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## Flux qua gap: The Hegelian Deleuze

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**Abstract:** This essay aims to answer the question: how does Žižek reconcile Hegel's immanence of gap with Deleuze's immanence of flux? The contrast between the Deleuzian flux and the Hegelian gap is positivity versus negativity, externality versus internality, and virtuality versus actuality. Via Lacanian not-all, Žižek inserts Hegelian negativity into the absolute positivity of the Deleuzian univocity. In keeping up with Hegelian immanence without externality, Žižek encloses Deleuzian externality by regarding anti-Oedipus as the inner transgression of desire via the shift of perspective. Ending up with the subject supposed to know via retroactivities, the Deleuzian subject as desire finds an affinity with the Hegelian subject of letting-it-be. The reconciliation is mutual. Though Žižek tries to reconcile Deleuzian pure difference with self-identity, and pure repetition with self-sublation and negativity, Hegelian negativity is interpreted as the repetitive death drive, and a Hegelian coherent narration of Hegel-Kierkegaard-Freud-Deleuze is developed. What we get in the end is a Hegelian Deleuze, and Hegel as the Platonist of the virtual.

**Key words:** Deleuze, Hegel, not-all, negativity, the virtual, retroactivity

## **Introduction: Hegel's gap and Deleuze's flux**

Deleuze is well known for his rejection of Hegel. He is “repeatedly making the point that Hegel was a philosopher who should be simply ignored, not worked-through” (Žižek 2012b: 503). But in the eyes of Žižek, Deleuze is Hegelian without awareness: “This absolute rejection, this urge to ‘stupidize’ Hegel, to present a straw man image of him [...] conceals, of course, a disavowed affinity” (Žižek 2012a: 44). What is this disavowed affinity? Both Deleuze and Hegel are philosophers of immanence, but there is a huge difference between them:

The “ultimate fact” of Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism is the absolute immanence of the continuous flux of pure becoming, while the “ultimate fact” of Hegel is the irreducible rupture of/in immanence [...] for Hegel, the gap between phenomena and their transcendent Ground is a secondary effect of the absolutely immanent gap of/in the phenomena themselves. (Žižek 2012a: 54)

Is there any affinity between the immanence of gap and the immanence of flux? This essay aims to answer the question: How does Žižek reconcile Hegel’s immanence with Deleuze’s immanence?

An associated question is: why does Žižek want to reconcile Deleuze with Hegel?

Does not Žižek treat Deleuze like a doctor diagnoses a patient? For Žižek, there are two Deleuzes: a good one and a bad one. The good one is the highly elitist apolitical one, while bad one is the one turning towards Guattari, and their co-authored book *Anti-Oedipus* is Deleuze’s worst book offering a fake solution to Deleuze’s inner deadlock (Žižek 2012a: 18). In the eyes of Žižek,

*Anti-Oedipus* as “The easy escape was the abandoning of a good Lacanian ontology (event as effect) for a bad Guattarian ontology (event as production and becoming): ‘Deleuze deploys the One-Substance as the indifferent medium of multitude’” (Smith 2004: 638). Through the angle of diagnosis, “Perhaps the limits of Deleuze resides in his vitalism, in his elevation of the notion of Life to a new name for Becoming as the only true encompassing Whole, the One-ness, of Being itself”(Žižek 2012a: 25); and Deleuze’s formal genesis (the emergence of reality out of the immanence of impersonal consciousness as the pure flow of Becoming) “comes dangerously close to ‘empiriocriticist’ formulas: the primordial fact is the pure flow of experience, attributable to no subject, neither subjective nor objective—subject and object are, as all fixed entities, just secondary ‘coagulations’ of this flow” (Žižek 2012a:19). In other words, Žižek thinks that Deleuze’s deadlock lies in his insistence on the univocity of being, the plane of consistency: “In his ‘flat ontology,’ all heterogeneous entities of an assemblage can be conceived at the same level, without any ontological exceptions or priorities” (Žižek 2012a: 48). The Deleuzian flux of One-ness and consistency directly conflicts with the Hegelian irreducible rupture of/in the immanence. Again, how does Žižek reconcile Hegel’s immanence of gap with Deleuze’s immanence of flux?

