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Difference, Repetition, and the N[on(e)-All]: The Parallaxic Mirror of Žižek and Deleuze

Samantha Bankson, Sierra Nevada

Abstract

The ontologies of Slavoj Žižek and Gilles Deleuze are incommensurable. Rather than appropriate one at the expense of the other, this essay uses Žižek's notion of parallax to think the two philosophers together, without mediation. Both Deleuze and Žižek provide mirrored philosophical images, with the point of divergence being absolute lack. Deleuze argues that lack, or the being of negation, is an error of representational understanding, while Žižek conceives his philosophy as being driven by absolute lack. A stark opponent of Žižek's precursor, Hegel, Deleuze rejects opposition as a constitutive feature of reality. However, Žižek mirrors Deleuze's very concepts in his Lacanian reading of Hegel, while said concepts retain identical terms. For instance, Žižek calls *l'objet petit a* "difference," while his term for absolute negation is "repetition," and finally, he refers to his philosophical system as the "non-All". These singular concepts in Žižek's thought share an identical language with that of Deleuze. Deleuze's philosophy is one of "difference," while its mode of proliferation is "repetition," and finally, he often refers to his philosophy as the "One-All". Mapping these common terms that do not denote a common language, but incommensurable, inverse logics, it becomes evident that Deleuze and Žižek are mirror images of one another, infinitely fragmenting across the expanse of their respective positions. Thus, by triangulating ontology from their unique perspectives, a new ontological shift emerges—one that resists mediation and admixture.

“Where there was once one, there are now two. Or were there always two? What is a reflection? A chance to see two? When there are chances for reflections, there can always be two — or more. Only when we are everywhere will there be just one.” —The Log Lady¹



Invoking Hegel in his re-appropriation of stellar parallax, Slavoj Žižek explains that the apparent displacement of an object cannot simply be attributed to incommensurable subjective points of observation on said object, since “subject and object are inherently ‘mediated,’ so that an ‘epistemological’ shift in the subject’s point of view always reflects an ‘ontological’ shift in the object itself.”² Or in Lacanian terms, Žižek explains that the subject’s gaze is always-already inscribed in the perceived object; in other words, “the abyss also looks into you.”³ But what happens when this abyss, this parallax gap, looks into Žižek? What happens when the ontological object of the parallax view is ontology itself? By staging the incommensurable epistemological positions of the last century’s two greatest anti-philosophy nemeses, Gilles Deleuze and Slavoj Žižek, as divergent points of view on ontology-as-object, difference-in-itself shifts within the dark star of ontology, thus producing the radically new. In order to maintain the minimal difference of the parallax view, we must resist the temptation to read Deleuze, the self-proclaimed anti-Hegelian, through Žižek’s dialectical materialism. Nor should we use Deleuze’s concept of constructivism to take Žižek from behind, a methodology of Deleuze’s that Žižek admittedly adopts as his own with respect to the history of philosophy. Instead, a revised version of parallax will be used to transform the philosophical process of unilateral “buggery” into an act of mutual *misrecognition*,

giving birth to a multiplicity of monstrous children.⁴ The result is an ontological shift that involves a both/and for Deleuze's becoming and Žižek's dialectic, without subordinating one to the other. Employing a Žižekian-Deleuzian parallax does not amount to some sort of Habermasian consensus, but produces an ontological reverberation between dialectical materialism and becoming, without subjecting one to the other. Furthermore, the spaces where the two thinkers overlap are to be treated through disjunctive synthesis, where mediation is precluded.

For Žižek, it is the *l'objet petit a*—the indivisible lack, or what he often calls “‘pure’ difference”—which forms a gap in the symbolic order that cannot be dialectically mediated and must be triangulated in order to appear.⁵ As he explains, “*L'objet petit a* can thus be defined as a pure parallax object: it is not only that its contours change with the shift of the subject; it only exists - its presence can only be discerned - when the landscape is viewed from a certain perspective” (Žižek 2009: 18). Since the object only exists through the divergent, subjective positions that constitute the parallax view, triangulating the epistemologies of Deleuze and Žižek creates a new ontological shift that cannot be sublated, yet reverberates across their respective positions. Rather than take *l'objet petit a* (pure difference) as the parallax object, ontology itself becomes the parallax object triangulated by two philosophical positions which contain opposing notions of pure difference. Subsequently, when ontology is taken as the object of two diverse philosophies of difference, the concept of pure difference itself undergoes a shift. This can be ascribed to the incommensurable uses Žižek and Deleuze give to the terms “difference” and “repetition” within their respective philosophies. Though “difference” and “repetition” appear as key features of both philosophers' systems, these common terms do not denote common languages. The parallax view, then, will be re-appropriated in such a way to mirror the divergence of difference and repetition as they operate across Deleuze's “One-All” philosophy and that of Žižek's “non-All.” One point of view is Deleuze's nomadology, which he sometimes refers to as the One-All, and another point of triangulation is its re-appropriation in Žižek's philosophy, the non-All. Their point of contention centers precisely on the possibility of *nothing*. In this essay I will delineate the incommensurable positions of Deleuze and Žižek along three axes explicitly taken up by both thinkers: difference, repetition, and the n[on(e)-all]. By

tracking these concepts in concert, the mirroring of the two philosophers reveals an incommensurable gap between everything and nothing.

