

Chapter II

Repetition and Difference: Žižek, Deleuze and Lacanian Drives

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Over the course of many years now, Slavoj Žižek repeatedly has emphasised that the fundamental underlying concern and main overriding ambition of his intellectual efforts in their entirety is to argue for a counterintuitive identity between, on the one hand, the *Cogito*-like subject of German idealism and, on the other hand, the death drive (*Todestrieb*) of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis.¹ Consistent with this emphasis, the short circuit of this coincidence of apparent antagonists (i.e. subject and death drive) also features centrally in the pages of *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* and *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*.² In these two philosophical works from 2012 and 2014 respectively, Žižek is concerned with confronting G. W. F. Hegel in particular with Sigmund Freud's and Jacques Lacan's theories of libidinal economics (as involving the death drive). Both the *Todestrieb* as well as a Lacanian distinction between drive (*Trieb, pulsion*) and desire (*désir*) are presented by Žižek as requiring of Hegel's philosophy certain revisions and changes while simultaneously being foreshadowed by this same philosophy.

In *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek goes so far as to put forward the death drive as the extimate nucleus of Hegelianism, as that which this philosophy, as it were, neither can live with nor can live without. In line with a stress on groundless contingency as the *Ur*-modality of Hegelianism's absoluteness,³ Žižek identifies as 'the core of Hegelian dialectics' (i.e. the main engine of Hegel's System) nothing other than 'the death drive or the compulsion to repeat' in its brute, dumb facticity – that is, a recurrent circling movement exhibiting an acephalous, idiotic character resembling a mechanical automaton rather than a human subject.⁴ Žižek's move here displays a convergence of (seeming) opposites in which the

heights of meaning/sense (Hegel's dialectically systematic absolute Idea as the entire integrated network of categories and concepts both logical and real) coincide with the depths of meaninglessness/nonsense (a non-dialectical repetitiveness making possible the Hegelian System and yet, at the same time, perpetually evading this System's comprehension). Of the four post-Hegelians Žižek, at this point in *Less Than Nothing*, mentions by name as targeting this extimate dimension of Hegel's philosophy (i.e. Søren Kierkegaard, Freud, Lacan and Gilles Deleuze), it is, unsurprisingly, Lacan who is most important for his purposes. A Lacanian psychoanalytic Owl of Minerva permits an *après-coup* making explicit of (as a raising to the dignity of its Notion) a Hegelian philosophical presupposition (as *an sich*) waiting to be delivered by its belated positing (as *an und für sich*). Lacan's psychoanalytic conceptions of drive and repetition are put forward by Žižek as the keys to 'positing the presuppositions' that are, precisely, Hegel's implicit conceptions of the contingent Absolute and its dialectical developments propelled along by a non-dialecticisable negativity interminably reiterating itself. I also will take up much later Žižek's reference to Deleuze in conjunction with Lacan's own scattered references to Deleuze's philosophy.

Properly appreciating and assessing Žižek's identification of psychoanalytic drive theory as, to paraphrase Lacan appropriately in this context, 'in Hegel more than Hegel himself' obviously requires examining how Žižek himself conceptualises *Trieb* generally and the *Todestrieb* specifically. Throughout the rest of what follows, I will be tacitly but heavily relying upon my reconstruction of Freud's, Lacan's and Žižek's accounts of drives and libidinal economies in my 2005 book *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*. I further explore Žižek's pre-2012 parsings of metapsychological drive theory at various moments in my 2008 book *Žižek's Ontology*, explorations likewise in the background of what ensues below. Now, the best place to start this particular examination in the present intervention is with Žižek's distinction, based on a certain interpretation of Lacan, between *pulsion* and *désir*. Indeed, the Žižekian conception of drive is utterly dependent upon this distinction.

In *Less Than Nothing*, the drive–desire contrast is invoked by Žižek multiple times. Therein, the first and most substantial articulation of this difference, an initial articulation upon which subsequent returns to this topic in both *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil* draw, begins thusly:

What does drive mean from a *philosophical* standpoint? In a vague general sense, there is a homology between the shift from Kant to Hegel and the shift from desire to drive: the Kantian universe is that of desire (structured around the lack, the inaccessible Thing-in-itself), of endlessly approaching the goal, which is why, in order to guarantee the meaningfulness of our

ethical activity, Kant has to postulate the immortality of the soul (since we cannot reach the goal in our terrestrial life, we must be allowed to go on *ad infinitum*). For Hegel, on the contrary, the Thing-in-itself is not inaccessible, the impossible does happen here and now – not, of course, in the naïve pre-critical sense of gaining access to the transcendent order of things, but in the properly dialectical sense of shifting the perspective and conceiving the gap (that separates us from the Thing) as the Real. With regard to satisfaction, this does not mean that, in contrast to desire which is constitutively non-satisfied, the drive achieves satisfaction by way of reaching the object which eludes desire. True, in contrast to desire, the drive is by definition satisfied, but this is because, in it, satisfaction is achieved in the repeated failure to reach the object, in repeatedly circling around the object.⁵

Žižek's opening question is motivated by his above-discussed thesis that drive theory à la Lacanian psychoanalysis is the best means for retroactively positing a pivotal presupposition in speculative dialectics à la Hegelian philosophy (i.e. the ceaseless restlessness of dialectical negativity). Moreover, his manner here of aligning Immanuel Kant and Hegel with desire and drive respectively reinforces the heterodoxy of his Hegelianism. In other words, and in a gesture familiar to connoisseurs of the Žižekian *oeuvre*, Žižek's Hegel abruptly transubstantiates Kantian epistemological defeat (as equated with the 'That's not it!' of the 'hysteria' of Lacanian *désir*) directly into ontological victory (as equated with the 'That's it!' of the 'perversion' of Lacanian *pulsion*).⁶ Put differently, Žižekian Hegelianism involves a kind of interminably and compulsively repeated enjoyment of negativity, an automatic, inhuman and senseless orbiting around certain centres of gravity akin to black holes in physics and/or attractors in mathematics (i.e. Žižek's '*eppur si muove* of the pure drive').⁷

Many other passages in *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil* embellish upon this fashion of linking Kant and Hegel with desire and drive.⁸ For this Žižek, the central motor mechanism powering the kinetics of Hegelian dialectical negativity is a meta-dialectical 'parallax' between drive and desire.⁹ Put differently, Žižek's psychoanalytic, drive-theoretic revisit of Hegel's philosophy quite deliberately suggests that something non-dialectical (i.e. a *Verstand*-type binary opposition) generates and underlies the dialectical (i.e. *Vernunft* as speculative dialectics). Similarly, when Žižek speaks of 'the very "drive" to *break* the All of continuity in which we are embedded, to introduce a radical imbalance into it',¹⁰ this sympathetically can be heard as accurately capturing Hegel's post-Spinoza, anti-Schelling insistence on 'grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*',¹¹ with subjectivity (identified by Žižek as equivalent to (death) drive) being an excrescence of substantiality (i.e. 'the All of continuity in which we are embedded') disrupting this very substantiality from within and out of itself (with the latter therefore being, in

proper Hegelian fashion, self-sundering and auto-dialecticising).¹² Hence, in Žižek's discourse, 'subject' and 'drive' are two names, in German idealism and psychoanalysis respectively, for the same thing, namely an existent negativity both produced by and simultaneously interfering with grounding *Substanz* qua a chain of (rough) equivalences including: the Absolute, the One, the All, the Infinite, the Totality, the Whole, and so on.

