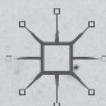


SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK AND DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

EDITED BY
AGON HAMZA
& FRANK RUDA



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To our man of steel, Slavoj Žižek

Contents

List of Figures	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
1 Introduction: The Absolute Revisited—Slavoj Žižek and Dialectical Materialism <i>Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda</i>	1
2 Materialism without Materialism: Slavoj Žižek and the Disappearance of Matter <i>Adrian Johnston</i>	3
3 The Althusserian Battlegrounds <i>Robert Pfaller</i>	23
4 The Necessity of an Absolute Misunderstanding: Why Hegel Has So Many Misreaders <i>Todd McGowan</i>	43
5 From Hegel to Kant: The Thing-of-Itself German Idealism <i>Jan Voelker</i>	57
6 Politics of Negativity in Slavoj Žižek: Actualizing Some Hegelian Themes <i>Vladimir Safatle</i>	69
7 Dialectic at Its Impurest: Žižek's Materialism of Less Than Nothing <i>Simon Hajdini</i>	85
8 Natural Worlds, Historical Worlds, and Dialectical Materialism <i>Ed Pluth</i>	101
9 Positing the Presuppositions—Dialectical Biology and the Minimal Structure of Life <i>Victor Marques</i>	113

10	Transferential Materialism: Toward a Theory of Formal Otherness <i>Gabriel Tupinambá</i>	133
11	Dialectical Materialism and the Dangers of Aristotelianism <i>Frank Ruda</i>	147
12	Going to One's Ground: Žižek's Dialectical Materialism <i>Agon Hamza</i>	163
13	Afterword: Objects, Objects Everywhere <i>Slavoj Žižek</i>	177
	Notes on Contributors	193
	Index	195

List of Figures

7.1	Table of the Four Types of Negation I	87
7.2	Schema of the “Mere Not”	94
7.3	Table of the Four Types of Negation II	95
7.4	Schema of Four Nothings I	96
7.5	Schema of Four Nothings II	97

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Introduction: The Absolute Revisited—Slavoj Žižek and Dialectical Materialism

Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda

The concept for this book emerged after the publication of Slavoj Žižek's *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*.¹ The initial aim was to gather a series of responses to the book in the philosophical journal *Crisis and Critique*² that we both coedit. We envisaged bringing together scholars who begin from different perspectives to seriously engage with the concept of dialectic in the work of G. W. F. Hegel and Jacques Lacan as presented and systematically developed by Žižek in *Absolute Recoil*. But when we started putting this together, it became clear that the initial idea had to be expanded beyond the frame of a journal issue and required a properly systematic realization in the form of a book.

The present volume therefore became far more ambitious than the initial project. As the title of this book suggests, the volume you are about to read undertakes a critical and systematic investigation into the concept of dialectical materialism developed in the work of Slavoj Žižek. The main focus of this volume lies on his 2012 *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*³ and his 2014 *Absolute Recoil*, but the essays gathered here do not limit themselves to these two works. They also address elements and aspects of Žižek's thought from different books and, often, do so in a more general manner. The latter can also be regarded as being fully legitimate as one can argue that "dialectical materialism" has been *exercised* and has marked the practice of thought that manifests in Žižek's oeuvre, beginning with *The Most Sublime Hysteric*:

Hegel with Lacan,⁴ although the term itself explicitly appears only from a certain moment on in the unfolding of Žižek's intellectual enterprise.

To gather thinkers on the topic of *Slavoj Žižek and Dialectical Materialism* implies a specific perspective on how to enter into and deal with Žižek's work. The articles assembled here therefore neither present an investigation of all aspects of his system (e.g., they do not elaborate upon the role and function of examples, jokes, and so forth in his thought) nor should they be taken as chapters of an introductory book to the philosophical system of Žižek. They all situate themselves within the very specific conceptual framework of the concatenation of dialectics and materialism and the volume as a whole seeks to bring forth its implications, consequences, and potential impasses as well as its possibly revolutionizing character for contemporary philosophical thought.