I. Why Construct a Parallax through Deleuze and Žižek?

Why apply the notion of parallax to the philosophies of Žižek and Deleuze? What is to be gained by thinking of them together? Everything and nothing. The opposition of these two figures has been elevated in contemporary Continental philosophy in no small part due to Žižek's critical book on Deleuze, *Organs without Bodies*, and his consistent engagement with the latter in numerous other published works.⁶ Deleuze and Žižek are philosophy's most pronounced stylists since Friedrich Nietzsche, as if strange bedfellows whose central point of contention is Georg Wilhelm Hegel. Even more than Lacan, who served to provide productive re-appropriations for Deleuze's (and Guattari's) philosophy,⁷ and structurally brings Žižek much closer to Deleuze,⁸ the Hegelian dialectic marks the primordial schism between the two thinkers. Deleuze takes up the Bergsonian claim that the Hegelian dialectic employs abstract concepts that, like baggy clothes, are too large to account for real difference (Deleuze 1991: 44).⁹ For him, the process of opposition in the Hegelian dialectic amounts to a false movement that casts a net so vast that everything slips through it (Ibid.: 45). Instead, Deleuze creates a vitalist ontology that rejects what he calls the dogmatic "image of thought", taking to task its four specious shackles: analogy, resemblance, identity, and, most notably, opposition. Opposition, especially as it functions in the Hegelian dialectic, is unable to account for difference without subordinating it to identity, says Deleuze. The ontological object, then, of Deleuze's philosophical project is difference in-itself.

Almost 40 years after the publication of *Difference and Repetition*, Žižek comes to the defense of the Dialectic, calling Deleuze's misreading of Hegel "strangely reductionist," stating that he produces a "flat, totally homogeneous image of the Enemy" (Žižek 2004: 70). And Žižek uses an alternative logic of pure difference (as *lack*) to confront Deleuze's philosophy head-on. If difference is shown to be absolute lack, then the eternal return of difference is the eternal return of absolute lack, contributing to a philosophical system of the non-all, a repetition of gaps, voids, and nothing. This is precisely the move Žižek makes in his reading of Deleuze; Deleuze is

reconfigured as Žižek, or as Daniel Smith describes, “a kind of Žižekian *avant la lettre*.” (Smith 2012: 314). Despite Deleuze’s allegedly flat reification of the enemy in his criticisms of Hegel, the same criticism can be turned against Žižek and his literally cartoonish reading of Deleuze’s philosophy. In *The Parallax View*, for instance, he asks, “[I]s not the ontology of cartoons that of pure becoming in Deleuze’s precise sense of the term?” and pursuing this analogy, he states that

[c]artoons take place in a universe of radical plasticity, in which entities are deprived of all substance and reduced to pure surface: they literally possess no depth, there is nothing beneath their surface skin, no meat, bones and blood inside [..].(Žižek 2004: 168-9)

A clear mockery of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the Body without Organs, Žižek likens the former’s ontology to organ-less, bloodless cartoons, and we get a glimpse of Žižek’s own reductionist misreading. He conflates the two sub-representational temporal registers of becoming in his depiction of Deleuze’s philosophy, failing to acknowledge the divergent and convergent processes that constitute a tripartite ontology: sensory becoming, absolute becoming, and effectuated being.¹⁰ The absolute becoming of the Event, the aspect of Deleuze that Žižek fixates upon in his writings, does not occur in a substanceless vacuum, nor is it the only mode of becoming. He creates a straw man out of Deleuze, just as Žižek accuses Deleuze of having done to Hegel, resulting in the spurious claim that Deleuze is not a philosopher of multiplicity, but a philosopher of the One.¹¹ Not only does Žižek fail to address the complexity of Deleuzian multiplicity, he also states that his philosophy involves incompatible dualist ontologies of “Becoming versus Being” (Zizek 2004: 28). Deleuze’s reading of Hegel, and Žižek’s reading of Deleuze, are riddled with errors, and such a difficulty arises when attempting to mediate two incommensurable philosophical positions.

The antagonistic positions of constructivist becoming and dialectical materialism offer two of the most compelling speculative theories on reality in the past 50 years. The tendency of Deleuze and Žižek to offer superficial, either/or misreadings of their oppositional philosophical systems is what makes the use of parallax so beneficial; it transforms an “is not” into an “and”. The two thinkers offer mirrored philosophies, and

while it is possible to appropriate one through the other, we do so at the risk of diluting and muting their respective positions. Thus, the object of the present study is not to determine which thinker has a superior system of thought, or what happens when we interpret one through the other, but what is opened up when they are thought simultaneously in suspension, without admixture. When constructing a parallax from each perspective, we triangulate a new ontological object, which illuminates universes of meaning that would not otherwise be possible. We can *both* have Žižek's strawberry cake *and* eat Deleuze's raspberry jam, too.¹²

II. Difference

While it is possible to construct a parallax view out of a variety of epistemological regimes, it is the so-called subjective positions of Deleuze and Žižek that make it possible to think a radically new ontology as a function of their mirror images of difference. By staging an encounter between two irreconcilable philosophies of difference—on one hand, the unconditioned excess of becoming; and the other, an primordial, excessive object of lack emptied of all positive substance¹³—dialectical materialism is no longer the reigning ontological order, a philosophical all or nothing, but is revolutionized to become all *and* nothing. This shift in method arises out of the ontological shift of “difference” between the two. The lack posed by pure difference in Žižek's system is at direct odds with Deleuze's notion of continuous multiplicity, which rejects any gaps in the fabric of immanence.

