, and we get out of Hegel’s deeply social, historical and materialized universe, in which the adventures of the Spirit unfold as dialectics. For Butler—they signalize the formation of the abject, as she claims: “Here, consciousness in its full abjection has become like shit, lost in a self-referential anality, a circle of its own making” (Butler 1997, 50). As I already suggested, I find her reading of Hegel to some extent reductive, thus I argue that beyond what she emphasizes there is also the repetitiveness and mundane character of basic life functions, which are obviously repulsive for the Spirit at this stage, yet—not quite abjectal or anal, as they can also take the form of caring agency, for oneself or another. Thus, in order to remain within the Hegelian ontology, we need to imagine these “animal functions,” as well as the “varied forms of life,” as impressions of a materialized, empirical character, obviously subjected to the tormented reflection of the self, right after the difficult “struggle for recognition,” thus in the moment when any materiality is experienced as the just rejected chains. This badly abstract negativity entered by the Spirit in moment of Stoicism, thus unfolds as a deepening hiatus between the reproductive functions perceived mainly as “animal functions” and the prospects of abandoning all matter in radical spiritualism. While the second part of this twofold operation is given full depiction,

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that first, materialized, embodied experience of repetitive maintenance, is not so vocal, yet it leaves its traces, and perhaps a closer look at them makes the dialectics more complete, while at the same time bringing about an invisible figure tacitly representing them as parts of the universal human experience.

The moments of wretchedness and poverty experienced by the Unhappy Consciousness have long been understood as those resulting from the recognition of nothingness and futility, or—as Butler depicts it in *Psychic Life of Power*—the “permutations of self-enslavement” (Butler 1997a, 32). Following Nietzsche and Foucault, Butler reinstalls the denial of the body in the dialectics, arguing that Hegel demonstrated how liberation from external oppression does not lead to the disappearance of internal oppression (Butler 1997a, 32–33). For Butler the appearance of the Unhappy Consciousness

(...) involves splitting the psyche into two parts, a lordship and a bondage internal to a single consciousness, whereby the body is again dissimulated as an alterity, but where this alterity is now interior to the psyche itself. (Butler 1997a, 42)

But why would Hegel mention the animal functions, if he rejected the body completely? Isn't the claim of alterity of the body applicable to the unhappy moment of consciousness rather than to Hegel himself?

In the book *Trzy opery, czyli podmiotowość komiczna* (Three operas, or the comic subjectivity) Aleksander Ochocki argues in favor of a materialist reading of Hegel's dialectics, in which, he suggests that the least fortunate—often comical—characters make historical changes. Parallel to the more classical reading of Hegel, Ochocki opened the way for a Brechtian, disillusioned understanding of the historical process, in which it is Rameau's Nephew and other unheroic beings that actually express the central themes of history. In his reevaluation of comedy as more important for Hegel than tragedy, Ochocki goes as far as to remind us that it is actually in comedy that the people, or the rabble, actually present itself, as they are insufficiently sophisticated to enter tragedy (Ochocki 2003, 65). In Hegel's aesthetics, comedy actually closes the discussion on art's development, making most readers understand it as a happy ending of the adventures of Spirit in culture, however Ochocki offers a different reading: in his perspective comedy is important, because history is not heroic, it consists of the daily struggles of those excluded from historical accounts: the rabble. These remarks shed new light on the Unhappy Consciousness too—if history does not belong to the winners, then perhaps the sense of nothingness resulting from the eve-

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ryday confrontations with material reproduction and decay, the encounter of life “as its grave,” should also be read in a materialist fashion, not merely as an effort to reduce the embodied experience to some “mere alterity,” but rather as an expression of the alienation of the spirit in its negation of said experience.