In *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek further enriches the concept of drive by contrasting it with instinct (in addition to the contrasts already drawn with desire).¹³ Although Hegel is not mentioned directly by name in the drawing of this contrast, Žižek's manner of doing so fundamentally expresses an ambivalence with respect to him. On the positive side of this ambivalence, Žižek characteristically corrects certain standard, commonplace (mis)interpretations of Hegelianism. Apropos Hegel's conception of the distinction between human and non-human animals, Žižek's remarks warn against construing this specific philosophical anthropology as the straightforward progress narrative of a teleological development in which simple animality is superseded by comparatively more complex humanity ('the zero-degree of "humanization" is not a further "mediation" of animal activity, its reinscription as a subordinated moment of a higher totality (for example, we eat and procreate in order to develop our higher spiritual potentials)¹⁴). With such instances as the famous discussion of habit in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*' treatment of the human 'soul' (*Seele*) clearly in mind,¹⁵ Žižek contends that human animals become properly human (qua (partially) de-animalised) by passing through a concentration into the more, rather than less, rudimentary (i.e. the repetitive, the narrow, the habitual, the fixed, the driven, etc.).

Additionally, when Žižek asserts 'man perceives as a direct goal what, for an animal, has no intrinsic value',¹⁶ this alludes to aspects of Freud's and Lacan's accounts of distinctive features of specifically human libidinal economies (in addition to its allusions to Hegel's philosophical anthropology). As regards Freud, one could take as an exemplary illustration here the Freudian oral drive: whereas the hunger of an instinct (*als Instinkt*) to obtain nourishment would, in the case of a human infant, invest in milk as the nourishing substance *an sich*, the oral drive (*als Trieb*) parasitically accompanying this instinct cathects (*als Besetzung*) instead such not-directly-nourishing objects and activities as the sensory-perceptual representatives of the breast and the repetitive motor movements of the mouth involved in sucking (i.e. in Žižek's terms, 'mere by-products'¹⁷ of sating instinctive hunger). As regards Lacan, I cannot help but recall a humorous moment during his early 1950s elaborations of the mirror stage in 'Some Reflections on the Ego'. Therein, he contrasts human and non-human primate responses to reflective surfaces: While the non-human

primate quickly realises that the mirror image is nothing but a semblance, the flat, superficial illusion of a conspecific who is not really there, and then quite reasonably loses interest in it as unreal, the human being becomes permanently enthralled by this image, getting lured into the spectral vortex of a virtual reality in which appearances, fictions, semblances, and the like become more valued and important than anything 'real'. On this occasion, Lacan is not only engaging in a bit of tongue-in-cheek human self-deprecation (with human idiots stupidly falling again and again for mirages and deceptions readily and wisely turned away from by humanity's closest animal relatives) – he also is taking a swipe at his arch-enemies, the pseudo-Freudian ego psychologists, for whom 'adaptation to reality' is a gold standard of human mental health. Lacan's counterpoint is that a hallmark feature of humanity is an original dis/mal-adaptation to reality, a preference for the unreality of illusory images and fictitious phantasms instead of the reality adaptationally favoured by non-human animals, including the other primates. One implication is that ego psychology's insistence on patients 'adapting to reality' is literally dehumanising, stunningly blind and deaf to essential facets of the so-called 'human condition'.¹⁸

But, returning to Hegel, and on the negative side of Žižek's ambivalence towards him, Žižek views Hegel's philosophy as sometimes lapsing into precisely the pseudo-Hegelianism Žižek's positive, pro-Hegel remarks at this same moment in *Less Than Nothing* seek to rectify. This should not, despite the likelihood of the contrary, come as a shock, since Žižek, in both *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil*, explicitly makes clear that his general interpretive *modus operandi* with respect to his chosen cardinal points of reference (such as Hegel, Karl Marx, Freud and Lacan) is, at least when suitable, to play them off against themselves, thereby bringing to light that which is extimately in 'x' (Hegel, Marx, Freud, Lacan . . .) more than 'x' him- or herself ('What characterizes a really great thinker is that they misrecognize the basic dimension of their own breakthrough'¹⁹). Žižek describes this critical-exegetical procedure as 'thinking with Freud against Freud, or with Hegel against Hegel'²⁰ and similarly maintains that 'the only way beyond Lacan is through Lacan'.²¹ *Less Than Nothing* pinpoints a number of topics, such as rabble-rousing poverty, mathematised experimental science, the psychoanalytic unconscious and Freudian–Lacanian drives (especially the *Todestrieb*), arguably addressable and assimilable by Hegelianism only if the latter undergoes significant metamorphoses involving immanent self-critiques (i.e. Hegelian critiques of Hegel(ianism)).²²

For Žižek, Hegel mishandles human sexuality as something quasi-animalistic to be subordinated to the socio-symbolic mediations of the

family as itself an element of *SittlicŒeit*.²³ But, the analytic Owl of Minerva, with the benefit of hindsight afforded specifically by its conceptualisation of the largely unconscious, drive-centred, sexual-libidinal economy of human psychical subjects, accurately sees that this sexuality, with its everyday and not-so-everyday obsessions and fixations, fits elsewhere in Hegel's System than Hegel realises (namely, in the 'Anthropology' of the 'Philosophy of Subjective Spirit', with the soul and its habits so near to and yet so far from animality, rather than much later in the subsequent 'Philosophy of Objective Spirit'). From Žižek's perspective, it is not that Hegel's System cannot accommodate at all such post-Hegelian developments as the psychoanalytic theory of human sexuality, being rendered obsolete by them. Instead, this System allegedly can accommodate them, but in ways other than those that Hegel himself might favour. Fidelity requires a certain amount of betrayal – a dialectical truth that applies as much to relations with dialectical thinkers as to those with non-dialectical ones.