### **Not-all and the univocity of being**

Is not reconciling a flux with a gap anti-intuitive? Gap stands for a break and an interstice, while flux stands for a flow and a consistency, in which “all the displayed phenomena are equalized” (Žižek 2016:19); the Hegelian gap and self-sublation is absolute negativity, while “Deleuze’s great anti-Hegelian motif is that of absolute positivity, his thorough rejection of negativity” (Žižek 2012a: 46). Žižek argues that Hegel’s negativity is ultimately the positivization of negativity itself: “the absence itself is here perceived as a positive fact; we thus

obtain a curious field in which absences accompany presences as just another set of positive facts” (Žižek 2012a: 47). Probably because this argument is far-fetched, Žižek does not go further down this path, instead, Žižek resorts to Lacan: Deleuze is well-known for his indebtedness to Lacan, and “Lacan is fundamentally Hegelian, but without knowing it. His Hegelianism is ...in his logic of the not-all” (Žižek 2005:28).

Lacanian not-all and its inconsistencies are the basis of Hegelian immanence: Hegelian gap within immanence itself is the non-coincidence of the Same with itself; “as the most elementary ontological fact,” Hegelian gap divides the One from within (Žižek 2012a: 61). To reconcile the Hegelian gap with the Deleuzian flux is to impose the Lacanian not-all logic onto Deleuze’s “underlying all-pervasive Sameness” (Žižek 2002: 73). Two concepts are involved: the dark precursor and quasi cause; both of them being “the pure agency of transcendental causality” that prevent the event from being reduced to historical causes (Žižek 2012a: 24). Deleuze’s absolute immanentism rejects any transcendence, which paradoxically implicates that “an effect can transcend its cause,” and the dark precursor is the name of the effect over its cause (Žižek 2012a: 99). In Deleuze’s words, “Thunderbolts explode between different intensities, but they are preceded by an invisible, imperceptible dark precursor, which determines their path in advance, but in reverse, as though intagliated” (Deleuze 1994:119). As an excessive pseudo element, the dark precursor functions as a mediator or catalyst to hold the linear relations (Žižek 2012a: 100), and the quasi cause functions as “the metacause of the very excess of the effect over its (corporeal) causes” to prevent the emergence of the New from being reduced to “its historical circumstances” (Žižek 2012a: 24).

The dark precursor and quasi cause indicate that the subject can transcend its conditions, just like the Italian neorealism can transcend its historical circumstances of World War II (Žižek 2012a: 10). They are like Lacan’s objet a

“that lacks its place in the structure [...] an excessive element lacking its place would still sustain the fantasy of some yet unknown place waiting for it” (Žižek 2012a: 82-83):

a reference to Lacan’s logic of “non-All” could be of some help. What if we read the incompleteness of the (physical) causal links as the obverse of the fact that there is no exception to them, no other causality? And, what if, on the contrary, we conceive the completeness/closure of the physical as relying on, as involving, a metaphysical exception, a divine or spiritual ground? It is the gap in physical causality as such that opens up the space of freedom, without being filled with another positive causality—as Deleuze expressed it, the only causality “beyond and above” the corporeal one is that of the immaterial quasi cause. (Žižek 2012a: 102)

In short, “either subjectivity is an illusion or reality is in itself (not only epistemologically) not-All” (Žižek 2012a: 103). Conclusion: the Deleuzian univocity of being is the ontological non-self-coincidence and non-closure. The Hegelian gap is successfully inserted into the Deleuzian plane. An other way to insert Lacanian not-all logic into the Deleuzian flux is via the conflict inherent in Deleuze’s conceptual edifice:

On the one hand, the logic of sense, of the immaterial becoming as the sense-event, as the effect of bodily-material processes-causes, the logic of the radical gap between generative process and its immaterial sense-effect [...] On the other hand, the logic of becoming as the production of Beings (Žižek 2014: 374-375).