The contributors to this volume are ardent readers of and commentators on Žižek's work. Some of them may be called or may refer to themselves as Žižekians, others are either interlocutors or critical commentators of his work. This said, none of the contributors engages in a simple *defense* of Žižek's work, none in a simple *rejection*. All of them work with his work, and work through his work, and all of them do commit to the principle that his thought must be taken absolutely seriously, so seriously that one needs to investigate, discuss, criticize, and elaborate upon the most crucial conceptual and systematic dimensions it implies. What you are about to read is therefore not a simple work of propaganda for the renowned thinker Slavoj Žižek but a performative plea for reading him as seriously as any true philosopher should be read: to the letter.

Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda, Prishtina, Berlin, 2015

Notes

1. Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2014).
2. See www.crisiscritique.org
3. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012).
4. Slavoj Žižek, *The Most Sublime Hysteric: Hegel with Lacan* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), initially published as *Le Plus Sublime de Hystériques: Hegel avec Lacan* (Paris: Point Hors Ligne, 1988).

Materialism without Materialism: Slavoj Žižek and the Disappearance of Matter

Adrian Johnston

Slavoj Žižek's two most recent major philosophical works, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (2012) and *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (2014), both strive, as their subtitles indicate, to reinvent for the twenty-first century the Marxist tradition of "dialectical materialism." Although this philosophical label is closely associated with such names as, first and foremost, Friedrich Engels and V. I. Lenin, Žižek seeks to develop a permutation that deviates markedly from the classical Engelsian and Soviet versions. As is to be expected, he pursues this via his characteristic blend of German idealism and psychoanalysis, utilizing the work of G. W. F. Hegel and Jacques Lacan in order to creatively update dialectical materialism.

In particular, Žižek openly adopts two manifestly anti-Leninist approaches to the reinvention of dialectical materialism. First, in diametrical opposition to Lenin's 1908 *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, he enthusiastically celebrates "the disappearance of matter" that is purportedly observed in quantum physics¹ (as well as, more recently and dramatically, string theory). Second, inverting the emphasis on finding materialism within idealism in Lenin's remarks on Hegel's *Science of Logic* in the former's *Philosophical Notebooks*,² Žižek insists (implicitly echoing the first of Karl Marx's 11 "Theses on Feuerbach"³) upon the urgent need to infuse materialism with idealism, especially transcendental and post-Kantian varieties of the latter.⁴ Of course, Žižek's anti-Leninism at the level of theoretical philosophy is somewhat striking in light

of his politics as staunchly Leninist (to a certain extent) at the corresponding level of, as it were, practical philosophy. That said, in this intervention I argue that, one, Žižek deviates too far in an idealist qua nonmaterialist direction in his anti-Leninist revisions of dialectical materialism and, two, his own Hegelian–Lacanian dialectical materialist negotiations of such relations as those between *Natur und Geist* (as per Hegel) and the Real and reality (as per Lacan) not only raise crucial yet-to-be-answered questions, they also contain dangerous ambiguities that, at times, bring Žižek’s materialism into disturbing proximity with certain of those contemporaneous “materialisms” he explicitly and correctly denounces as pseudomaterialist.

Žižek opens *Absolute Recoil* by calling for an immanent critique of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. It is well known that Lenin’s overriding concern in this text is combatting idealist exploitations by multiple philosophers and scientists of the then-new revolutionary upheavals in physics that overturned Newtonianism. For the author of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, such scientific, ideological exploiters seek opportunistically to take advantage of a crisis in the natural sciences so as to attack, whether directly or indirectly, precisely the sort of materialist positions he sees as integral to Marxism *überhaupt*.⁵

Žižek’s concisely damning verdict, conveyed in the opening lines of his 2014 sequel to his 2012 magnum opus (*Less Than Nothing*), is that in striving so vehemently to defend the uncompromisingly robust realism of materialism, Lenin falls far short of a criterion for materialism that both he and Engels uphold.⁶ “In Chapter 5 of his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, invoking Engels’ claim that materialism has to change its form with each new scientific discovery, Lenin applies the point to Engels himself.”⁷ Žižek continues:

Today, in turn, we should apply this motto to Lenin himself: if his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* clearly failed the task of raising philosophical materialism to the level of relativity theory and quantum physics, neither can it help us grasp other breakthroughs such as Freudian psychoanalysis, not to mention the failures of twentieth-century communism.⁸

Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, given its conjuncturally prompted preoccupation with abruptly striking down moves to provide (pseudo) scientific support for antimaterialist and antirealist stances, ignores the dialectical materialist potentials arguably latent within post-Newtonian physics from its very inception (of course, both in *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil* as well as in earlier works, Žižek engages in efforts to interface quantum physics in particular with his hybrid German-idealist/Marxist/Lacanian philosophical framework⁹). Lenin addresses such

physics only insofar as it functions as a misappropriated weapon in the hands of his theoretical and ideological adversaries. Moreover, this materialism of Lenin is so crude in its polemical aggressiveness (although this, arguably, is a carefully calculated crudeness on the part of a shrewd political and ideological tactician) as to exhibit no serious traces of dialectics. In other words, this 1908 treatise appears not to put forward, in its frontal assaults upon its opponents, a genuinely dialectical materialist alternative to the worldviews it hotly contests. Given these limitations, Žižek indeed is justified in stressing the need to “repeat Lenin” (philosophically as well as politically), to move beyond him specifically by performing in the early twenty-first century, just over 100 years after *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, the same gesture with respect to him that he recommends enacting vis-à-vis Engels.

Although *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* does involve a missed encounter between philosophical materialism and quantum physics—what is more, as Žižek persuasively charges on a number of occasions, the materialism of this 1908 work is even guilty of being “contemplative” (qua insufficiently historical and dialectical) in the precise sense critiqued in Marx’s “Thesis One”¹⁰—a bit of devil’s advocacy on Lenin’s behalf might be appropriate nonetheless. To begin with, Lenin does not intend for *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* to stand as a complete, self-sufficient statement of his theoretical materialism in its entirety (let alone to address such topics as communism per se and/or Freudian psychoanalysis). A standard (Soviet) line going back to Nicolai Bukharin, among others, is that Leninist dialectical materialism is (or should be) constructed on the basis of a combination of the dialectics of Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* and the materialism of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.¹¹ One would have to concede to Žižek that the *Philosophical Notebooks* certainly do not return to the topic of the new physics. But it is a historical fact (one meticulously and soberly documented by Loren R. Graham especially) that many philosophers and scientists in the Soviet Union, pushing off from a dialectical materialism fundamentally informed by a combination of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the *Philosophical Notebooks*, seriously practiced and interpreted the sciences of quantum mechanics, relativity theory, and cosmology and cosmogony (not to mention chemistry and the life sciences over and above physics).

I would contend that, while numerous radical leftists rightly protest noisy ditchings of “the idea of communism” (to employ Alain Badiou’s phrase) in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and related occurrences during the late twentieth century, they have tended to overlook and remain silent about the quiet trashing of the products of the labors of the aforementioned Soviet natural scientists and dialectical materialist

philosophers of science. That is to say, while contemporary Marxists have mightily resisted the vulgar anti-Marxist gesture of indefensibly equating Marxist politics *tout court* with the figure of Joseph Stalin, they appear, for the most part, to have fought less fiercely (if at all) against equally vulgar reductions of Marxist theory qua the Engelsian–Leninist dialectics of nature, with its unique Soviet legacy, to the lone figure of Trofim Denisovich Lysenko.¹² In my view, lamentable scientific and philosophical casualties, as well as disastrous, catastrophic political–ideological ones, arise from the collapse of Really Existing Socialism in the USSR and its satellites (this being another sad instance of what Walter Benjamin talks of in “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” wherein he warns that “*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.”¹³). I fear that Žižek’s swift dismissals of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* risk inadvertently heaping even more obscuring dirt on the burial sites of these unjustly unmourned losses. What is more, I believe that both his materialism specifically and a newly resurrected dialectical materialism generally would benefit in intellectual–historical as well as philosophical and political depth from revisiting the multidisciplinary ideas and debates centered upon *Naturdialektik* in the Soviet Union from Lenin’s time onward.