As seen, Žižek's rendition of the Lacanian distinction between drive and desire non-dialectically opposes them, treating this opposition as a meta-dialectical motor of dialectical processes. At this juncture, I would propose that Žižek's Lacanian difference between *pulsion* and *désir* is itself the fallout of, in human beings, the failure of evolved instincts, themselves symptoms of nature's weakness, its lack of strong principles, its careless sloppiness, its negligent laxness permitting proliferations of just-functional-enough malformations. To go into more precise details, I can begin by observing that the natural history of evolution has eventuated in *Homo sapiens* equipped with central nervous systems involving emotional, motivational and cognitive functions highly distributed neurophysiologically over a diverse neuroanatomical landscape spanning the breadth from the brain stem to the neocortex. What is more, epigenetics and neuroplasticity make this same evolved brain naturally inclined to the dominance of nurture over nature, pre-programmed in somatic-biological-material terms for reprogramming in and by psychical-social-symbolic terms. These natural variables specific to human evolutionary neurobiology – thanks to these variables, evolutionarily older instinctual-type motivational and emotional functions get connected with and mediated by evolutionarily newer cognitive functions – consequently result in, within individual human beings, what would be animal instincts always-already being transubstantiated into human drives as per Freudian psychoanalytic metapsychology.

To be even more exact apropos Lacan and Žižek in particular, drive and desire can be understood in light of the immediately preceding as the dividing and becoming-antagonistic of two sides of what remains, in non-human animals, internally un-conflicted instinct. The instinctual would involve both the repetitive and the teleological. That is to say, instincts

both demand recurrences of set patterns of intending and acting (as does the repetition operative in Freudian *Trieb*) as well as impel in the direction of certain ends (as does the Freudian *Lustprinzip*, with its twin aims of attaining pleasure and avoiding pain). Moreover, such animal instincts qua organic (by contrast with the kludgy ‘anorganicity’ of the peculiar human organism and its kaleidoscopic, patched-together drives) generally tend to embody harmonious syntheses of repetition and teleology. These syntheses occasionally break apart in non-human animals due primarily to interferences of exogenous origins. In other words, instinctually dictated repetitions cease functioning effectively toward certain *teloi* if and when environmental changes cause these instincts to go from being adaptive to becoming maladaptive in relation to their changed surroundings.

But, maladaptation at the levels of motivational/libidinal forces and factors is the endogenous rule, rather than the exogenous exception, in human (instead of non-human) animals. To be more specific, Žižek’s version of the Lacanian drive–desire distinction can be recast as reflecting a coming-apart of the repetitive and the teleological (i.e. of what, in the instincts of non-human animals, are organically coupled unless interfered with by external contingencies). Arguably, this rift is opened precisely by neurobiological evolution widely distributing animal-instinctive emotional and motivational functions across humans’ heterogeneous, variegated emotional, motivational and cognitive neuroanatomy and neurophysiology. Such distribution is perhaps a stretch too far, bringing about rips and tears in the fabric of human libidinal economies, splits and wounds that come to be organising principles of these economies.

Put simply enough, Lacanian-Žižekian *pulsion* could be said to entail repetition-without-teleology and Lacanian-Žižekian *désir* teleology-without-repetition. According to Lacan’s distinction between a drive’s ‘aim’ and its ‘goal’ (a distinction closely related to that between drive and desire), an aim-inhibited drive can achieve satisfaction, as per Freud’s main characterisation of sublimation as the satisfaction of an aim-inhibited drive, precisely because it has an ‘aim’ (i.e. Lacan’s ‘goal’) other than the aim inhibited. Lacan reasons, on the basis of Freud’s own claims, that if all drives aim at satisfaction and yet can and do achieve ‘satisfaction’ via sublimation even when these same aims of theirs are inhibited, then there must be an ‘aim’–‘satisfaction’ circuit wired into *Trieb* separate from the one calibrated by the dialectical push and pull between the see-sawing pleasure and reality principles. The inhabitable Freudian-Lacanian (drive-) aim would involve ‘satisfaction’ à la the pleasure principle, namely ‘pleasure’ qua contentment, happiness, homeostasis, well-being, and so on. By contrast, the Lacanian (drive-)goal consists in another ‘satisfaction’ altogether than that of the pleasure principle’s aim(s), this being nothing other

than the idiotic *jouissance* of aimless repetition (i.e. repetition-without-teleology). In other words, Lacan, apropos *pulsion*, clearly contrasts the aim of pleasure as satisfaction with the goal of *jouissance* as, so to speak, an Other 'satisfaction'.

The latter, this enjoyment of and in Žižekian 'stuckness'²⁴ as repetition *sans* the teleology imposed by the instinct-like *Lustprinzip*, can be and is derived from interminably circling revolutions around, as it were, *idées fixes*. This is a *jouissance* of what sometimes even is, from the perspectives of instinct and desire alike (which, despite their significant differences, both involve teleologies), pointless, counterproductive, self-destructive, and the like. Such 'enjoyment' (often consciously unenjoyable) might be bio-materially made possible by (even if admittedly far from exhaustively explicable through) the neuro-evolutionary opening of a rift decoupling brain-stem-level emotional and motivational structures and dynamics (especially those of the so-called SEEKING system of affective neuroscience as per Jaak Panksepp and like-minded researchers²⁵) from neocortex-level cognitive ones. The former side of this rift arguably supports affectively intense, *jouissance*-saturated repetitions without accompanying teleologies (i.e. Freud's source and pressure of drive, Lacan's drive-without-aim-but-with-goal, and/or my 'axis of iteration' as per *Time Driven*), while the latter side of this same rift arguably supports representational, signifier-like differences/differentiations with accompanying teleologies (i.e. Freud's aim and object of drive, Lacan's desire with its interrelated Thing (*das Ding, la Chose*) and object-cause (*objet petit a*), and/or my 'axis of alteration' as per *Time Driven*).

Within the ontogenies of singular human organisms, evolution, with its cold indifference to whether life flourishes or withers and somewhat low bar of 'good enough to survive long enough to reproduce' at the scale of populations rather than individuals, permits the emergence of this far-from-optimal gap fragmenting what otherwise would be organic animal instincts into the anorganic split drives characteristic of human beings. The natural-historical genesis of such a fissuring presumably brought with it certain evolutionary advantages, namely those accruing thanks to evolved neocortically enabled sapience (itself allowing sapient creatures much more finer-grained, longer-term and/or bigger-picture cooperating, planning, predicting, responding, etc. than sentient-but-not-sapient creatures). But, there also seem to have been many disadvantages attributable to this very same genesis. In neuro-evolutionary terms, these would be ones arising from the immanent nature- or evolution-generated de- and re-organisation of pre-neocortical instincts into what thereby become drives proper via the routing of these instincts through evolved neocortically enabled sapience. In psychoanalytic terms, they are the uniquely

human libidinal dysfunctions detailed in *Time Driven* as symptoms of ‘the splitting of the drive’ referred to in that book’s sub-title. However, so long as, on overall species-scale balance, such disadvantages do not result in *Homo sapiens* as a whole being driven to extinction through population-magnitude aggregates biologically failing to survive and reproduce, the sub-optimal, discontent-inducing mechanisms of drives are allowed to continue running their courses. What is not forbidden by natural evolution is permitted. Exemplary of what exists with this permission is a queer isolated species many of whose members are miserable wretches tirelessly but unwittingly working in myriad ways against their own happiness and flourishing – a species which, as Freud famously observes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, appears counterintuitively to be getting less, rather than more, content even as it rapidly gains in adaptive powers by virtue of the modern progress of its interlinked, co-evolving scientific *savoir* and technological *savoir-faire*.