The opposition between the becoming as a productive process and the becoming as a sterile effect is the opposition between “the productive flux of desire and the sterility of the event,” and “the opposition between desire and drive” (Žižek 2014: 376). Žižek interprets this opposition as the gap that separates the One from within, because if the univocity of being is ontology,

then, to account for the gap between Being and Event, one either remains stuck in dualism or one has to dismiss the Event as an ultimately illusory local occurrence within the encompassing order of Being. Against this notion of multiplicity, one should assert as the ultimate ontological given the gap that separates the One from within. (Žižek 2012a: 96)

Thus the univocity of being is inorganic and antagonistic; the absolute positivity is nothing but “a retroactive ideological fantasy that obfuscates the fact that this original unity never existed, that it is a retroactive projection generated by the process of splitting” (Žižek 2012b: 475). Or, we can put it another way: the Deleuzian univocity of being reaches the standpoint of the absolute positivity when the becoming coincides with the being, when desire fully overlaps with the drive.

### **Oedipus as desiring machine**

Hegelian immanence is absolute internality without externality. By contrast, as an absolute positivity and equation, Deleuzian immanence thoroughly rejects internality: “every obstacle comes from outside [...] nothing can be destroyed from within, for all change must come from without” (Žižek 2012a: 31).

Deleuzian absolute externalization of obstacles is problematic in the eyes of Hegel. For Hegel, antagonism is always the antagonism of/in the One (Žižek

2012a: 60): “the failure of reality to fully actualize an Idea is simultaneously the failure (limitation) of this Idea itself continues to hold [...] the gap separating Idea from its actualization signals a gap within this Idea itself” (Žižek 2009: 209); external obstacles arise from the fact that we are finite and inconsistent and serve for our illusion of self-consistency. According to this logic, Oedipus as the enemy and the external obstacle just reflects the immanent inconsistency of desire and serves to maintain the illusion of consistency; in fighting the external Oedipus, desire fights its own core (Žižek 2012b: 200-201). It is not Oedipus that is opposed to becoming but it is becoming itself that is the form of Oedipus. The antagonism between desire and Oedipus is not outside conflict, but the inner irreducible confrontation in desire itself.

To smoothly transform Oedipus from external opposition to the inherent self-opposition of desire, the Lacanian logic of not-all is needed again: “A is not just not-B, it is also and primarily not fully A, and B emerges to fill in this gap” (Žižek 2016: 27); the desire itself is not just desire, it is also and primarily not fully desire, and repression emerges to fill in this gap. In *Anti-Oedipus*, desire itself generates its repression: the force of repression is “inherent to desire [...] in Deleuze, desire is the encompassing unity of itself and its ‘repression’ (i.e., its negating force)” (Žižek 2012a: 64). This inherent repression in desire is Oedipus. The questions are: why is desire a not-all set? Can the logic of not-all be applied to anything? Even if desire is a not-all set, why is the complement repression, rather than something else? How can repression be so easily equated with the Oedipus? In the book *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek offers an explanation:

Mead-Malinowski myth of the free, non-inhibited sexuality reigning in the South Pacific primitives [...] merely projects into the spatio-historical Other of ‘primitive Societies’ the fantasy of a ‘free

sexuality' rooted in our own historical context. In this way [...] it remains caught in the co-ordinates of one's own historical horizon precisely in its attempt to imagine a 'radical' Otherness—in short, anti-Oedipus is the ultimate Oedipal myth. (Žižek 1999: 72)

The one caught in the co-ordinates of one's own historical horizon is the Hegelian inherently pathological subject: subjects are "included in reality, embedded in it, and whose perspectives on reality are none the less constitutive of it" (Žižek 1999: 78). With regard to Deleuze, the reality is the Oedipus itself, and desire is constitutive of the Oedipus; the Desire cannot be distinguished and separated from the Oedipus, rather, desire is mediated by the Oedipus; the Oedipus is not an external limitation, but a radical split into desire itself; once we remove the Oedipus, we remove desire itself.

In other words, desire is the fantasy rooted in our Oedipal society; desire and the Oedipus are not the opposite poles, but the one itself. What is involved is the mechanism of the shift of perspective. Like Hegel inscribes Law into the crime, and makes law itself "the supreme form of crime" (Žižek 2012a: 59), Žižek makes Oedipus into the inherent self-impediment of desire. No real act is needed. What is needed is to change "the way we perceive and relate to it" to get a skewed perspective (Žižek 2012b: 202):

the question to be asked is not "How does the Oedipal matrix repress the free flow of the desiring machines?" but, rather, "What kind of a desiring machine is Oedipus?" [...] the Oedipus complex, in its oppositional determinations, is the place at which the very force of the repression of the desiring machines encounters ITSELF in its Otherness, as one among the desiring machines. (Žižek 2012a: 59-60)



