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Some remarks on language and its 'objective' background

"City" as a metaphor of language

In point 18. of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein compares language to a city. From the materialistic point of view, city is a phenomenon which can be interpreted through its history. It physically (materially) changes. As such, its history is marked through these changes. Language, compared to the city, is also a historical phenomenon. It was not complete without, for example, "the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus . . . incorporated in it" (Wittgenstein 1958, p. 18).[1]

It cannot be said, however, to be complete once the mentioned spheres, ways of speaking, specialized languages — at some points — were developed and incorporated into it. Formal languages, interpreted (among others) by Carnap, were well organized "logical" constructions, comparable to the (Mendeleev's) periodic table, and — as such — (more or less, albeit consciously) "complete." Rather than that, natural languages, interpreted and investigated by the "late" Wittgenstein, are comparable — as he puts it –to "mazes." Although it can be said that there are some suburbs (like the abovementioned symbolism of chemistry or notation of the infinitesimal calculus) with "straight regular streets and uniform houses," (Wittgenstein 1958, p. 18) visited only by some members of the society, to which (on the one hand) the specified language can be ascribed, there is also a (more) central sphere of it, characteristic of the all members of the specified society in the (more or less precisely) specific (and possibly to be specified) period of its existence. Incompleteness of this or that natural language, or rather: way of speaking, to which the specified society (on the other hand) is ascribed, may be understood through the changes (among others) of the

[1] In the case of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1958) I refer not to pages, but to points of the mentioned book.

material ('objective') background of the life and (widely taken) history of the specified society. The history of the society and the changes of its language, the ways its members communicate with each other, are — in other words — inseparably bound.

The metaphor of "maze"

Wittgenstein's metaphor of the city has brought the interpretation to the metaphor of the "maze." This metaphor, used here to provide a certain sketchy understanding of natural languages, might be understood through the points preceding point 18., especially points 11 and 12. In point 11 the philosopher compares language to a tool-box containing several tools, such as screw-drivers, a saw, a hammer, screws, nails, glue *etc*. (Wittgenstein 1958, p. 11) The cabin of a locomotive looks similar to the tool-box. It is full of "handles all looking more or less alike" (Wittgenstein 1958, p. 12).

Each and every handle seems to have a different function. Each and every handle needs to be used, in order to achieve the expected and awaited effect, in a different way. It is exactly like in the case of toolbox. A screw-driver will be useful for screws, but not for nails or glue. Each and every handle has a different application and the awaited effect will be achieved only if a useful — with regard to the society — application is made of it. It can be also said that each and every society has its own, relative to the more or less specified period of its history, tool-box or appearance, as well as effects of the handles from the locomotive cabin. Which is why the metaphor of a natural language considered and interpreted as a maze is adequate. It is indeed a maze, albeit well connected and — for this reason — working.

Wittgenstein opens his *Philosophical Investigations* — considered by some thinkers as one of the most important books for the contemporary philosophy — with very straight and simplified languages, for instance containing only orders and replies to them. The initial points of this book may therefore be seen — with regard to it — in the optics of his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Carnap's formalized languages, *etc*. This is, however, an illusion, very quickly dispelled in the 23rd point of his work. There the so-called "late" Wittgenstein, the author of the *Philosophical Investigations*, engages in polemics with his earlier work, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. The mentioned point of his late work makes it possible to see not only polemics but also auto-irony — an irony directed toward his early work and the thoughts of other logicians about the language. Wittgenstein enumerates several existing kinds of sentences and concludes that it is not possible to mention about each and every one. Which is why — I do believe — the here interpreted

metaphors of the city, of the maze, of the tool-box, and of the locomotive cabin are so vivid and important for the understanding of the mechanics of natural language and/or speaking and communication between the subjects co-creating a specified society (Wittgenstein 1958, p. 23).

'Objective' background

I assume that the whole form of life ascribed to the specified society takes its place in some WORLD. World, among others, can be understood as a material background. Let us rethink the question of the historical changes of the 'objective' background upon which the social practice is taking its place. In other words, let us rethink the material roots of the form of life. The change of the material (objective) background can be seen in Marx's words, from the *The Communist Manifesto*: "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind." (Marx)

There is no reason, from my point of view, to sub late or abandon this assumption. It is not only because it is one of the basic assumptions of historical materialism, which I — more or less — assume in my thinking. Each and every category, as well as each and every theory, framework, conception, etc., can be critically revised and reconsidered. Slavoj Žižek and Marshall Berman show, however, that it is a very current and adequate category and way of thinking. The objective background, on which the social practice is performed, is constantly changing, even today. All that is solid melts into air.