In addition to drive, what about desire as per Lacan and Žižek? As I indicated above, whereas Lacanian-Žižekian *pulsion* embodies repetition-without-teleology, Lacanian-Žižekian *désir* represents teleology-without-repetition. What I mean by the latter is that desire in this precise technical sense always is oriented toward select *teloi* in the dual guises of the always-already lost Real Thing (i.e. *das Ding*) of a time-before-time ontogenetic past and the eternally-yet-to-come fantasmatic object (i.e. *objet petit a*) of a forever-receding future. Furthermore, these two *teloi*, the irretrievably lost *jouissance* of *das Ding* and the expected-but-never-obtained *jouissance* of *objet petit a*, co-constitute each other such that object *a* is a projection forward into the future of a past Thing and, correlatively but conversely, the Thing is a retrojection backward into the past of the present and future unattainable object *a*. *Désir* à la Lacan is, among many other of its myriad features, inherently teleological, ceaselessly dissatisfied in its perpetual, restless straining beyond itself in the directions of impossible-to-reach ends. Whatever it does manage to attain, Lacanian desire’s response, as Žižek rightly underscores, invariably is a disappointed ‘Ce n’est pas ça’ (‘That’s not it’).

Interestingly, such desire looks as though it bears resemblances to different aspects of both instinct and drive. To be more precise, *Instinkt* and *Trieb* share in common repetitiveness, namely the basic imperative to think and behave in certain fixed manners again and again, a libidinal-motivational injunction Freud labels *Wiederholungszwang*. However, unlike the instincts of non-human animals – these ultimately are rooted in evolutionarily primitive mammalian brain-stem neuroanatomy and neurophysiology – the drives of human ones route such repetitious tendencies through the cognitive circuitries of evolutionarily advanced

neocortical neuroanatomy and neurophysiology. Such intra-neural mediation transforming animal *Instinkt* into human *Trieb* via (re)distribution spanning the gaping distance from brain stem to neocortex, also brings with it extra-neural mediations – and this because the epigenetics and neuroplasticity of the neocortex, as a certain Real, hardware/pre-program this cortex for re-wiring/re-programming vis-à-vis more-than-corporeal, non-biological, denaturalising dimensions both experiential-phenomenal (i.e. Imaginary) and socio-structural (i.e. Symbolic). In and through these somatically intra- and psychically extra-bodily distributions/redistributions and mediations/meta-mediations at the tangled intersections of natural and human histories, instincts are torn apart and become the split drives distinctive of humanity and distinctively theorised by psychoanalysis.

Without pretending to offer an exhaustive or even thorough delineation of Lacanian *désir* in all its multifaceted complexity, I would propose that this desire fairly can be depicted in the context of this present discussion as animal instinct transubstantiated (*als Aufhebung*) by having been always-already derailed into human drive at the ontogenetic level of individual members of the species *Homo sapiens*. Lacan's consistent fashion from the 1950s onward of characterising *désir* in an interrelated triad also involving *besoin* (need) and *demande* (demand) can be construed with early twenty-first-century (post-)Lacanian neuro-psychoanalytic hindsight as anticipating what I am proposing here. As per this Lacan, need is very much akin to instinct as a natural physical imperative regularly repeating itself. For a living being thrown even well before the actual moment of biological birth into a pre-existent inter- and trans-subjective set of matrices of mediation and destined thereby to become a 'speaking being' (*parlêtre*), these Real needs are forced, within the surrounding strictures imposed upon the little human being by both Imaginary others and Symbolic Others, into being (mis)communicated in the form of socially recognised, language-symbolised demands. Whether as Freud's somatic drive-sources and drive-pressures (i.e. my axis of iteration) or Lacan's bodily needs, aspects of the bio-material substance of the human organism get colonised and overwritten by swarms of psychically inscribed socio-symbolic rules and representations. Thereby, in Freudian terms, the more-than-somatic ideational representations (*Vorstellungen*) of psychical drive-aims and drive-objects (i.e. my axis of alteration) denaturalise and divert drive-sources and drive-pressures. In Lacanian terms, Imaginary phenomena and Symbolic structures involving both others and Others constrain Real corporeal requirements to (mis)translate themselves into signifier-like images and words (i.e. needs getting articulated as demands).

Both Freud's drive-sources and drive-pressures as well as Lacan's needs are features of the libidinal economy that defensibly could be described

as, on their own in isolation, instinctual components of human nature. Of course, as always-already channelled through and filtered by representations and signifiers in creatures naturally inclined towards the dominance of nurture over nature, these instinctual features admittedly are never encountered and dealt with directly by analytic clinicians and metaphysicists in some state of undiluted purity (both Freud and Lacan acknowledge this in various different manners). Nonetheless, in both Freudian and Lacanian theoretical frameworks, they are posited to be unavoidable and compelling presuppositions. What is more, for any Freudian and/or Lacanian who also is a staunch, committed materialist (whether Žižek, myself, or whoever else), these biological forces and factors must be acknowledged and granted their appropriate place.

In connection with Lacan's recurrent denunciations of the mistranslation of 'drive' (*Trieb*) as 'instinct' (*Instinkt*), he sometimes maintains that *pulsion* might best be translated as *dérive* (drift). Indeed, drive is very well depicted as drift – as natural instinct set adrift by and on more-than-natural mediators (whether as Freud's somatic sources and pressures diverted into the psychical *Vorstellungen* of aims and objects or Lacan's corporeal needs forcibly expressed in and through the extra-corporeal signifiers of demands). But, again, what about *désir* à la Lacan?