Oedipus is the desiring machine itself, or the desiring machine is Oedipus itself. There is no externality, what we have is only internality, “a closed economy in which the self-movement of the Concept sublates all differences and every dispersion of the material process” (Žižek 2005: 29). But, what a bizarre picture we get! The univocity of being that “dismiss all notions of ontological hierarchy” (Žižek 2016: 19) “assembling all the heterogeneous elements within the same ‘plane of consistency’” (Žižek 2012a: 49) turns into the space exerting repression, opposition, and antagonism. The mechanism behind is quite simple: with the aid of Lacanian not-all plus the shift of perspective, we get the bizarre picture—“the wound is already in itself its own healing” (Žižek 1999: 71); Oedipus is inherent in the desiring machine.

### **Retroactivity and the subject supposed to know**

Maybe the picture is not that bizarre if we keep shifting our perspective so that “there never really was a serious conflict,” and “the two opponents were always on the same side” (Žižek 2012b: 204). A shifting perspective is always retroactive. We find the mechanism of retroactivity everywhere in Žižek’s reconciliation. The dark precursor and quasi cause can only make sense via retroactivity: the excess of the effect over its causes means that “the effect is retroactively the cause of its cause” (Žižek 2012a: 110). As a mediator, a catalyst, and a suture to hold the linear relations, the dark precursor and quasi cause can only be read in reverse to avoid mistaking effects for causes (Žižek 2012b: 937); they turn into “a kind of ‘vanishing mediator’ whose traces are to be erased in the finished result” (Žižek 2012a: 73).

Retroactivity explains the notion of problem shared by Deleuze and Hegel: “actual reality can only be grasped as a series of answers to a virtual problem” (Žižek 2012b: 215); answers not only actualize the problem, but also redefine

the problem retroactively—as Deleuze points out, the human eye not only reacts to the flow of light, but retroactively redefines and formulates the light; for Hegel, different forms of the state not only proposes a solution to the Idea of the State, but also redefines the Idea itself (Žižek 2012b:214).

There is a homology between the notion of the pure past and the notion of the problem: what lies behind is the same mechanism of retroactivity.

Deleuze's notion of pure past is both an absolute past and a virtual past: the Deleuzian pure past “already contains things which are still present”, but in the meanwhile it “must also be amenable to change through the occurrence of any new present” (Žižek 2012b: 207-208). We depend on the past, in the meanwhile we can change the past retroactively. Only from the teleological retroactivity can we understand Deleuze's epigram that “my wound existed before me; I was born to embody it”: not only do I actualize my wound, but I also retroactively change my wound (Žižek 2012b: 213-214).

The Hegelian Act and the Deleuzian New come from this absolute and amenable past: each of them is the thing that will have been necessary; each of them “not only designates a break with the entire past, but retroactively changes this past itself” (Žižek 2012b: 218). Once again, externality is wiped out: externality is “eventually overcome in the self-mediation of the absolute Idea that ends up suturing all wounds” (Žižek 2005: 26); the Deleuzian New is encased into the “radical historical closure (there is no metalanguage, no way of looking at oneself from the outside)” (Žižek 2012b: 502). We end up with the subject supposed to know: if the power of the Deleuzian New and the Hegelian Act is retroactively to change the past, if “a consistent story can always be told after the event [...] no matter how confused the events themselves” (Žižek 2012b: 225), the subject is not the subject of act, or the subject as the flow of becoming, but the subject supposed to know, which can always magically generate a consistent order in the end. Only from this angle can we

understand the Hegelian decentering subject of letting-it-be:

in Hegel's philosophy, the fundamental stance of the subject towards objective reality is not that of practical engagement, of confrontation with the inertia of objectivity, but that of letting-it-be: purified of its pathological particularity, the universal subject is certain of itself, it knows that its thought already is the form of reality, so it can renounce enforcing its projects upon reality, it can let reality be the way it is. (Žižek 2012b: 202)

Isn't the decentering Hegelian subject of letting-it-be close to the Deleuzian subject of becoming? In Deleuze's formulas, "the subject is not a person, but the unending process of division/repetition" (Žižek 2012a: 61); both subject and object as fixed entities are secondary to the impersonal pure flow of Becoming (Žižek 2012a: 19) as "a pure a-subjective current of consciousness, an impersonal prereflexive consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without self" (Žižek 2012a: 4). The Hegelian gesture here is that "the subject passes into its predicate": "at the beginning of the process, Desire generates the structure of Power, which then, retroactively, poses itself as the process' subject [...] so that the process is not the process of a subject, but generates new subjects of itself" (Žižek 2012a: 64-65).