Similarly to the operation performed by Bonnie Honig on Butler’s reading of Antigone, I tried to re-read Hegel’s chapter on the Unhappy Consciousness somewhat against Butler, as one which allows us to see how the body becomes recognized as mundane, animal, non-human, and individual, as opposed to universal, thus: particular and enmeshed in various forms of life. Such an object obviously makes the Spirit, the subject of the dialectics, “unhappy.” But is it thus foreclosed or opposed, rejected or embraced? As the Unhappy Consciousness leads to reconciliation in “being in the world,” it seems clear that, regardless of all the disgust and unhappiness the body can cause, it is still that which not only risks death, but also allows life. I believe that the perspective offered by Butler on the Unhappy Consciousness reconstructs one part of the process of embodiment in the dialectics, while leaving aside the other part—that of maintenance, sustainability, reproduction and care, which also should be considered. This preservation of the bare life is involved in the double-bind: it is the only part of labour clearly hidden from the male gaze and the individualist theoretical readings, therefore, throughout *Phenomenology of Spirit* in its entirety. It should perhaps be stressed that the negation of reproductive labour, care and the practice of its maintenance, is a cultural phenomenon largely discussed in feminist theory. It is thus interesting that Hegel’s description of the exclusion of these necessary components of the everyday life of individuals and society perhaps critically addresses the problem? Perhaps *Phenomenology...* would have been a better book, if the figure of a maid had been there in the first place. As I was trying to show however, there is sufficient material in the discussed chapter to argue that Hegel theorized the foreclosure of materialized, embodied experience, rather than asserting that he himself banished that experience from dialectics. This argument, proceeding in line with Buck-Morss’s research on the slave and the actual historical references in Hegel’s life and the events surrounding him, clearly demarcates him as a historical materialist rather than an idealist, as has been claimed on numerous occasions. My reading of the Unhappy Consciousness leads to the conclusion that Hegel did not idealize his time, either by artificially making care and reproductive labour visible or by pushing his discussion of the self-formation away from materialized experience. On the contrary—he expressed the embodied experience

while at the same time demonstrating the ideological constraints of his time, which led to the badly abstract rejection, artificial negation of the material reproduction of life in the badly abstract spiritualism.

The “other,” material side of the process of the formation of the Unhappy Consciousness, perhaps one that expresses that part of socialization clearly associated with femininity and care, remains oblivious, however it can nevertheless be reconstructed from between the scattered expressions of the sensual, empirical and embodied present in Hegel’s chapter. We would thus have the disgust and foreclosure of the body, yet combined with a growing understanding that yes, the repetitive, mundane and reproductive labour of sustaining the body and the species belong to dialectics. Butler’s impossibility of seeing in the chapter on Unhappy Consciousness not only the repeated distancing from the body, disgust and rejection of it, but also—parallelly—learning that maintenance work is that which, albeit repetitive, is also necessary, and leads to a surrender of one’s will, later to be discovered in the flat unity of reason, as “it has successfully struggled to divest itself of its being-for-self and has turned it into (mere) being” of certainty (Hegel 1979, 139). Butler’s reconstruction of the rejection of the body and my effort to reconstruct the process of (positive) embodiment in Hegel’s narrative, presented as negated by the Spirit, together make of the Unhappy Consciousness a twofold, dialectical operation. As Hegel writes,

Through these moments of surrender, first of its right to decide for itself, then of its property and enjoyment, and finally through the positive moment of practising what it does not understand, it truly and completely deprives itself of the consciousness of inner and outer freedom, of the actuality in which consciousness exists for *itself*. (Hegel 1979, 135)

Doesn’t that sound rather like a mother’s or other care-giver’s statement concerning the nature of their caring acts? And thus—is not a vision of Unhappy Consciousness as one of childbearing and cleaning more appropriate than that of the “Young Werther”? Or—and this could be a more plausible version of my argument in this article—could it be that the “tearing” of the consciousness in the discussed chapter consists also in the Subject’s confrontation with materiality and sustainability, and thus—the need to react to the “life functions”? In such a reading, Hegel’s famous chapter is one about the rejection of the contingency, precarity and instability of existence in both dimensions: the embodied and the psychic. Until now I have contradicted the “traditional,” spiritual focus that other authors highlighted in reading this part of *Pheno-*

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*menology of the Spirit*. I also undermined Judith Butler's one-sided perspective asserting that the hatred of the body immediately means its rejection. What if it does not? What if the hatred, the inability to embrace the material, embodied and thus contingent dimension of life, the Subject finds its precarious reconciliation in acknowledging the materialized, embodied community of bodies, human and not, in the world?

Such an atypical reading of the Unhappy Consciousness chapter would not have been possible without the research made by Susan Buck-Morss on Hegel's work and reading while he was writing the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. As we might remember, Hegel sent the draft of his manuscript two weeks after the deadline, because Jena was under Napoleon's siege. After Susan Buck-Morss's article "Hegel and Haiti," we must acknowledge that the slaves of San Domingue inspired Europe's most powerful philosophical metaphor of emancipation in modern history. As Buck-Morss reconstructs the magazines Hegel read and letters he wrote prior to the publication of his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, it is clear that the frequent readings of the progressive, abolitionist magazine *Minerva* shaped his understanding of the struggle for recognition. It is thus perhaps necessary to revisit the other parts of his narrative, central for the global struggles, and imagine other possible understandings of the dialectics of the self than idealist ones, shaped by the 19<sup>th</sup> century dualisms, patriarchal and racist prejudices, as well as a flat and one-dimensional understanding of progress. The heroic vision of political subjectivity also needs to be revisited, as it perhaps limits our imagination in the important issue of what it means to change history.