The Freudian sources and pressures of drives as well as Lacanian needs all give rise to repetition, to a well-nigh irresistible *Wiederholungszwang* buffeting desire and pushing it into its ceaseless yet vain attempts and reattempts to grasp 'IT' (i.e. *das Ding/la Chose* as incarnated within and by *objet petit a*) always resulting in the disappointing sense of 'That's not IT!' In addition to these relentlessly reiterated 'demands for work' (to borrow Freud's phrase for the repetitious insistence of drive-sources and drive-pressures), Lacan's theory of the signifier, a theory integral to the account of desire, has it that the signifier is simultaneously a condition of possibility and impossibility for repetition. On the one hand (i.e. condition of possibility for repetition), signifier-like representations (whether as words or images) enable libidinal economies and their subjects to orient themselves towards the quest for, as Freud puts it, 're-finding lost objects', towards seeking out what are marked and identified as the 'same' things again and again (i.e. 'IT'). But, on the other hand (i.e. condition of impossibility for repetition), the structural dynamics of signifiers make it such that repetition itself engenders difference, that each re-finding is a re-losing, that each successive return to sameness liquidates this very same sameness (thus resulting in 'Ce n'est pas ça').

Lacanian desire arises from the forced (mis)translation of needs into the signifiers of demands. Hence, *désir* is, one could say, caught between two varieties of repetitiousness: first, the *Wiederholungszwang* of biological,

instinct-like vital requirements as recurrently insisting upon labour at their behest; second, the iterability enabled and generated by the signifiers impressed upon a human animal who thereby becomes a *parlêtre*. I claimed earlier that desire as per Lacan defensibly can be described as involving teleology-without-repetition – and this by contrast with Lacanian drive as repetition-without-teleology. However, I now can and should nuance this by observing that desire's 'without-repetition' is, more precisely, without successful, satisfying repetition (or, as the Lacan of Seminar X (1962–3) would put it, desire nevertheless is 'not without' ('pas sans') repetition entirely). That is to say, Lacanian *désir*, whether thought of in relation to instinct, Freud's drive-source and drive-pressure, Lacan's need and/or Lacan's *pulsion*, constantly is pushed into futile, Sisyphean efforts at reaching *teloi* whose necessary unreachability tends to be misperceived by the desiring subject as contingent rather than necessary.

At least one of the tones audible in desire's cry of 'That's not IT!' is contributed by lingering vestiges of the teleological leanings inherent in animal instincts. Put differently, the 'Ce n'est pas ça' of desire can be heard as containing impotent (à la Hegel's *OÚmacht der Nature* and my related 'weak nature') natural instinct's feeble protest against denaturalised drive's repetition-without-teleology, namely the latter's 'perverse' enjoyment (qua *jouissance*) of failure, of tirelessly and pointlessly skirting around never-attained aims. Whereas Lacanian drive is the enjoyment of veering off teleological course, Lacanian desire does not enjoy this, instead remaining fixated upon its ever-receding *teloi* past and future. Like intrinsically failed instincts always operating 'beyond the pleasure principle', desires are dissatisfied and dissatisfying stucknesses in impossible, doomed teleologies.

I am tempted to suggest that the ontogeny of desire emerging through need passing into demand partly involves a recapitulation of the phylogeny of instinct becoming drive (more precisely, the evolutionary genesis of the neocortex and its assumption of mediating roles in relation to emotional and motivational brain functions). Even more, the latter arguably is a necessary condition for the former. In other words, the denaturalising socio-symbolic suffusions and regulations of the libidinal economy (such as the overwriting of bodily needs by the signifiers of demands) are made possible in part by virtue of a neuroanatomy and neurophysiology in which a highly plastic neocortex genetically coded endogenously to be epigenetically re-coded exogenously plays a pivotal role in relation to emotional-motivational circuits. Thanks to such a cognitive cortex receptive to influences and inscriptions impressed upon it by the living being's surrounding environments of countless sorts, instinct becomes drive, with drive itself being split between a teleology-without-repetition (i.e. Freud's drive-aim and drive-object, Lacan's *désir* and my axis of alteration – all

depending upon the evolved human brain's cognitive circuitry) and a repetition-without-teleology (i.e. Freud's drive-source and drive-pressure, Lacan's *pulsion* and my axis of iteration – all depending upon the human brain's emotional and motivational circuitry as well as the entire rest of the body).

The time has come to circumnavigate back to re-engaging directly with Žižek himself. I will end this intervention with an attempt to demonstrate why and how my revisitation of psychoanalytic drive theory resolves what I would contend are certain problems his fashions of redeploying Lacan's drive–desire distinction in *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil* create for him. But, before closing thusly, Žižek's reflections on the already-mentioned notion of stuckness are worth considering.

Along with the *pulsion–désir* pair, and closely related to it, stuckness is a strikingly recurrent theme throughout both *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil*.²⁶ Apropos this theme, Žižek implicitly relies upon a feature of the Lacanian logic of the signifier I underlined a short while ago, namely that, in a coincidence/convergence of opposites, repetition produces difference in and through signifier-like structures and dynamics. One of Žižek's central theses as regards Hegel in these 2012 and 2014 books is that Hegel's dialectical-speculative philosophy fundamentally relies upon repetitions producing differences:

We can clearly see here what is wrong with one of the basic common-sense criticisms of Hegel: 'Hegel always presupposes that the movement goes on – a thesis is opposed by its anti-thesis, the "contradiction" gets aggravated, we pass to the new position, etc., etc. But what if a moment refuses to get caught in the movement, what if it simply insists in (or resigns itself to) its inert particularity: "OK, I am inconsistent with myself, but so what? I prefer to stay where I am . . ."' The mistake of this criticism is that it misses the point: far from being a threatening abnormality, an exception to the 'normal' dialectical movement, this – the refusal of a moment to become caught in a movement, its sticking to its particular identity – is precisely what happens as a rule. A moment turns into its opposite precisely by way of sticking to what it is, by refusing to recognize its truth in its opposite.²⁷

This reversal of stubborn repetition into radical difference is entirely in line with the Lacanian logic of the signifier. Additionally, Žižek is quite correct that Hegel, contrary to various complaints and objections, indeed allows for resistances to and reactions against the dialectical-speculative trajectories he traces.

But, in *Less Than Nothing*, at the start of a chapter (the seventh) entitled 'The Limits of Hegel', Žižek indicates that the employment of a (Lacanian) dialectic between repetition and difference along the lines laid out in the preceding block quotation is a self-exonerating move not available to

Hegel himself.²⁸ The ‘excess of purely mechanical repetition’ Žižek here claims Hegel misses is nothing other than the Freudian-Lacanian death drive.²⁹ As observed, the *Todestrieb* is, in Žižek’s view, an extimate core of Hegelianism, something ‘in Hegel more than Hegel himself. Clearly, Žižek is convinced that post-Hegelian psychoanalytic drive theory is both compatible with and even integral to a Hegelianism reinvented for the twenty-first century.