For both Žižek and Deleuze, pure difference is excess, the unconditioned, that which does not possess positive properties and escapes the presence of perception, or what Deleuze calls the present present in *Difference and Repetition*. At first glance, it would appear that difference operates similarly in both philosophers' systems. Part of the perceived similarity is owed to Žižek's reading of the quasi-causal operator in Deleuze. Žižek identifies the quasi-cause with the Lacanian *l'objet petit a*, which he also calls “pure difference,” and asks: “[I]s the Deleuzian quasi cause not the exact equivalent of Lacan's *l'objet petit a*, this pure, immaterial, spectral entity that serves as the object-cause of desire?” (Žižek 2004: 27) Quasi-causality supplements the mechanistic causation of bodies that is seen in the actual, and functions as the

differentiating mechanism that connects the actual to the virtual. Thus, in order to fully understand the two concepts of difference offered by both thinkers, one must investigate the nature of the quasi-cause in Deleuze.

The quasi-cause is dealt with most extensively by Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*, and then again with Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. In order to construct an ontology premised on immanence and becoming, Deleuze sought to a form of causality that eschews the classical forms of causation in Aristotle (material, efficient, formal, and final causation), as well as transitive and emanative causation found in Medieval philosophy.¹⁴ To supplement the mechanistic causation that governs corporeal entities in the actual, Deleuze introduces a meta-causality that de-actualizes individuated forms through immanent processes of becoming. The cause remains immanent within itself, as does the effect, without the effect emanating from the cause (Smith 2012: 33). Accordingly, the function of the quasi-cause precludes causal reification by differentiating singularities across divergent series of the past and future. The quasi-cause effectively releases ideal events of becoming from the representational fixity of the actual through the depths of sensory becoming. While Žižek's interpretation of quasi-causality insists on "the very basic *duality* of Deleuze's thought, that of Becoming versus Being [...],"¹⁵ there is more to be said about the operation of the quasi-cause (Žižek 2004: 28). Following Alain Badiou's tendency to focus on the Event in Deleuze, Žižek's *Organs without Bodies* overlooks the third ontological realm integral to the process of individuation and counter-actualization: sensory becoming. In *Less Than Nothing*, he finally addresses the two becomings, sensory (becoming-mad of depths/corporeal) and absolute becoming (Aion/incorporeal), which provided Žižek the opportunity to explore Deleuze's tripartite ontology, rather than portraying it as a dualistic philosophy of the One. Instead, Žižek says, "This difference between the two becomings, the becoming-mad of depths of the primordial formless Chaos and the surface of the infinite divisibility of the Instant, is 'almost the difference between the second and the third hypotheses of *Parmenides*—that of the "now" and that of the "instant"' (Žižek 2013).¹⁶ The key word in this passage is "almost"; the difference between sensory becoming (becoming-mad) and absolute becoming (Aion) is *almost* that of the "now" and the "instant," were becoming-mad not the subversion of the "now."

However, becoming-mad (sensory-becoming) is not of the temporal register of the “now,” but that of molecular duration in sensation.

Sensory becoming has one foot in the door of the materiality of the actual and one foot in the door of the ideality of the Event. Influenced by Bergsonian time and Proustian reminiscence, sensory becoming differs in kind from the absolute becoming of events, employing the molecular memory of duration as generative process. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze refers to sensory becoming as “bad Chronos” or “becoming-mad,” though the concept appears in many terminological guises across his works, which can be mapped through an analysis of their corresponding temporal *ordinates*. The becoming of sensation disorients and destabilizes the present of the actual, infinitely fragmenting identity, and completely subverting the passing present. The quasi-cause, which is modeled after Nietzsche’s Moment,¹⁷ counter-actualizes a given form at random, distributing its features (singularities) into two opposing lanes, that of sensory becoming (becoming of duration) and absolute becoming (becoming of the instant). These singularities do not intermix in becoming, but crystallize, and their corresponding molecular lines of subversive (non)sense are then distributed along the perpetually displaced line of absolute becoming, the line of Aion. However, in the realm of sensation, new neighborhoods of singularities that assemble do not resemble their prior, or eventual, incarnations in the actual. Breaking with the logic of identity, the quasi-cause produces effects that bear no resemblance to their cause. The quasi-cause strikes individuated forms at random, deterritorializing their content, which is rearranged in a completely altered form into neighborhoods of sensation. The temporal logic of sensory becoming differs from that of absolute becoming, and that of Being. Unlike the molecular duration of sensory becoming, absolute becoming has no duration and is the open future, which ungrounds the past.¹⁸

In Žižek’s reading, however, he sees a fundamental incompatibility between the virtual (Event) and the actual (Being) (Žižek 2004: 28). The Event, notes Žižek, becomes only through a passive, static differentiating of the quasi-cause, which cannot be said to effect changes in the materiality of Being, in the actual. The two realms seem to function in parallel, evincing a dualism that is insufficiently explained by Deleuze’s version of the Cartesian pituitary gland: quasi-causality. In a telling gesture, however,