In this sense, for both the Hegelian subject of letting-it-be and the Deleuzian subject as desire, "subjectivity is the site of 'true infinity'": what is infinite is not the "sterile repetition of the same," but "the subjective urge to go beyond" and "the very ACT of going-beyond" (Žižek 2012a: 62). Whether we are caught in the Deleuzian flow of becoming, or in the Hegelian very moment of an act, "we experience the abyss of history's 'openness,' we are forced to choose; afterward, when we cast a retrospective gaze on it, its course loses

the character of 'becoming' and appears as the manifestation of some 'eternal necessity' (Žižek 2008: 93). In other words, for both the Hegelian subject of letting-it-be and the Deleuzian subject as desire, "the new...is always a 'state that is essentially a by-product,' never the result of advance planning" (Žižek 2008:53), thus both of them are "the self-identical foundation/ground of a process, and not yet S, the empty, nonsubstantial subject" (Žižek 2012a: 65). This "not yet S" leads to the subject supposed to know that always ends up with a rational totality via retroactivities.

### **Pure difference, pure repetition, and Hegelian negativity**

The contrast between the Deleuzian immanence of flux versus Hegelian immanence of gap is also positivity versus negativity, externality versus internality, and virtuality versus actuality. Žižek has so far dissolved the first two contrasts, but there is still a way to go. For one thing, the pure difference, goes far beyond Hegel theoretical mansion:

Deleuze's most radical anti-Hegelian argument concerns this pure difference: Hegel is unable to think pure difference which is outside the horizon of identity/contradiction; Hegel conceives a radicalized difference as contradiction which, then, through its dialectical resolution, is again subsumed under identity [...] Hegel's inability to think pure difference is linked to his inability to think the virtual in its proper dimension, as a possibility which already qua possibility possesses its own reality: pure difference is not actual, it does not concern different actual properties of a thing or differences among things, its status is purely virtual, it is a difference which takes place at its purest precisely when nothing changes in actuality, when, in actuality, the same thing repeats itself. It may appear that it is only

Deleuze who formulates the truly post-Hegelian program of thinking difference. (Žižek 2012b: 481-482)

The radicalness of Deleuzian pure difference lies in that it is something outside actual identity—the virtual, which is alien to Hegel’s philosophy of actualization. There are two paths to bridge the Hegelian actual and the Deleuzian virtual: first, via the Lacanian not-all—to prove that the virtual comes from the Lacanian not-all, thus equating Hegel’s gap with Deleuze’s pure difference. The problem with this path is that the Hegelian gap is always the gap of actual identity—the gap “between the phenomenal and the noumenal” that “sustains freedom” (Žižek 2012a: 38), so the second path is needed: via identity—to prove that pure difference is the virtual support of actual self-identity, thus the virtual is subordinated to the actual.

The second path is the extended version of the first one. The virtualization is inherent to reality because reality is inherently indeterminate, incomplete, and inconsistent; “to transpose the incompleteness and openness [...] into the thing itself” is to transpose “the surplus of the virtual over the actual” (Žižek 2012a: 52). Since not-all is the inner logic of reality, Žižek goes further attributing this inner logic to each identity:

The starting point of Deleuze's “transcendental empiricism” is that there is always a hidden virtual aspect to any given determined/actual object or process: actual things are not ontologically “complete”; in order to get a complete view of them, we must add to it its virtual supplement. This move from an actual given thing to its virtual conditions is the transcendental move, the deployment of the transcendental conditions of the given. (Žižek 2010)