In this very vein, *Less Than Nothing* subsequently goes so far as to equate the repetition of death-drive-type stuckness with the negativity so central for Hegel himself.³⁰ Through a contrast with ‘the Orient’ broadly speaking – more specifically, Žižek likely has in mind first and foremost a favourite *bête noire*, namely ‘Western Buddhism’ – he presents his fusion of Hegelian dialectics with Freudian-Lacanian *Todestrieb* as emblematic of a ‘Western negativity’ overall (presumably in non-dialectical opposition to an Eastern, or pseudo-Eastern, positivity). Furthermore, and to refer back to my earlier discussions of (death) drive and desire à la Freud, Lacan and Žižek, it strikes me as more accurate to identify Žižek’s Western negativity precisely with a death-drive-like dimension of Lacanian *désir* (rather than directly with, as per Žižek, *Todestrieb/pulsion de mort* proper). For Lacan himself, the unattainability of pure repetition (i.e. repeating as dialectically self-subverting) is associated with the logic of the signifier generally and signifier-mediated desire specifically. Admittedly, *désir* repetitiously perseverates in its unhappy pursuit of the impossible Real Thing wrapped in the fantasmatic disguises of *objet petit a*. Thus described, Lacan’s desire indeed exhibits a *Wiederholungszwang* ‘beyond the pleasure principle’. Hence, Žižek is not without his justifications for recurring to a death drive originating with Freud in 1920. However, given that Žižek’s Western-Hegelian negativity in *Less Than Nothing* hinges entirely on a repetition sublating itself into difference/newness, the psychoanalytic inspiration for this contemporary (neo-)Hegelianism looks to be not so much the Freudian *Todestrieb* as the Lacanian *désir* of the *parlêtre*.

Of course, speaking of the words ‘repetition’ and ‘difference’ in connection with each other in a context in which psychoanalysis and twentieth-century French philosophy/theory also are in play cannot but conjure up the figure of Deleuze and his 1968 masterpiece *Difference and Repetition*. As is well known, Lacan himself has the highest praise not only for *Difference and Repetition*, but also for Deleuze’s ‘Coldness and Cruelty’ (1967) as well as *The Logic of Sense* (1969).³¹ Despite the tensions and incompatibilities between Lacanian and Deleuzian orientations – as I will address shortly, the Žižek of both *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil* pointedly mobilises these frictions between Lacan and Deleuze as regards repetition, difference, drive and desire – Lacan’s enthusiasm for the

non-Guattarianised Deleuze of 1967–9 is not misplaced. Certain facets of Deleuze’s philosophy indeed cross-resonate strikingly with Lacanian psychoanalysis. Relatedly, Žižek, given his equation of Hegel’s negativity with the stuckness of Freud’s and Lacan’s drives, views the account of repetition in *Difference and Repetition* as ironically quite Hegelian on the part of its avowedly anti-Hegelian author.³²

The first of these facets appropriate to highlight in this specific context is the Deleuzian thesis according to which repetitions are inseparably immanent to their unfurling series of difference-inducing iterations – a thesis Deleuze articulates, in *Difference and Repetition*, via a revisitation of Freud from 1920 onwards (i.e. when *Wiederholungszwang* and the *Todestrieb* become explicit preoccupations).³³ Furthermore, at one point in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze states that ‘the death instinct’ (‘l’instinct de la mort’) is ‘not merely one instinct among others, but the crack itself around which all of the instincts congregate’ (‘qui n’est pas un instinct parmi les autres, mais la fêlure en personne, autour de laquelle tous les instincts fourmillent’).³⁴ Despite the strangeness of Deleuze’s rather un-psychoanalytic disregard for the Freudian and Lacanian distinction between *Trieb/pulsion* (drive) and *Instinkt/instinct* (instinct) displayed by his talk of ‘l’instinct de la mort’ (rather than *Todestrieb/pulsion de mort* (death drive)), this statement, already foreshadowed in ‘Coldness and Cruelty’,³⁵ condenses echoes of a number of lines of drive-theoretic thought (Freudian, Lacanian and/or Žižekian) touched upon by me earlier: the death drive is not a drive unto itself, but a trait of each and every drive, of *Trieb* as such (as per one of Freud’s speculations regarding the *Todestrieb*); this death(ly trait of) drive involves repetitions disrupting the pleasure principle, following a *Wiederholungszwang* beyond, behind or beneath the *Lustprinzip*; the *Todestrieb*(-like nature of all drives) is the negativity of a ‘crack’ (*fêlure*) forming a centre of gravity within the libidinal economy (on the basis of the drive theories of Freud and Lacan, I divide drive qua drive into axes of iteration and alteration starting in *Time Driven*, and this arguably dovetails with both Deleuze’s ‘crack’ as well as his pairings of difference (alteration) and repetition (iteration)). When Lacan, in Seminar XVI, favourably gestures at Deleuze’s recourse to the figure of a ‘blank’ (*blanc*) or ‘lack’ (*manque*) as capturing the essence of what could be called ‘structuralism’³⁶ (this being the Deleuze of *Logic of Sense* as well as the related essay ‘How Do We Recognize Structuralism?’³⁷), this hints that Deleuzian negativity (including what Deleuze, in *Logic of Sense*, associates with a deadly fissure shaping all drives) overlaps with the Lacanian Real as what immanently perturbs Imaginary-Symbolic reality (and, especially, the big Other of the symbolic order). Žižek approvingly reads this Deleuze similarly.³⁸

Deleuze's 'Coldness and Cruelty', because of its focus on masochism, contains extended discussions of the *Todestrieb* as per Freudian psychoanalysis. Indeed, the tenth and penultimate chapter of it is entitled 'The Death Instinct' ('Qu'est-ce que l'instinct de mort').³⁹ Therein, Deleuze accurately maintains that Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is not primarily concerned with this 'Jenseits' in terms of an utter and complete antithesis or nullification of the *Lustprinzip*, despite various impressions and interpretations regarding this 1920 book to the contrary. Instead, Deleuze's account, amply supported by the details of Freud's text, underscores that the repetitiveness (as compulsive repetition) with which Freud closely links the death drive is 'beyond' specifically as a transcendental dimension before or beneath the pleasure principle. That is to say, Deleuze associates the *Todestrieb* specifically with repetition as a condition of possibility for the consequent installation, via the 'binding' (*Bindung*) Freud identifies this repetition bringing about (or trying to bring about), of the *Lustprinzip* as the thereafter generally dominant governing tendency of psychical life. Such compulsive repetition is the groundless ground preceding and paving the way for a libidinal economy reliably leaning toward the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. But, as a precondition for the pleasure principle, this *Wiederholungszwang* itself is not governed by the rule of law it precedes and helps establish. In other words, repetition, in enabling the *Lustprinzip*, does not necessarily obey this principle.⁴⁰ A year later, *Difference and Repetition* reiterates these points.⁴¹