Žižek immediately takes a step back to point out the two different concepts (“models”) of becoming in *The Logic of Sense*, and asks, “Is Deleuze’s oscillation between the two models (becoming as the impassive effect; becoming as the generative process) not homologous to the oscillation, in the Marxist tradition, between the two models of ‘reification’?” (Žižek 2004: 28) If briefly, Žižek acknowledges the two formulations of becoming in *The Logic of Sense*, which he has conflated as absolute, duration-less becoming. Rather than pursue the implications of two temporal logics of becoming, his analogous example of the theories of reification in Marx and Lukacs serves to justify his prior conflation of absolute and sensory becoming, while reaffirming his claim that Being and Event are ontologically incompatible. In his comparison, absolute becoming (impassive effect) resists attributing an immaterial affect to the bodily product from whence it is connected, while sensory becoming (generative process) is the hidden process that generates the “reified” realm of Being, the actual. Not only are the virtual and the actual co-constitutive (the virtual is not the cause of the actual), but Žižek glosses over the intermediary role sensory becoming plays in processes of individuation, wherein the quasi-cause subverts the actual present by arranging blocs of becoming in durational sensation. Unlike the bifurcating process of absolute becoming, which expels all memory traces, sensory becoming retains molecular memory in the form of non-filial arrangements, such as the Proustian example of the wasp and the orchid. Diverse spatiotemporal dynamisms characterize the realm of sensation, which defies the logic of identity without being completely ungrounded by the ontological forgetting of absolute becoming. Being and Event might be incompatible were it not for the intermediary realm of sensory becoming, where the shards of former identities, in molecular memory, are reassembled as pure relations of speed by the quasi-cause.

While the quasi-cause has no duration or substance, it arrives like a maelstrom, infinitely dividing each moment simultaneously into the past and future. It is static by virtue of its instantaneity, as it has no duration, yet it is generative in its effects of spatiotemporal arrangements in sensation of “(non)-being.”¹⁹ This paradox of static process, the quasi-cause, is the instant, which

extracts singularities from the present, and from individuals and person which occupy this present. It extracts singular points twice projected—once into the future and once into the past—forming by this double equation the constitutive elements of the pure event (in the manner of a pod which releases its spores). (Deleuze 1990: 166)

As Žižek accurately observes, the quasi-cause haunts the present, not as an entity of lack, but as pure function. This is where Bergson's insights into the present enter the picture. The present is mere illusion; what we call the present is the infinitesimal, immediate past of perception. Yet, the present as such is the infinite splitting of all it encounters into the always-already and the eternal not-yet. Three modes of the present signaled in *The Logic of Sense* correspond to three ontological milieus that express, represent and differentiate difference in-itself. Deleuze writes,

The notion of the present therefore has several meanings: the measureless or dislocated present as the time of depth and subversion; the variable and measured present at the time of actualization. But there is yet another present. How could there be a measurable actualization, unless a third present prevented it constantly from falling into subversion and being confused with it? It would seem, no doubt, that the Aion cannot have any present at all, since in it the instant is always dividing into future and past [...] It is the present of the pure operation, not of the incorporation. (Deleuze 1990: 168)

It is this third present of pure operation, which is of particular interest to Žižek. Its presence is its untimely, without substance or temporal duration, and self-differs infinitely in absence of identity. Where the quasi-cause serves as the differentiator, the integration of difference is the line of Aion, or the eternal return. The eternal return is both the process of returning (repetition) and that which survives the return (difference). When an ontological system, such as that of Deleuze, privileges relation over substance, then difference produced becomes the generator of difference. While it is true that both the *l'objet petit a* of Žižek/Lacan and the quasi-cause of Deleuze lack identity and repeat, the quasi-cause can only be said to *represent* lack, and is not ontologically constituted by it.

As fixed features infinitely approach 0 in the differential equation, genesis is static and *instantaneous*, since it cannot afford even minimal spatiotemporal dynamism.

However, quasi-causality is not absence in itself, but pure relationality in-itself. For this reason it is imperative to avoid characterizing difference as an entity or product. In an interview with Jean-Noël Vuarnet, Deleuze announces the collapsed distinction between ontology and temporality when asked about the publication of his then forthcoming book, *Difference and Repetition*. He says, “Yes, I finished the book—on repetition and difference (they’re the same thing) as the actual categories of our thought” (Deleuze 2004a: 142). Difference in itself, the unconditioned in the product, is all that survives the eternal return; in other words, what repeats eternally is the repetition of the future (Deleuze 2004b: 370). At first blush, *l’objet petit a*, as both the object-cause of desire and the object of pure lack, resembles the quasi-cause, which is present in absence and differentiates all individuated forms it encounters. Both lack positive content, and both effect causation through the absence of identity. However, this is where their similarities end.

Deleuze’s difference can only be construed as lack from the perspective of representation, which already subordinates difference to the logic of identity. Deleuze is quite unflinching in this affirmative nature of difference, which he immediately clarifies in the preface to *Difference and Repetition*: “We propose to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it to the Same, and the relation of different to different independently of those forms which make them pass through the negative” (Deleuze 2004a: xvii-xviii). Passing through the negative, however, allows us to arrive at Žižek’s notion of difference. Like Deleuze, he agrees that pure (or “minimal”) difference is not the difference between two things, or positive properties. Žižek speaks of difference as the process of self-differentiation. It is when a subject is divided from itself, in a kind of fractured redoubling, that we have pure difference in Žižekian terms. The *l’objet petit a* causes the ontological gap that resists all symbolization, yet also causes countless points of view on said object. And while the self-differing of *l’objet petit a* is not a difference between two separate poles, or difference in positive content, antagonism and contradiction is written into the fabric of Žižek’s “pure difference.” For instance, he states, “This noncoincidence, this ‘pure difference,’ can either unravel into a multitude of entities forming a differential totality, or split into the antagonistic opposition of two terms” (Žižek 2009: 36). Contrary to