The pure difference is this virtual supplement of each identity “that differentiates an element not from other particular elements but from itself, from its own place of inscription,” which is “the very core of Hegelian dialectics” (Žižek 2012a: 58). As for the argument that the pure difference is not actual but virtual, not about identity/contradiction but about an infinite inner process of differentiation,

the Hegelian counter-argument would be: is not “pure” virtual difference the very name for actual self-identity? Is it not constitutive of actual identity? More precisely, in the terms of Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism, pure difference is the virtual support or condition of actual identity: an entity is perceived as “(self-) identical” when (and only when) its virtual support is reduced to a pure difference. In Lacanese, pure difference concerns the supplement of the virtual object (Lacan’s objet a); its most plastic experience is that of a sudden change in (our perception of) an object which, with regard to its positive qualities, remains the same: “although nothing changes, the thing all of a sudden seemed totally different”—as Deleuze would have put it, it is the thing’s intensity which changes. (Žižek 2012b: 482)

As the virtual supplement of each identity, pure difference functions as Lacan’s objet a in the sense of virtual intensities: it does not differentiate an element “from other particular elements but from itself, from its own place of inscription, the minimal difference which, instead of securing the (specific) identity of the element in question, explodes this identity into the in(de)finite generative process of differentiation” (Žižek 2012a: 58). The conclusion is that: “there is no ‘pure’ difference outside actuality, the virtual sphere of differences only persists-insists as a shadow accompanying actual identities and their

interactions” (Žižek 2010); “pure difference is closer to the inner antagonism of one positive social group than to the difference between two positive social groups, one of which is to be annihilated” (Žižek 2012b: 482). Here we find the Hegelian logic of absolute internality again, thus the criticism Deleuze puts on Hegel also suits Žižek: Žižekian reconciliation as well as “Hegelian negativity is precisely the way to subordinate difference to Identity, to reduce it to a sublated moment of identity’s self-mediation” (Žižek 2012a: 46-47).

From the pure difference comes the pure repetition, which again goes beyond Hegel’s frame. Hegel cannot think about the pure repetition—“a repetition not yet caught in the movement of sublation or idealization” (Žižek 2012b: 500):

In Hegel, repetition plays a crucial role, but within the economy of *Aufhebung*: through a mere repetition, an immediacy is elevated into universality, a contingency is transformed into necessity—after Caesar’s death, “Caesar” is repeated no longer as the designation of a particular individual, but as the name of a universal title. There is no place, within Hegel’s system, for thinking “pure” repetition, a repetition not yet caught in the movement of *Aufhebung*. (Žižek 2012b: 491)

The solution is to equate Deleuzian repetition with Hegelian self-sublation. The operation goes as following: what repetition repeats is the virtual minimal difference; to repeat is “to subtract this minimal difference”; this “subtraction is also another name for the Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*) or negation of negation” (Žižek 2012b: 483); thus Deleuzian repetition is Hegelian self-sublation. The remaining problem is:

pure repetition (in contrast to repetition as idealizing sublation) is sustained precisely by its impurity, by the persistence of a contingent 'pathological' element to which the movement of repetition gets and remains stuck [...] according to Deleuze, the New arises through repetition: things flow, they follow their usual course of incessant change, and then, all of sudden, something gets stuck, interrupts the flow, imposing itself as New by way of its very persistence. (Žižek 2012b: 500-501)

Deleuze's New is interpreted as the sudden interruption of the flow, the moment the flow gets stuck in a contingent pathological element: "the minimal definition of the New is as the Old which gets stuck and thereby refuses to pass away" (Žižek 2012b: 483). This stuck in the contingent pathological element is missing in Hegel's notion of negativity. Žižek's solution is to claim that "at its zero-level, negativity is not a destructive annihilation of whatever there is; it rather appears as a sudden immobilization of the normal flow of things—at some point, things get stuck, a singularity persists beyond its proper term" (Žižek 2012b: 501). The contingent pathological element is "the 'material basis' for idealizing negativity," just like "the contingent 'irrational' figure of the monarch" as the material basis that embodies "the rational state as a universal totality mediating all particular content" (Žižek 2012b: 503).

The contingent pathological element smoothly leads to the definition of the problem shared by Deleuze and Hegel: A problem is ontological, and each solution to a problem is the contingent pathological element. Žižek concludes, "What Deleuze missed was how his own thought of pure repetition only works as a weird sublation of Hegel": pure repetition is "an answer to Hegelian problem, its hidden core, which is why it can only be properly located within the



Hegelian problematic—once we enter the post-Hegelian world, the concept of repetition is ‘renormalized’ and loses its subversive edge” (Žižek 2012b: 503).