This short article drafts the prospect of finding a housewife at the core of Hegel's dialectics. The mundane, repetitive and reproductive labour of care, performed everyday mostly by women in the privacy of households, in hospitals and other institutions, already known to Hegel, did not receive a clear expression in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. However, their presence can be traced in his narrative, as I tried to show. By this operation, I believe I fulfilled the part of my task to introduce a housewife to the dialectics and present her as another element of the "dialectics of the weak," suggested in the article's beginning. This hopeful premise is based on several feminist interpretations of Hegel's philosophy, those in which the dialectics is not seen solely as a patriarchal weapon, those where materialism is the method, as well as those where the connections between theory and historical events are drawn. I also referenced Butler's and Ochocki's readings of Hegel, to reiterate the

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importance of recognition, its perplexity, and of comedy and its centrality. The process of the reinterpretation of the Unhappy Consciousness in a materialist-feminist way is a necessary one, as it complements the other materialist-historical excursions in Hegel's dialectics, such as those offered by Susan Buck-Morss in the context of slavery and emancipation, by Frank Ruda and the re-evaluation of the rabble, as well as that presented by Aleksander Ochocki in the context of comedy and the misfortunate, funny anti-heroes of Hegelian philosophy. Introducing a housewife in the Unhappy Consciousness is an effort to bring dialectics home, to its incessant connection with the embodied life, which on this stage is a bare life, in need of care and maintenance to survive. It is also necessary for the task of reconstructing the weak figures of the dialectics understood as a philosophical project—my reading allows the vulnerable, weak, even invisible subjects to be seen as another part of the dialectics, its central parts perhaps, as they represent the materialized, embodied elements of the spirit's journey, thus making it historical in the first place.

Examining various efforts to construct a materialist reading of Hegel, it is easy to see how the heroic, monumental and successful vision of history is tacitly replaced by that enacted by the unheroic, mundane, exhausted and disenchanting. It is thus significant how these very different revisions of Hegel's supposed idealism, actually introduce a sense of historicity, weakness and what Walter Benjamin would probably call "history written by losers." The dialectics thus presents itself as one pushed forward by the weak, and consists in everyday unheroic struggles rather than the victorious marches of the winners. The reconstruction of the Unhappy Consciousness as a confrontation of the Spirit with care and reproductive labour announces an end to the exclusion of invisible labour from dialectics, but also fills an important gap in the materialist reinterpretations of Hegel, providing another argument for the critical, anti-monumental and progressive reading of his philosophy. However brutally the spirit claims to escape its embodied, material experience, it is there, in the dialectical process, even in its private, supposedly intimate moments of daily existence and its reproductive and caring maintenance. This, alongside the recognition of the slave and Antigone's claim, is the third element of the weak dialectics, the re-introduction of the supposedly absent housewife.

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**Tytuł:** Niewolnik, Antygona i gospodyni domowa. Hegłowska dialektyka słabości

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje dyskusję szeregu feministycznych interpretacji Hegła, od tej zaproponowanej przez Carlę Lonzi, po queerową analitykę Judith Butler, tak by zreinterpretować słynną figurę „świadomości nieszczęśliwej”. Z feministycznej perspektywy poświęcone jej fragmenty *Fenomenologii ducha* powinny być czytane przede wszystkim jako re-ewaluacja pracy opiekuńczej i reprodukcyjnej, której Podmiot doświadcza na tym etapie swojego rozwoju przede wszystkim jako powtarzalnej i nużącej. Dialektyka słabości może być ustanowiona w oparciu o głębokie przewartościowanie rozumienia tego, co materialne, w tym również aktywności podtrzymujących życie tradycyjnie już lekceważonych w analizach heglowskiego dziedzictwa. W niniejszym artykule te marginalizowane dotąd elementy przeżywanego doświadczenia Podmiotu zostają uwzględnione, co z kolei prowadzi do wprowadzenia gospodyni domowej w proces dialektyczny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dialektyka, słabość, praca reprodukcyjna, Antygona