Deleuze, then, these two possible outcomes of pure difference are assigned to the masculine differential totality, and the antagonistic position is that of the feminine.²⁰ Not only is Žižek conceiving of pure difference in the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis, but he retains an oppositional distinction between multiplicity and antagonism. Antagonism expresses the inscribed void within difference for Žižek. The process of pure, self-differentiation means that identity is only possibly through the repetition of the One, and “the gap is inherent to this One itself—not as the gap between its two opposite aspects, but as the gap between One and the Void” (Ibid.). Deleuze, too, describes difference as infinite self-differing. Thus, as the term for the ontological in-itself, “difference” is the key concept for both Deleuze and Žižek, as an empty cause and a dissimulative effect. Despite the similarity between the function of the quasi-cause and *l’objet petit a*, the meaning of “difference” within their respective philosophical systems is determined by the concept’s corresponding temporal logic. Deleuze’s difference is pure, continuous relation, while Žižek’s difference operates through discontinuity. It appears that through two sides of the looking glass, both versions of difference eternally repeat as the function of their respective philosophical systems, without mediation or accretion. Another common term that denotes incommensurable positions, is “repetition.” Repetition, as the for-itself of difference, repeats absolute lack dialectically and repeats the unconditioned eternally. And both must die twice.

III. Repetition

Žižek’s use of repetition presupposes *discontinuity*, whence negation, as a static process of redoubling, repeats the symbolic gap dialectically. As the *l’objet petit a* tickles us, Žižek’s dialectical materialism revolts against a reductionist reification of essence in Hegel’s logic by reading Universality in a post-structural way. The Universal is the very site of antagonism, and not simply antagonism between discrete differences, but the self-differing that emerges in the parallax gap between the One and itself. His reckoning with the supplemental, or excessive, minimal difference that cannot be assimilated through mediation, is his Lacanian interpretation of difference in-itself, the fundamental concern of post-structural philosophy from Derrida to Lyotard, Deleuze, et. al. (Žižek 2009: 34). As stated above, Žižek’s “pure difference” is *l’objet petit a*, and

while *l'objet petit a* repeats as the supplemental remainder, its repetition rests on the axis of (less than) nothing, absolute lack. Pure difference, as an object of lack that cannot be mediated repeats through absolute negativity. Žižek explains, “Negation of negation’ is thus nothing but repetition at its purest: in the first move, a certain gesture is accomplished and fails; then, in the second move, this same gesture is simply *repeated*” (Žižek 2000: 74). Of course failure is unavoidable and drives the repetition of *l'objet petit a*, which will never be symbolized or communicated. As a result, the discontinuity posed by *l'objet petit a* is the very driving force of the Dialectic, with repetition as absolute negation.

This association that Žižek makes between the non-being of *l'objet petit a* and its repetition as negation is directly rejected by Deleuze. Deleuze specifically addresses the notion of non-being in *Difference and Repetition*, for, like Žižek, difference has non-being.²¹ He states, “There is a non-being, yet there is neither negative nor negation. There is a non-being which is by no means the being of the negative, but rather the being of the problematic. The symbol for this (non)-being or ?-being is 0/0” (Deleuze 2009: 253). Deleuze continues by stating that the zero stands for difference and its repetition. What would it mean for zero ((non)-being) to repeats as zero?

The zeroes denote the ontological redoubling of difference and repetition. Difference is the absolutely new, unconditioned, and is pure experiment. While it lacks positive content, it is not itself lack. The (non)-being of difference is divided and infinitely subdivided by repetition, which is the pure and empty form of time. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze describes the third synthesis of time, the future, as the eternal return of difference. To return without analogy, resemblance, opposition, or identity, is to return as absolute, anti-memorial becoming. Forms, structures, subjects, objects—any and all identities—are expelled by the eternal return. The 0 of difference is split into simultaneous streams toward the past and the future, eternally approaching 0 by virtue of repetition. The features, or traits, in the moment of the return disappear, but the relations between vanishing terms are continuous, determinable, and with no gaps.

For Žižek, it is through the negation of negation that *l'objet petit a* repeats, demonstrating that essence is the hidden core of “mere appearance” in its very

appearing. The understanding of essence through ontological object-as-lack unearths the very structures of thought that would, paradoxically, slip through the virtual networks of continuous multiplicity. Since a philosophical system premised on continuous multiplicity, such as that of Deleuze, rejects the notion of absolute lack as an ontological constituent. As such, the thought structures that are revealed through the movement of essence—nothing in-itself, whose significance is constructed in its appearing as appearance—would be deemed an ontological error of representation, and contingent accidents. Discontinuity for Deleuze, following Bergson, is rooted in a temporal error where duration and Aion²² are subordinated to the immobilizing mechanism of the intellect, which distorts the continuous multiplicity of temporality by imposing homogeneous modes of quantification and discretion. This cinematographic means of thinking change—the artificial, retro-causal succession of still photographs—gives rise to gaps and voids, but only as a function of representational, fallacious understanding. And while Deleuze claims that the Hegelian dialectic contains concepts are too vast and cast a net too large to capture difference, the structures of thought that are produced through discontinuous dialectical repetition often “slip through” the ontological fabric of continuous multiplicity. For this reason, holding the two mirror images of continuity and discontinuity in repetition produces new ontological revelations.