### **Hegel-Kierkegaard-Freud-Deleuze: negativity qua the virtual**

One of Žižek’s strategies of reconciling Deleuze with Hegel is drawing the equality between the different elements of these two philosophers, in a more or less straightforward way. Equation means mutual concession. In the book *Less than Nothing*, Žižek demonstrates hesitation and indeterminacy about the virtual, pure difference, and pure repetition. Regarding the equation of Deleuzian pure difference with Hegelian gap, pure difference with the virtual support of actual self-identity, pure repetition with self-sublation, the stuck in the contingent pathological element with Hegelian negativity, Žižek is not fully satisfied, because “the crux of the post-Hegelian rupture [...] the gap that emerges between sublation and repetition” remains (Žižek 2012b: 483):

that is, repetition acquires autonomy with regard to sublation, and the two are now opposed—either a thing is sublated into a higher mode of its existence, or it just drags on in its inertia. This “liberation” of repetition from the hold of sublation, this idea of a non-cumulative repetition which just runs on empty, not generating anything new, is usually taken as the minimal index of post-Hegelian materialism, in its break with the Hegelian circle of total conceptual mediation. ...As Lacan points out in his Seminar II, another name for this excess of repetition over organic progress is mechanism: what the post-Hegelian thought brings out is the notion of a non-cumulative mechanical repetition. (Žižek 2012b: 483).

In other words, tailoring the virtual to the actual does not really solve the

divergence, because the challenge is the non-cumulative mechanical repetition that just drags on in its inertia and autonomy, which breaks with the Hegelian circle of negativity. For Deleuze, pure repetition

cannot be contained in the idealist movement of sublation [...] There is no complementarity between these two aspects, they mutually exclusive: repetition relies on the blockage of direct positive affirmation, we repeat because it is impossible to directly affirm [...] the compulsion to repeat introduces an obscene infinity or “immortality”—not spiritual immortality, but an immortality of “spirits,” of the living dead. (Žižek 2012b: 493).

Žižek admits that pure repetition cannot be equated with the idealist movement of sublation. The only way left is to confront the immortality of the living dead: the death drive. The death drive, as the other name of the Deleuzian virtual, overlaps with pure difference, pure repetition, desire, and becoming. That is why Badiou regards Deleuze as an “involuntary Platonist,” and Deleuze’s philosophy as “a system of thought whose final identity is that of a ‘Platonism of the virtual’” (Badiou 2000: xiii). By contrast, “Hegel is the philosopher of actuality/actualization, insofar as, for him, the ‘truth’ of a potentiality is revealed in its actualization” (Žižek 2012b: 481). Žižek has reconciled the pure difference and pure repetition with self-identity and self-sublation, thus subordinated the virtual to the actual, but here he surprisingly goes to the opposite: subordinating the actual to the virtual by claiming that the death drive is inherent in Hegelian abstract negativity. Similar to Deleuze’s treating the flux of desire as the by-product of the virtual, Hegel’s “affirmation of an irreducible excess of the problem over its solution(s) [...] is the same as the excess of the virtual over its actualizations” (Žižek 2012a: 50). Further, the Hegelian

“negation as the universalizing abolition of particular content” is “inherent to idealization”, and the death drive as the compulsion to repeat “lies at the heart of negativity” (Žižek 2012b: 493). Žižek concludes, only from the angle of the death drive can we answer questions like “Why does the dialectical process always go on? Why does dialectical mediation always continue its work” (Žižek 2012b: 492).

There is thus a core that resists the subject’s full reconciliation with his second nature: the Freudian name for this kernel is drive, the Hegelian name for it is “abstract negativity” (or, in the more poetic terms of the young Hegel, the “night of the world”). Is this not why Hegel insists on the necessity of war which, from time to time, must allow the subject to regain the taste for abstract negativity and shake off his full immersion in the concrete totality of the social Substance qua his “second Nature”? (Žižek 1999: 82).