Capital is the key to the understanding of the changes within the objective background on which the social practice is performed. Those who possess the productive forces are willing to maximize their profits and to minimize — or, at least, not to increase — their expenses. Their aim is to accumulate the capital. What is the capital? Žižek says it is a Deleuzian rhizome. It has no center, no borders, no structure. On the other hand, it surrounds and possesses everything. Capital can be compared to a spectral vampire which parasitizes on everything and — as a result — changes everything It is also the basic condition of its reproduction and effectiveness. in other words, without the capital the reproduction of the capital and of the objective background would not be possible and would not occur (Žižek 2011, pp. 274-275).

Capital, Žižek argues, can negate each and every crisis. Its weakness is its strength. Its development occurs through its falls and its instability. It exists through the negation of its own borders: "THE THING CAN SURVIVE

ONLY AS ITS OWN EXCESS, constantly exceeding it own 'normal' constraints" (Žižek 2011, p. 277).

Each and every crisis, including natural disasters, will be organized through the capital. While the commodity in Marx's *The Capital* has a use-value, money has only value. The classic scheme,

$$\text{Commodity} \longrightarrow \text{Money} \longrightarrow \text{Commodity}$$

where the commodity was sold in order to achieve money, needed to buy another commodity, in the frames of the contemporary capitalism, described by the Slovenian thinker, is not accurate anymore. In the contemporary times, the commodity fetishism is not present. It is rather a reversed scheme,

$$\text{Money} \longrightarrow \text{Commodity} \longrightarrow \text{Money}$$

where the aim is not to fulfill the use-values, but only to expand the capital. It is the money fetishism now. Money is the beginning and the end of everything. It is mediated through the money, in order to make more money. Capital circulates only in order to multiply itself (Žižek 2011, p. 281).

What is crucial in Žižek's remarks, invoked and interpreted above, is the fact that the human lost its subjectivity. The subjectivity has been taken over by the money, the capital. Objective background is not possessed in any way by the human being. It is more so that the objective background possess human beings. Humankind has lost its subjectivity for the benefit of capital. These inaccurate individuals, who do not fit the new times, the new constellation of the capital, and the new 'objective background' mediated and done through it, are to be smashed by the subject. Capital, in other words, is the monstrous vehicle which surrounds everything, and especially, which is important here, the new objective background mediated and done through it. The individuals who do not fit the new circumstances are to be smashed by these circumstances, by the new objective background and — if considered from a historical perspective — by the locomotive of the history. Such circumstances can be seen in the first part (chapter) of the Marshall Berman's book, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*.

In the abovementioned book, its author interprets Goethe's *Faust*, which — he argues — is the key to the understanding of modernity and its birth. It is, in his interpretation, a story of greed, a story of the quest for self-understanding, but also a story of love, development, and changes of and within the world. Finally, it is a story of the fall of the traditional world. The title of the part in which Berman interprets Goethe's *Faust* says it all: it is

"The Tragedy of Development." Development will make it so that the — so far — solid reality, objective background, and the social practice performed on its ground will melt into air. Nothing will be the same again.

Faust has a doctor's degree, is a humanist in the full sense of the word, a lawyer, a philosopher, a theologian, and a scientist. He is a widely recognized professor with public esteem, surrounded by the artifacts of knowledge, books and manuscripts. He feels, however, that there is something what is missing for him. Being a humanist means for him that nothing human is and will be strange and foreign. Surrounded by the knowledge, he lives in a kind of personal, Popperian-like, open society. Society, however, by its very definition, cannot be 'personal' and contain only a single person. It is an oxymoron; what I wanted to point out is the fact that he is basically not understood. His mind is open, ahead of the time, of the society in which he lives and which he co-creates. It is a Popperian-like closed society, a society of humans with closed minds. It is why he can feel he is not happy. Being 'ahead of his times', as the one and — most likely — the only, makes him alone. One person cannot create a society. It is not the time and place, if there ever was or will be at some point, in the future, for such outsiders.

Nietzsche writes, in his *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*: „Um den Helden herum wird Alles zur Tragödie . . . ".[2] Faust is a visualization of the Nietzschean hero. Everything that surrounds him will turn into his tragedy. Not being understood by other people, he will accept the pact offered him by the devil Mephistopheles. He will not only become immortal, but also — what seems to be more important for him — he will achieve self-development. It will allow him to gain the experience of each and every mode of human experience, including its positive and negative sides. It is a tragedy because it will also mean the radical change of his — and others' — world. The tragedy is founded on the fact that this achievement should and will be done through the change of the world. It is presented as the radical change of the "whole physical and social and moral world he lives in," (Berman 1988, p. 40) which will affect each and every human being, including Gretchen, the love of his life. In other words — in the frames of the socio-regulative conception of culture — what has to be changed is the objective background (physical world) on which the social practice (the social and the moral world) taken as a whole will be changed as well. The second change, the change of the social practice, understood here as the social and the moral world, will occur in consequence of the first change, the change of the physical world.These changes are realized

[2] Fragment 150 of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*, taken from the Nietzsche Source (http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/JGB)(02-02-2014).

by — using Marx's words — "the powers of the underground" (Berman 1988, p. 40), located, until the pact between Faust and the devil, under the surface. This pact will release these powers and change everything. This will not be, however, done for free. With the change of the whole world, there is a cost to be paid. The bill from the devil cannot be unpaid. Not in the case when all that was — so far — solid melts into air. The cost of the changes will be paid by those whom these changes will have impacted. It will be paid by Gretchen (her fall), as such — since she was love of his life — by Faust, and by the whole humankind (see Berman 1988, pp. 40-41).