It goes without saying that Žižek’s reading of the Hegelian dialectic rejects its iteration as a tripartite movement of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Thus, a negation creating an opposition of terms, as read by Deleuze, is not the dialectic of Žižek’s philosophy. Žižek’s dialectic is much more post-structural. He deploys the supplement, difference, as the Lacanian *l’objet petit a*, but as that which cannot be mediated and thus repeats as a rupture in every moment of the dialectic. For instance, he explains, “The inner logic of the movement from one stage to another is not that from one extreme, to the opposite extreme, and then to their higher unity; the second passage is, rather, simply the radicalization of the first” (Žižek 1999: 71). Not only does absolute negation, repetition, radicalize each stage of the dialectic, but Žižek’s reading of Hegel also rejects the otherworldly, claiming that repetition is really no more than the immanent process of self-overcoming (Deleuze 2006: 389). All transcendence is immanent process, or as Deleuze speaks in reference to his own philosophy, “[T]he

transcendental field could be defined as a pure plane of innocence, because it escapes all transcendence, both of the subject and the object.”²³ To overcome the self is not to arrive in some transcendent realm, but to transcend subjectivity through immanent repetitions of difference. This is the case for both philosophers in question, but the processes of repetition and what is repeated are incommensurably distinct. Žižek’s description of the subject (the being of the negative), such as the self, uncovers the significance of self-overcoming (as the repetition of non-being):

The parallel between the void of the transcendental subject (S) and the void of the transcendental object, the inaccessible X that causes our perceptions, is misleading here: the transcendental object is the void *beyond* phenomenal appearances, while the transcendental subject *already appears as a void*. (Žižek 2009:21)

The inaccessible X is, naturally, *l’objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, and is ontologically void, rather than a lack of a given, substantive trait. The transcendental subject (self) appears as void, giving it a kind of Sartrean nothingness, a phenomenal character as lack. Difference, *l’objet petit a*, on the contrary, is an ontological rupture, running through each dialectical stage as discontinuity. This discontinuity is dealt with by the fantasy structure, where we fill in the absent content from triangulating positions that cannot immediately encounter the lack. The transcendental ego is the mark of identity, and is thus *experienced* as lack, unlike pure difference. Accordingly, a self-overcoming, in Žižek is the intrusion of *l’objet petit a* into substantive content, splitting it from itself absolutely, repeating the split as other. But what are immanent processes of self-overcoming for Žižek? According to *Less than Nothing*, nothing is beyond finite reality except the absolute immanence of transcendence, or absolute negativity.²⁴ In his description of the subject’s phenomenal void—which, as Kant explains, schematically temporalizes—“the finite” involves the overcoming of the self, or identity. Thus, that which is “‘beyond’ finite” itself is without content, but subverts dialectically. Since absolute negation repeats *l’objet petit a* all must reflect inward, it redoubles appearance as appearance. Žižek reveals how

[f]rames are always redoubled: Once introduced, the gap between reality and appearance is thus immediately complicated, reflected-into-itself: once we get a

glimpse, through the Frame, of the Other Dimension, *reality itself turns into appearance*. In other words, things do not simply appear, they *appear to appear*. This is why the negation of a negation does not bring us to a simple flat affirmation: once things (start to) appear, they not only appear as what they are not, creating an illusion; they can also appear to just appear, concealing the fact that they are what they appear to be. (Žižek 2009: 29-30)

Absolute negation is of the order of instantaneity; not only is it 'beyond' finite and therefore beyond time and duration, but its unfolding of essence is through the paradoxical instant. This notion of absolute self-overcoming shows Žižek's insistence on thinking becoming as incorporeal, or the mirror image to Deleuze's Aion. An adequate account of becoming-mad of "bad" Chronos is lacking, as is an apprehension of its temporal structure of molecular duration. The result is a stage of reality at every moment simultaneously splitting from itself, surrounded by its void as altered presence. This prevents split features from assembling with other features to create a new non-identity in sensation. Instead, reality (which is less than nothing) appears, then appears to appear all in the same moment. Not constituted by positive content, absolute negation instantaneously radicalizes content in its repetition, and what is repeated is both antecedent (always-already) and consequent (eternal not-yet) to the failed attempt to capture pure difference.

The failure to capture difference includes two forms of repetition in both Žižek's and Deleuze's philosophy. The difference as lack that is repeated first does not escape its symbolic context.²⁵ For this reason, the second repetition must destroy the ground of the first repetition, as must that which was repeated. We see the same pattern of repetition in Deleuze. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze outlines two repetitions, bare and disguised. Bare repetition is the repetition of the same, while disguised repetition is the repetition of difference. The repetition of the same is bound to the discontinuous, successive "nows" of chronological time, while disguised repetition is the infinite masking of matter by chronology's subversion. The counter-causal mechanism of absolute becoming dislodges singular features from identity and runs them through an infinite becoming-other in sensation, while distributing them through the pure and empty form of time: the future. Thus, in both Žižek's and Deleuze's portrait of double repetition, the second repetition ungrounds the past once and for all.