The emancipatory power of Hegelian abstract negativity as the Freudian death drive lies in its disavowal of the full immersion in reality. In this sense, Hegelian negation is Deleuzian repetition—“an obstinate repetitive fixation on a contingent object which subtracts the subject from its direct immersion in reality” (Žižek 2012b: 496). It is through the death drive, Hegelian ontological identity is subordinate to the pure becoming that “thoroughly extracted from its corporeal base” (Žižek 2012a: 8); Hegelian idealism is subordinate to Deleuzian vitalism; Hegelian individuality as universal is subordinate to Deleuzian universality as individual. Hegel, the master of the actual, is now speaking the same language with Deleuze, the master of the virtual: the death drive = negativity = the objet a = “the Real =

desiring—production” (Smith 2004: 641). In this sense, Hegel’s basic operation of negativity,

the core of Hegelian dialectics, inaccessible to Hegel himself, is the repetitive (death) drive which becomes visible after the post-Hegelian break. But why should there not be at the base of dialectics a tension between dialectics and its non-dialectizable core? In this sense, the death drive or the compulsion to repeat is the heart of negativity, Hegel’s non-thematized presupposition—inaccessible not only to him, but, perhaps, to philosophy as such: its outlines were first deployed by a theologian (Kierkegaard) and a (meta-) psychologist (Freud), and a century later a philosopher (Deleuze) incorporated Kierkegaard’s and Freud’s lesson. (Žižek 2012b: 492-493)

If there is a best example of Hegelian retroactivity, it is this: just like Borges finds the multitude of precursors for Kafka, Žižek finds the multitude of descendants for Hegel—Kierkegaard, Freud, and Deleuze, and draws a perfect circle among these four philosophers. The Hegelian story of Absolute Knowing goes like this: “it is Hegel who offers a series of Vers, of displaced variations of negativity, and it is only in psychoanalysis, through Freud and Lacan, that we can formulate the elementary form of negativity” (Žižek 2012b: 493). Via this retroactive ideological projection, the death drive becomes the very support and evidence of Hegel—the mechanism of the movement of the Hegelian spirit. Hegel and Deleuze, the radical opponent of Hegel, are hand in hand living in the same family of the virtual.

## **Conclusion**

Now we have a clear map about how Žižek reconciles Deleuzian immanence

of flux with Hegelian immanence of gap: inserting Hegelian negativity and gap into the Deleuzian absolute positivity of being via Lacanian not-all; based on Lacanian not-all, making anti-Oedipus the inner transgression of desire by shifting the perspective; pointing out the affinity between the Hegelian subject of letting-it-be and the Deleuzian subject as desire, and making these two subjects end up with the subject supposed to know via retroactivities; making pure difference the virtual support of actual self-identity and equating pure repetition as self-sublation and negativity; claiming that the compulsion to repeat is the death drive that lies at the heart of Hegelian negativity, and developing a coherent narration of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Freud, and Deleuze.

For Deleuze, the history of philosophy is a sort of buggery: "I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous" (Deleuze 1995:6). Žižek is a disciple of Deleuze in this sense. After "the Hegelian buggery of Deleuze" (Žižek 2012a: 43), a rebellious Deleuze is domesticated into the classical Hegelian grids; we get a Hegelian Deleuze. We have the feeling that Žižek can take any philosophers from behind and engender a Hegelian-Lacanian offspring. But, is not the buggery a two-way road? In the whole of Žižek's effort, Lacanian not-all is both entry point and pivot point: it is universal and ontological in its effects. *Objet a*, negativity, gap, the virtual, the dark precursor, the quasi cause, retroactivity, the pure difference, the pure repetition, and the death drive, all these concepts that enable the Žižekian equations are led to or derived from Lacanian not-all. As a philosopher of the virtual, Deleuze has no difficulty recognizing Lacanian logic of not-all in his theoretical edifice. But Hegel, the philosopher of actualization, has to move toward to the direction of the virtual in the effort of reconciliation. We end up finding Hegel an involuntary Platonist, and Hegel's philosophy the Platonism of the death drive. Not only does Žižek insert Hegelian negativity into Deleuze's ontology of positivity, wiping off the

externality from Deleuze's concept edifice, but he also recognizes the non-dialectizable Deleuzian virtual repetition in the Hegelian mansion of actualization. Hegel, the philosopher of actuality/actualization, becomes a Platonist of the virtual. The buggery indeed is mutual.

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