Admittedly, at one point in *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek briefly refers approvingly to Soviet dialectical materialism and creatively recasts the distinction between historical and dialectical materialisms, ontologizing this distinction as reflecting a “parallax gap,” a real antagonistic split internal to human beings themselves in their natural and sociohistorical incarnate existences.¹⁴ This innovative gesture implicitly contests the early Georg Lukács’s mobilization of a historical materialism of mediating/mediated human practices contra a dialectical materialism of immediate natural processes—with 1923’s *History and Class Consciousness* and related texts arguing that, for a proper Marxist as a historical materialist, “nature” and the natural sciences must always be treated as nothing more than ideologically compromised and socially structured artificial configurations.¹⁵ This is in opposition to the confidently unqualified naturalism and realism of the Engelsian dialectics of nature and its offshoots.¹⁶ This implicit contestation is explicitly confirmed later in *Less Than Nothing* when Žižek pleads against the young Lukács (and his many Western Marxist descendants) for the urgency of resuscitating Hegelian *Naturphilosophie* and Marxian *Naturdialektik*.¹⁷ And, to cut a well-known story short (a story to which Žižek alludes in *Absolute Recoil*¹⁸), the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, with his playing off of historical against dialectical materialism, establishes what has since become a definitive difference between Western European and Eastern/Soviet Marxisms.¹⁹

Much like Alfred Schmidt before him—Schmidt's 1962 *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, although originally a dissertation supervised by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (themselves quite generally Lukácsian apropos the empirical, experimental sciences of nature²⁰), represents a voice of partial internal dissent within the Frankfurt School, at least as regards naturalist materialism—Žižek attempts to strike a delicate balance between, on the one hand, the historicist social constructivism of historical materialism and, on the other, the realist (quasi-)naturalism of dialectical materialism.²¹ As Žižek puts it in a 1996 interview, “not everything is cultural . . . Although you cannot pinpoint a moment which is pure nature, which is not yet mediated by culture, in spite of this you must not draw the conclusion that everything is culture. Otherwise you fall into ‘discursive idealism’”²² (this stipulation is echoed in *Absolute Recoil*²³). If, one, the distinction between nature (as Real) and culture (as Imaginary–Symbolic realities) is internal to the latter²⁴ and, two, an anti-idealist materialism is to be affirmed nevertheless (against, for example, the early Lukács's version of historical materialism, “discursive idealism,” and the like), then, it might be concluded, what is required is a meta-dialectical materialism that delineates the dialectics between the domains covered by dialectical materialism (i.e., the Real as nature) and historical materialism (i.e., Imaginary–Symbolic realities as culture).²⁵ Put differently, if, as *Absolute Recoil* has it, “the limit that separates the Real from the symbolic is simultaneously external and internal to the symbolic,”²⁶ then a certain amount of (meta-)dialectical finesse will be demanded of a materialism striving to walk a fine line between the Scylla of each and every pre-/nondialectical materialism and the Charybdis of all idealisms (including pseudo-Marxist ones).

As I already have hinted here, Žižek insinuates that the materialism of the 1908 Lenin amounts to a regression behind Marx circa 1845, going back to the contemplative stance of Ludwig Feuerbach and his eighteenth-century French materialist predecessors. However, Marx himself is not left unscathed by Žižek's recent push for a contemporary reworking of dialectical materialism. Not only is Lenin criticized via Marx—Marx in turn is criticized via Hegel. In *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek asserts that “today, one should return from Marx to Hegel and enact a ‘materialist reversal’ of Marx himself.”²⁷ Additionally, he engages in some Althusserian-style indictments of the young (pre-1845) Marx for being too Aristotelian as well as for assuming the potential effective existence of a thoroughly non-alienated human nature.²⁸ I would suggest reading this just-quoted assertion alongside Žižek's thesis, central to *Absolute Recoil*, that “the only way to be a true materialist today is to push idealism to its limit”²⁹ (in this instance, the only way to be a true Marxist historical/dialectical materialist today is to push Hegelian absolute idealism to its limit—something Žižek

hints Marx himself, in his mature work, starts doing specifically in relation to the structures and phenomena involving “real abstractions”³⁰). He later expands upon this thesis, using concepts and language borrowed from the Badiou of *Logics of Worlds*:³¹