IV. The N[on(e)-All]

In his tome on Hegel, under the chapter heading of “The Limits of Hegel,” Žižek asks, “[C]an Hegel think the notion which, according to Lacan, condenses all the paradoxes of the Freudian field, the notion of the *non-All*?” (Žižek 2012: 455). He explains that a simplistic, formulaic “Hegel” where the whole is seen as the True would preclude this possibility, but if the Whole also includes the irreconcilable remainder that causes dialectical antagonism, then it may be possible for Hegel’s philosophy to include the non-All. Hegel is unable to think pure repetition, says Žižek, as he misses the excess of mechanical repetition, since his repetition produces excess through the idealizing process of sublation (Ibid.). And while Hegel is limited in his thought of pure repetition, his inability to think the radically new—a new that is fully disconnected from the old—is not due to a mechanical repetition of the same. This is the point of impossibility to think the radically new where Žižek interjects with a “yes, but...” Even if there are limitations in the Hegel, Žižek declares that “[t]he time has thus come to *repeat* Hegel” (Ibid. 504). Whether it was possible for Hegel to think the non-All does not mean that Hegel’s thought will not repeat as the non-All, or as Žižek likes to say, “*Demandons l’impossible!*”²⁶ Impossibility is repeated as the excess of antagonism that can never be fully idealized. In this way, the failure to capture or mediate excess, Hegel’s dialectic can be said to be one of non-all. In many ways this is analogous to Deleuze’s reading of Leibniz through Borges and Nietzsche: affirming the power of the false.²⁷

The joke Žižek often tells about the customer who asks for coffee without cream, where the server states that they are out of cream and offers coffee without milk, instead (Lubitsch 1939). Without the repetition of absolute negation we would not arrive at coffee without milk, but simply the base opposition of coffee without cream, which would be coffee with cream. However, the repetition of negation produces a positivity as lack, coffee without milk, or non coffee without cream. The difference between the Hegelian coffee without milk and the Hegelian characterization of base negation as coffee with cream separates the two Hegels immediately. It is the positivity of lack, which repeats, and contributes to the non-all of Hegel in Žižek’s repetition.

Does Deleuze have a response to the absolute negation's repetition of excess, or *l'objet petit a*, or does he reductionistically see negation as Positive Content-X and Not-Positive-Content-X? For Deleuze, there is an account for coffee without milk, and it is via non-being. Becoming, not the being of the negative, is how one would account for the not non-cream of the coffee; it is one possible becoming of the coffee without cream, depending on the roll of the dice.²⁸ Again, we see the parallax positions of Žižek and Deleuze on the same object: coffee without milk. Despite the identical iteration of "repetition", the notion of lack leads to an opposition between the two philosophers with respect to excess. Non-being lacks nothing; it wants for nothing. On the contrary, the One-all of Deleuze repeats instantaneously, infinitely at the level of concepts, yet is finite in its movements in sensation. There are no gaps between the divided moments of non-being, as each concept is infinite in its speed, yet finite in its movement, causing all concepts and material sensation to resonate variably depending upon dynamics that arrange their singular features. In order to avoid the confusion between the One-all and that of Universality, Deleuze and Guattari explain that concepts are fragmentary wholes, as they are open and in the process of becoming through resonance, "and the philosophy that creates them always introduces a powerful Whole that, while remaining open, is not fragmented: an unlimited One-All, an 'Omnitudo' that includes all the concept on one and the same plane" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 35). We must not confuse concepts with the plane of immanence, since this would strip the concepts of their singular features, leading to an all-inclusive one concept, but as they note, the plane of immanence is not a concept. The constructivism of Deleuze's philosophy forecloses the possibility of discontinuity or gaps in the fabric of immanence. The repetition of becoming, both absolute and sensory, constructs lines of connection that retains a ghost of former assemblages along the forking paths of along the line of Aion, the pure empty form of time repeats the identity out of all former arrangements, while their molecular duration becomes like crystals growing under a microscope. As a consequence, Deleuze's One-All is a nomadology of singular features, constructively bifurcating at the infinite distribution of the past and the future. The ways in which these distributions become crystalized is by chance and the ways in which the speeds of

matter are rearranged. Most importantly, the proliferation of difference through non-being, or becoming(s), is continuous without becoming universal.

The gap between these two systems of “difference” and “repetition” are incommensurable, and in the vein of Nabokov, I would urge the reader to think of Žižek and Deleuze “as the boundaries—the mirry beaches and rosy rocks—of an enchanted island” (Nabokov 1997: 16). Identity is replaced by Deleuzian assemblages²⁹ of virtual multiplicity, which, then, echoes across the vast expanse of disjunctive synthesis, a both/and that simultaneously reveals the process of reality as it appears to appear (Žižek 2009: 29-30).³⁰ The reverberation within pure difference revolutionizes the parallax view itself, opening a constructive space where the logic of repetition superposes absolute becoming and dialectical materialism. The two subjective positions of Deleuze’s constructivism and Žižek’s logic dialectical materialism create an ontological shift within difference itself, creating a radically new ontology as such. Both Žižek and Deleuze agree on One thing: The Whole can never capture difference, and as a consequence, the Whole must account for its difference without lapsing into One, homogeneous reality. The Whole is not Truth, and the One is not Universal. Their respective positions indicate that it is impossible for an identity to *be* everywhere at once. Instead, Deleuze and Žižek stand as mirror images, speaking identically, communicating impossibly. Across the divergence of continuity and discontinuity stands an ontology, a N[on(e)-All], forever shifting mirror images anew, as difference, fractured and reflecting infinitely, in repetition.

Notes

¹ Lynch & Frost, “Twin Peaks,” Episode 29.

² Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 17

³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 89.

