



# verifiche

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- A. Nuzzo *Hegel's Idea of Philosophy and the World at the End*
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# A PHILOSOPHY OF CRISIS: IMMANENCE AND NORMATIVITY IN HEGEL'S LOGIC

by Giovanna Luciano\*

In the opening of her volume *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely: Melville, Molière, Beckett*, Angelica Nuzzo writes: «This is an unconventional book on Hegel's logic»<sup>1</sup>. And indeed it appears «unconventional» in several respects: within we find the synchronic reading of the Hegelian logic; the use of Aristotle's *Poetics* to facilitate the translation of the logical categories into a performative – almost theatrical – language of the logical categories; and, above all the highly original elaboration of a comparison between logic and literature which evidences the validity and vitality of Hegel's logic in contexts other than the abstract one in which it is often thought.

Although Nuzzo's book takes up the very traditional Hegelian task of comprehending and making sense of our present and of what happens in the world, it is nevertheless far from conventional in its execution of this task. In the account that Nuzzo wants to provide, the philosophical task to *tell the story of our present* must be thought from an immanent perspective. This requirement seems indeed exacerbate an alleged Hegelian difficulty: how can philosophy act as comprehension of the present while being immersed in the present, while the categories that shape the epoch belong to philosophy too and while philosophy has no resources other than those of the present to think the present? How can philosophy be fully immanent to and at the same time assume a critical position towards the present, without representing either mere *post-festum* justification, or a prescription from an absolutely different point of

\* Freie Universität Berlin/Boston University

<sup>1</sup> A. Nuzzo, *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely: Melville, Molière, Beckett*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2018, p. XIII.

view, i.e. one detached from the concrete situation of the world? In other words, what kind of immanence and what kind of normativity are at stake in Hegel's account of philosophy and how are immanence and normativity linked to one another?

Nuzzo approaches this problematic, as one would not expect. That is to say, rather than focusing on those aspects of Hegel's corpus most commonly dealt with in this case – *Phenomenology of Spirit* or on the *Realphilosophie* – she turns to that part of Hegel's system that seems further from these issues, that is the Logic.

This path is open to Nuzzo because of her radical reading of Hegel's logic in terms of a logic of change («logic of transformative processes»), that is, as a dialectic of the historically concrete structures of crisis that constitute the flesh and blood of transformative processes.

Crisis is therefore a concept which has a pivotal role in Nuzzo's interpretation. It names something like the Gramscian *interregnum* between «what is not yet here» and «what is already passing away», a morbid and pathological in-between state that arises when the old forms of life are dying and the new ones cannot be born. Thinking in times of crisis is thinking immersed in the symptoms of the necessary disease of the present, a diagnosis of the different forms of life that dramatically coexist in the present. As Nuzzo writes: «the interregnum is the point of implosion of the present»<sup>2</sup>: the field of real struggles, violence, oppression and domination of one part on the other; the field of humans' needs, desires, aspirations and of the negations and conflicts brought forth by them. But the interregnum is *also* the material of philosophy for philosophy – understood as philosophy of crisis – is nothing but the development of the historical and inevitable contradictions, showing in this way its own practical vocation.

If these claims already express the task and the interest of Hegel's idea of philosophy, and in so doing indirectly refuse any neutral or purely theoretical account of thinking and philosophical

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, p. 248.

knowledge, still the relation between philosophy and change needs to be further defined.

In Nuzzo's interpretation of Hegel's logic in terms of a dialectic of transformative processes, it seems to me that an important point for the definition of the task of a philosophy of crisis is made through the reading of logical forms as logical figures developed in Chapter 3 («Forms and Figures») of her volume. Such a reading constitutes one of the innovative elements of Nuzzo's interpretation of the Hegelian logic and a necessary step towards the comparison with literature carried out in the second part of the book.

In Chapter 3, the figure is defined by Nuzzo as the dynamic structure of individualization within the organic development of logic. By referring to the meaning that the term *Gestalt* assumes in Goethe's philosophy of nature and in Martin Luther, Nuzzo argues that logical forms possess real validity. The figure as Nuzzo understands it on the one hand contains an inner reference to a broader processual context and on the other hand constitutes an exceedance over the real that is the form of its actual fulfilment and consummation. Nuzzo writes: «The figure exceeds the real, although, at the same time, it encompasses and fully inhabits it. [...] while more than real, the figure carries in itself only a limited, partial, or unilateral significance and necessarily refers to a higher or broader and more complex order of things for its 'fulfilment' and true 'realisation'. The figure is never the whole truth»<sup>3</sup>. In the logic, figuration is therefore the movement of transformation itself, a process of mediation between the real and the ideal that produces the determinate negation. In other words, it is the driving force of the logical development and structure of the method that in the logic is produced.

The reading that Nuzzo is here proposing makes the logical movement indeed closer to the phenomenological one in light of

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 84.

the univocity of the dialectical movement of philosophy and of the principle of determinate negation that defines it. This proposal is particularly significant insofar as it serves to destructure long-standing – and sometimes sterile – debates internal to Hegel scholarship both on the relationship between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*, and on the absolute diversity of the logical movement with respect to the other parts of Hegel's system of philosophy.

Nuzzo's reading of the Hegelian logic raises a variety of interesting issues. Narrowing down from amongst this variety I would like to ask the author for insights on the concepts of immanence and normativity.

First, according to Nuzzo's reading of Hegel's logic, is it possible to redefine the account of the immanent development of logic based on the elements of Goethe's philosophy of nature underlined in this volume? More specifically, in relation to the logical development is it possible to refute the organic model of development as spontaneous production or predetermination by emphasising the determinate moment of contradiction? Can we take the idea of immanence in Hegel's logic in terms of *self-critique* of thinking, as self-critique of the on-going activity of rationality on the intellectual moment, which is each time sublated but never completely?

My second question involves the concept of normativity in Hegel's philosophy, how change *must* be thought.

I would like to know if the normativity of philosophy can be understood in a reflective way as I suggested for the concept of immanence as well? In this case, normativity does not indicate a prescription for change on reality, but the *autonomy* of philosophical thinking. Normativity is therefore the capacity of philosophical thinking to act on thinking in general (in all its different forms: reflection, need, institution), on the set of cultural forms that shape and define the present. According to its autonomy, philosophy immersed in the present and in the crisis of the present would have

two tasks: 1) philosophy would aim to destabilise the present, to weaken what exists and is fixed, to negate the positive; 2) philosophy would aim to liberate the individuals, the group of people that in the fixed structure of the present live the contradiction between «what they want» and «what is allowed» to them<sup>4</sup>, that is, those who live the barrier to the possibility of change. In other words, is the task of philosophy to be the liberation of the desiring side of thinking for the oppressed agents?

Third and finally, in the introductory part of *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely*, Nuzzo reveals that she tried and failed to write the first chapter on the logic of transformation several times. Her efforts were frustrated because each time a new crisis seems to emerge and redefine the previous one.

I was wondering if we could perhaps find in this remark something like the image of the contemporary relevance of Hegel's philosophy: the necessity to start again each time with a new comprehension of the crisis of the world?

<sup>4</sup> See GW 5, p. 16.