Part two of Goethe's *Faust* was written between 1825 and 1831 (Berman 1988, p. 60). Berman shows in its interpretation the connections between Faust's will of self-development and the development of the world: "he connects his personal drives with the economic, political and social forces that drive the world: he learns to build and to destroy" (Berman 1988, p. 61).

The crucial point is that his personal drives in connection with these forces are destructive. The new constructions are preceded by the destruction of the old. The old should be destroyed in order to make room for the new. The intact, natural, and beautiful landscape of the wasteland is changed into a well industrialized area with gardens, harbors, canals, places ready for the new cities and towns. Nothing is the same, all that was virginal and natural has been lost. The objective background has been changed and what has come right after were the changes within the economy and the society (Berman 1988, p. 62).

There is one place which remains untouched among the surrounding it changes. It is a little cottage on a dune, with a small chapel and a small garden. This place belongs to Philemon and Baucis, an old and lovely couple, who offer help for the wanderers and sailors from the shipwrecks. The fact that it is a part of the old world becomes Faust's obsession. He offers the old couple money and another place to live, but they do not accept it. They know or feel that they are too old to move. All they want is to spend the rest of their days in the small cottage where they lived their whole lives, providing help to those who need it (Berman 1988, pp. 66-67).

Faust's obsession leads him — as Berman interprets it — to "his first self-consciously evil act." Since he wants their home and the cost does not matter, he asks Mephistopheles for help. Faust does not want to know how it will be done. All that he wants is to have their place next morning. Dark thugs, under the command of Mephistopheles, achieve the deed — no one can withstand the devil and his soldiers — and inform Faust about this fact in the middle of the night. The old couple, as he finds out in the morning, has been killed, and their cottage has been burned. Faust is outraged and sends Mephistopheles back. The success has been achieved through violence and

he finds out about it. Could it be different, was there any other way, if they did not accept his previous propositions? This is why — I believe — Berman's thesis that it was "his first self-consciously evil act" is not understood and cannot be accepted, at least by the author of these investigations. Berman is right, however, when he argues that Faust not only wanted to make others believe that the new world can be built without victims. He also wanted himself to believe it was true (Berman 1988, pp. 67-68).

Around the hero — Nietzsche says — everything becomes a tragedy.[3] The case of Philemon and Baucis — in Berman's words — is the "first embodiment of the category of people . . . who are in the way of the history, of progress, of development; people who are classified, and disposed of, as obsolete" (Berman 1988, p. 67).

The important fact for the purpose of these investigations is that they were in the way of the change. It was not, however, a tragedy for Faust only. It was a tragedy especially for this old and lovely couple. They were standing in the way of history, changes, progress, development, and — in the result of it — they were smashed by the realization of these. Philemon and Baucis are shown as being too old to change themselves in order to fit the new times. This is why the occurring changes will change them without asking for permission. The most important point in the story of Philemon and Baucis is that the so called "progress" and "development" made them — in the most evil way, since they have lost their lives — lose their subjectivity. The realization of these two categories is like Žižek's capital, another Deleuzian rhizome — after the capital — devoid of the center, borders, and structure. On the other side, just like capital, it surrounds and possesses everything that it will reach on its way.

It cannot be said that an equality sign may be placed between the categories of "progress" and "development" on the one hand, and capital on the other. The common point — whether it is progress or development which takes its place on some the objective background, like it happened in case of Philemon and Baucis, or in the case of changes occurring in the sphere of morals, society, *etc.* — is that each and every human being loses their subjectivity. The same loss occurs under the influence of the capital. The connection between capital, development, and progress may — but does not have to — be present. All that is solid melts into the air, which takes place — however — under the influence of capital, the so-called progress or the so-called development.

[3] See the previous footnote.

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Abstract

In this article, the author attempts to combine two theoretical perspectives: Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and Marxist analysis and critique of modernity (Karl Marx, Slavoj Žižek, Marshall Berman). In the first two chapters, the author analyzes two metaphors, of the "city" and of the "maze," present in Wittgenstein's "Philosophical investigations." The remaining paragraphs relate to the connections between the categories of "language," "capital," "development" and "progress."

Keywords: language, capital, development, city, maze.