⁴ Philosophical buggery refers to Deleuze’s “Letter to a Harsh Critic” where he discloses his approach to the history of philosophy “as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception.” He goes on to explain, “I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child

was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed” Deleuze, *Negotiations*, p. 6).

⁵ In the opening of *The Parallax View*, Žižek asks if “parallax” is not simply another term for an antinomy, that which “can never be dialectically ‘mediated/sublated’ into a higher synthesis, since there is no common language, no shared ground, between the two levels?”

⁶ Žižek, in many ways, is Deleuze’s evil twin, and his concepts and philosophy recur in many of Žižek’s works.

⁷ His most pronounced engagement with Lacan being, of course, *Anti-Oedipus*.

⁸ Žižek’s use of the invisible remainder in his appropriation of Hegel’s logic turns the Dialectic into a function of pure difference.

⁹ At a time when Hegelianism was en vogue in France, as we see with such notable figures as Wahl, Koyré, Kojève, and Hyppolite, Deleuze forged another path, creating a philosophical collage out of the likes of Spinoza, Hume, Leibniz, Bergson, and Nietzsche.

¹⁰ The tripartite ontology in Deleuze is elaborated in my forthcoming book, *Deleuze and Becoming(s)*.

¹¹ The most notorious example of this misreading appears in Alain Badiou’s book, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, which inarguably influenced Žižek’s characterization of Deleuze.

¹² The strawberry cake reference is used in *The Parallax View* (p. 40) to demonstrate the function of lack in the construction of desire at the hands of *l’objet petit a*, and in terms of constructing a philosophy of both/and in his collaboration with Guattari, Deleuze is quoted in *Libération* as having said, “If I told him [Guattari] that the center of the earth was made of raspberry jam, his role would be to find out how to make that idea work (if we can call such a thing an idea.” Deleuze as quoted by Robert Maggiori in *Libération* (September 12, 1991).

¹³ “[T]he pure difference is itself an object. Another name for the parallax gap is therefore *minimal difference*, a ‘pure’ difference which cannot be grounded in positive substantial properties” (Žižek 2009: 36).

¹⁴ For a discussion of immanent versus transitive and emanative causation, see “Univocity,” in *Essays on Deleuze*, by Daniel W. Smith (pp. 27-42).

¹⁵ Žižek continues a brilliant, even if unfaithful to Deleuze, analysis of “Good” Chronos and Aion in the passages that follow, without returning to the logic(s) of two becomings.

¹⁶ He’s referring specifically to p. 164 of *The Logic of Sense*.

¹⁷ Nietzsche’s Moment often goes by the following terms in *The Logic of Sense*: instant, paradoxical instant, aleatory instant.

¹⁸ In *Difference and Repetition*, especially, Deleuze appropriates Nietzsche’s eternal return to denote his sub-representational theory of the future, which in *The Logic of Sense* he calls “the line of Aion.” Only that which is unconditioned returns on the line of Aion, thus all identity is expelled in the centrifugal process of return.

¹⁹ Sensation has (non)-being, a term used by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, to describe a form of non-being that is neither the being of the negative or negation, (p. 253).

²⁰ This is a marked difference between Žižek and Deleuze, for Deleuze’s ontological requirement for difference is that it pass through becoming-woman, since all becoming is a becoming-woman, absent of identity or essence.

²² Aion is the figure Deleuze uses to denote the integration of the eternal return of difference, instantaneous time of zero duration.

²³ Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, p. 389.

²⁴ See: fn. 35.

²⁵ “[The Hegelian ‘negation of negation’]’s matrix is not that of a loss and its recuperation, but simply that of a process of passage from state A to state B: the first, immediate ‘negation’ of A negates the position of A *while remaining within its symbolic confines*, so it must be followed by

another negation, which then negates the very symbolic space common to A and its immediate negation [...] Here the gap that separates the negated system's 'real' death from its 'symbolic' death is crucial: the system has to die twice" (Žižek 2000: 72).

²⁶ In this case he is invoking the May '68 slogan, "Let's be realistic, let's ask for the impossible!" also translated as *Soyons réalistes, exigeons l'impossible* ("Let's be realistic, let's demand the impossible), from Che Guevara's famous dictum.

²⁷ Deleuze reads Leibniz' notion of compossibility through impossibility. While we cannot have an event impossible with this world exist in this world, there is no limit to the impossibilities within one world.

²⁸ For the not coffee without cream, consider the *l'obster*.¹

²⁹ Not bound by homogeneous, chronological time, an assemblage—another terms for a multiplicity—is a bloc of becoming that arranges singular features of individuated forms in new ways premised on capacity, and not filial definition. For instance, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe an assemblage in the following way, "[I]t is this assemblage that is defined by a longitude and a latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane. It is the wolf itself, and the horse, and the child, that cease to be subjects to become events, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life" (Deleuze and Guattari 2007: 289).

³⁰ "Once introduced, the gap between reality and appearance is thus immediately complicated, reflected-into-itself: once we get a glimpse, through the Frame, of the Other Dimension, *reality itself turns into appearance*. In other words, things do not simply appear, they *appear to appear*. This is why the negation of a negation does not bring us to a simple flat affirmation: once things (start to) appear, they not only appear as what they are not, creating an illusion; they can also appear to just appear, concealing the fact that they are what they appear to be." Wallace, D.W. (2006) *Consider the Lobster*, New York: Back Bay Books.

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