In *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek, after rearticulating the Lacanian difference between drive and desire and associating the former with stuckness, favourably invokes Deleuze.⁴² But, when the topic of Lacan's and Deleuze's positions on drive and desire resurfaces in *Absolute Recoil*, the latter fares much worse at Žižek's hands than he did in *Less Than Nothing*. Žižek leads into his critique of Deleuze by rehearsing the Lacanian distinction between *pulsion* and *désir*.⁴³ The interrelated references and themes fleshing out the drive–desire opposition at this point in *Absolute Recoil* are quite familiar components of the Žižekian theoretical repertoire: the Kant–Hegel relationship, examples from quantum physics, sexuation à la Lacan, and so on. Moreover, the motif of parallax splits (i.e. Hegelian-style ontologisations of Kantian-style antinomies) mobilised by Žižek in this 2014 context resonates with the thesis in his recent major philosophical works according to which the dialectical is animated by the non-dialectical, by impossible-to-sublate antagonisms and incompatibilities coming to function as the meta-dialectical conditions of possibility for any and all speculative dialectics. Along these lines, *Absolute Recoil*, like *Less Than Nothing* before it, treats the Lacanian *pulsion–désir* tension, an

allegedly unbridgeable parallax divide, as the meta-dialectical motor of the dialectics of the psychoanalytic libidinal economy.

Žižek begins addressing Deleuze by name apropos libidinal-economic matters.⁴⁴ Set against the wider background of the history of Western philosophy, Žižek's remarks implicitly stage a confrontation between (neo-) Spinozism (in the guise of the anti-Oedipal Deleuze's 'flux of desire, this endless productive movement [. . .] a positive assertion of life prior to all negativity' as akin to Baruch Spinoza's *natura naturans*, substance-as-S) and (neo-)Hegelianism (in the guise of Lacan's 'parallax unity of mutual exclusion' as akin to Hegel's *Negativ*, subject-as- $\$$).⁴⁵ Žižek's quickly ensuing critical manoeuvre, in a nutshell, is to argue that Lacanian negativity (as symbolic castration, *manque-à-être*, *objet petit a*, and the like) is the disavowed condition of possibility for Deleuzian positivity (echoing Hegel's move of arguing that Spinoza presupposes without being willing and able to posit the subjective in his extreme monism of the substantial). What is more, when Žižek alleges that 'Deleuze remains within the paradigmatic modern opposition between production and (the scene of) representation', this alludes to the more precise charge of a regression back behind Kant to (again) Spinoza, with the latter's arguably *Verstand*-type (or, at least, insufficiently dialectical-speculative) dichotomy between *natura naturans* (i.e. Žižek's 'production' as the being of Spinoza's productive substance) and *natura naturata* (i.e. Žižek's 'scene of representation' as the appearances that are Spinoza's attributes and modes).⁴⁶

From Žižek's Hegelian-Lacanian perspective, especially as per *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil*, Deleuze's neo-Spinozism (especially à la *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) suffers from two of the same shortcomings Hegel diagnoses in Spinoza's metaphysics: first, an inability and/or refusal to ask and answer ultimately unavoidable questions as to how and why the One of being (i.e. substance) gives rise to the Many of appearances (i.e. attributes and modes);⁴⁷ second, an incompleteness de-absolutising its ostensibly absolute (qua exhaustively infinite) ontology – and this due to a withholding of unqualified ontological weight from appearances.⁴⁸ Žižek resolves the first Spinozist shortcoming on Deleuze's part by, as I underlined a moment ago, positing the Lacanian negativity Deleuze himself presupposes but nonetheless avoids positing (just as Hegel posits the subjectivity Spinoza likewise presupposes without positing). Žižek's response to the second shortcoming of Deleuzian neo-Spinozism is, as I already have examined elsewhere,⁴⁹ to insist that any truly absolute ontology worthy of this adjective must admit and account for the strange being(s) of appearances as non-epiphenomenal. In this vein, Žižek's Lacan does to Deleuze what Žižek's Hegel does to Kant, namely fully ontologises structures and phenomena otherwise treated as ontologically secondary

or sterile ('for Lacan, representation is never a mere screen or scene that mirrors the productive process in a limited and distorted way'⁵⁰).

However, a slightly earlier moment in *Absolute Recoil* reveals that, despite above-seen appearances to the contrary, the negativity Žižek posits as the disavowed presupposition qua condition of possibility for Deleuze's neo-Spinozist positivity of the productive, deterritorialised flux of desiring machines falls on neither side of the Lacanian opposition between drive and desire. Instead, and in line with certain of the more philosophically abstract/speculative moments of both *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil*,⁵¹ Žižek muses about an *Urgrund*, an ultimate origin or source, out of which is generated the very distinction between *pulsion* and *désir*. He declares:

Rather than defining the void of negativity around which the drives circulate as the 'pure' death drive, it would be more appropriate to posit a negativity/impossibility that precedes the very distinction between drive and desire, and to conceive of the drive and desire as the two modes of coping with this ontological impasse.⁵²

Žižek's 'ontological impasse' would be a primordial Nothingness or Void as a zero-level baseless base for, among other things, drives, desires and their difference(s). In other contexts, I have expressed critical reservations (ones which Žižek mentions in *Absolute Recoil*⁵³) apropos these moments in the Žižekian *oeuvre* when he looks to be indulging himself in what I dub (paraphrasing Wilfrid Sellars) 'the myth of the non-given', namely intellectual intuitions about the 'x' of an ineffable Negativity floating in an inaccessible time-before-time and from which all existent beings somehow emanate.⁵⁴ Now, I feel it to be appropriate and important to sharpen and specify these criticisms further in connection with the topic of drive and desire as explored throughout the preceding.

Žižek rightly underscores that both F. W. J. Schelling and Hegel take leave of the neo-Platonic and neo-Spinozist aspects of Friedrich Hölderlin's nonetheless pathbreaking critique of J. G. Fichte's quasi-Kantian subjectivist transcendental idealism (i.e. the critique sketched in 1795's 'Über Urtheil und Seyn').⁵⁵ Although this Hölderlin helps inspire and launch what becomes Schelling's objective idealism and Hegel's absolute idealism – both of these idealisms leave behind Kant's and Fichte's subjective idealism(s), departures initiated with 'On Judgement and Being' – Hölderlin's two friends from the *Tübinger Stift* come to consider his alternative to Kant and Fichte unsatisfactory due to its repetition of Spinoza's failures to ask and answer queries as to how and why substance manifests attributes and modes (or 'becomes subject', as the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* would put it). That is to say, Schelling's and

Hegel's eventual dissatisfactions with this Hölderlin are ascribable to the latter's lack of explanations for how and why his 'Being' (the positive of a *Sein* akin to the One of neo-Platonism and the substance of Spinozism) breaks itself to pieces in and through 'Judgement' as Being judging itself (the negative of an *Urtheil* or *Ur-Teilung* akin to the Many of neo-Platonism and the attributes and modes of Spinozism, up to and including the reflexive, reflective metaphysical judgements of Spinoza's (intellectual) intuition). Interestingly, Lacan too, on one occasion, tacitly suggests that a neo-Platonic-, Spinozist- and/or Hölderlinian-style depiction of Freudian 'primary narcissism' (à la the libidinal-affective 'paradise lost' of symbiotic fusion, the 'oceanic feeling', prior to the negations disrupting this presumed harmony and establishing such differences as inside-versus-outside, me-versus-not-me, and self-versus-other) as the neonatal/infantile basis of ontogenetic subject formation renders this same formation (i.e. the emergence of subjectivity) incomprehensible and, indeed, seemingly impossible.⁵⁶ Žižek's own problematisations of (quasi-)Deleuzian 'new materialisms' knowingly echo these specific Hegelian, Schellingian and Lacanian objections against appeals to the pure positivity of a primordial plenitude.⁵⁷

To take up again Žižek's musings in the previous block quotation from *Absolute Recoil*, his hypothesis about a single, sole *Ur*-source giving rise to the antinomic parallax gap between *pulsion* and *désir* strikes me as in danger of amounting to an inadvertent relapse into the neo-Platonism and Spinozism of Hölderlin with which, as Žižek himself correctly stresses, Hegel and Schelling split. It looks here as though some sort of (in a Schellingian phrasing) 'un-pre-thinkable being', the 'ontological impasse' of Žižek's (less than) Nothing, forms an indivisible, irreducible and unanalysable originary unity from which drives, desires and everything else in existence miraculously spring. To be more precise, this risks coming across as neo-Platonism and Spinozism merely with the signs reversed from positive (the surplus of the One or substance) to negative (the deficit of the not-One or negativity). It might similarly be said that this is neo-Spinozism under the sign of negation in the exact Freudian sense of *Verneinung*. As such Žižek's 'less than nothing' ends up being less than (fully) Hegelian.

An uncompromisingly Hegelian alternative to this perhaps compromised Hegelianism of Žižek's recent works, with the drive–desire distinction as a focal point, would be the replacement of the Žižekian primal Void as the groundless ground of this distinction with my grounding of this same distinction outlined above. My alternate account of the convergences and divergences between drive and desire as Žižek describes them mobilises biological evidence so as to provide a science-compatible, epistemologically

responsible explanation of how these convergences and divergences evolve out of the dysfunctional, unreliable, collage-like instincts of a weak nature alone in its spade-turning facticity. This requires no intellectual intuitions of intangible Nothings. Whatever these thought experiments of mine might lack in aesthetic appeal or speculative sexiness they make up for in plausibility and justifiability.

To make explicit the biggest-picture ontological vision implicit in my specific version of drive theory, there are, at the outer limits of what can be discerned of 'in the beginning', the plural positivities of dispersed natural-material multiplicities as the ultimate factual bases of any and every negativity taking shape within and between these many givens (as the givenness of the Many). Combining this *Ur*-facticity with transcendental materialism's more-is-less principle, according to which negativities are generated in and through tensions and conflicts between positivities (such as, within the neuro-evolution of human instincts, the negativities of drives and/or desires arising partly from antagonisms and incompatibilities between the kludgy brain's stem and neocortex),⁵⁸ one has available an utterly non-mystical and thoroughly post-critical (rather than pre-critical) foundation for a dialectical-speculative theoretical edifice integrating philosophy, psychoanalysis and science. Although embracing the label 'transcendental materialism' in *Less Than Nothing*,⁵⁹ Žižek, two years later in *Absolute Recoil*, pointedly rejects it.⁶⁰ I am tempted to suggest that it perhaps is not entirely coincidental that, in this same 2014 book in which this rejection transpires, there also look to be lapses into a position discomfotingly resembling in modified terminological guise the basic metaphysical models of neo-Platonism, Spinozism and Hölderlinian Romanticism Hegel repudiates and Žižek himself likewise seeks to surpass despite these lapses of his. So, I close with proposing the following choice: either transcendental materialism (with its weak nature alone in the forms of, among other things, contingent material facticity and the dialectics of more-is-less) or regression back behind both dialectical materialism and Hegelian dialectical speculation into the darkness of a pre-Kantian night.

Notes

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 3. JoŪston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pp. 123–268; JoŪston, Adrian, 'Contingency, Pure Contingency – Without Any Further Determination: Modal Categories in Hegelian Logic', *Logos* (special issue: 'The New Life of German Idealism', Chepurin, Kirill (ed.)) (forthcoming, 2016); 'Absolutely Contingent: Slavoj Žižek and the Hegelian Contingency of Necessity', in Carew, Joseph and McGrath, Sean (eds), *Rethinking German Idealism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2016), pp. 215–45.
 4. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, pp. 492–3.
 5. *Ibid.* p. 496.
 6. *Ibid.* p. 550.
 7. *Ibid.* pp. 496, 662.
 8. *Ibid.* pp. 497–8, 638–9, 550, 639–40; Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, pp. 89, 373–4.
 9. JoŪston, Adrian, 'Materialism Without Materialism: Slavoj Žižek and the Disappearance of Matter', in Hamza, Agon and Ruda, Frank (eds), *Slavoj Žižek and Dialectical Materialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 3–22.
 10. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 498.
 11. Hegel, G. W. F., *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 10; JoŪston, Adrian, "'Freedom or System? Yes, please!": How to Read Slavoj Žižek's *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*', in Hamza, Agon (ed.), *Repeating Žižek* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 7–42.
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 13. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 499.
 14. *Ibid.* p. 499.
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 17. *Ibid.* p. 499.
 18. Lacan, Jacques, 'Some Reflections on the Ego', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 34 (1953), pp. 11–17.
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 22. *Ibid.* pp. 440–2, 461–3, 484–5, 490, 492–3.
 23. Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, p. 499.
 24. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, pp. 483, 499, 547, 549, 639–40, 884; *Absolute Recoil*, pp. 118–19.
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 26. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, pp. 499, 549, 639–40, 884; *Absolute Recoil*, pp. 118–19.
 27. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, p. 294.

28. Ibid. pp. 455–6.
29. Ibid. pp. 492–3.
30. Ibid. pp. 482–3.
31. Lacan, Jacques, *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan, livre XIV: La logique du fantasme* (unpublished typescript), sessions of 19 April 1967 and 14 June 1967; *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan, livre XVI: D'un Autre à l'autre* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), pp. 134, 218–20, 245, 257; *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan, livre XXI: Les non-dupes errent* (unpublished typescript, 1973–4), session of 19 February 1974.
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