The predominant philosophical struggle occurs today *within* materialism, between democratic and dialectical materialism—and what characterizes dialectical materialism is precisely that it incorporates the idealist legacy, against vulgar democratic materialism in all its guises, from scientist naturalism to the post-Deleuzian assertion of spiritualized “vibrant” matter. Dialectical materialism is, first, a *materialism without matter*, without the metaphysical notion of matter as a full substantial entity—in dialectical materialism, matter “disappears” in a set of purely formal relations. Second, despite being materialism without matter, it is not idealism without an idea—it is a *materialism with an Idea*, an assertion of the eternal Idea outside the space of idealism. In contrast to idealism, whose problem is how to explain temporal finite reality if our starting point is the eternal order of Ideas, materialism’s problem is how to explain the rise of an eternal Idea out of the activity of people caught in a finite historical situation.³²

Early on in *Absolute Recoil*, Žižek provides a succinct yet incisive inventory of current strands of nondialectical materialisms (all of which he subsumes under the Badiouian heading of “democratic materialism” in this quotation), pointing out that none of them incorporate within materialism the philosophical resources of Kantian and post-Kantian German idealisms in particular (with these, especially the absolute idealism of Hegel, embodying the ultimate apex of “the idealist legacy”).³³ Moreover, despite the problematizations of Badiou’s own version of materialism articulated in multiple ways throughout *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil*,³⁴ Žižek fundamentally endorses *Logics of Worlds*’s characterization of the “materialist dialectic” (by contrasting it with democratic materialism³⁵) as the genuine dialectical materialism to be advanced in the twenty-first century. Like Badiou, Žižek, in the conclusion to *Less Than Nothing*, calls for a materialism that goes beyond the limits set by a Foucauldian–Agambenian biopolitics of animalistic “bare life.”³⁶

Returning to the details of the passage quoted above, I want to raise some concerns and reservations from a (dialectical) materialist perspective apropos Žižek’s characterizations of properly dialectical materialism. Before doing so, it should be noted that I share Žižek’s (and Badiou’s) antipathies and objections to, in Badiouian terms, all those brands and flavors of biopolitical democratic materialism to be combatted ferociously by a (re)new(ed) materialist dialectic and/or dialectical materialism

(I also am in profound solidarity both with Žižek's occasional pleas for reviving Hegelian *Naturphilosophie* and Engelsian *Naturdialektik* and with his doubts about the authentically materialist credentials of Badiou's ontological framework³⁷). That said, Žižek appears to me to hastily conflate two different possible senses of "a *materialism without matter*": on the one hand, a materialism in which physical nature itself is deprived of its traditionally imagined positivity qua consistency, density, solidity, and unity, being envisioned instead as shot through and permeated with the immanent negativities of antagonisms, conflicts, discrepancies, and tensions (i.e., replacing God-like Nature-with-a-capital-N as an omnipotent and omniscient big Other or Whole/Totality as One-All with, in hybrid Hegelian–Lacanian–Žižekian parlance, weak [*ohnmächtig*], rotten [*pourri*] nature[s] as a nonwhole/not-all barred Real); on the other hand, a "materialism" in which everything material is dissolved into the "purity" of logical (whether symbolic or dialectical–speculative) and/or mathematical "forms" (an ontology difficult to distinguish from Pythagoreanism and Platonic metaphysical realism—one which, moreover, by no means entails necessarily either dialectics or anything material in a way distinguishable from the ideational). For the sake of abbreviated clarity and convenience, I will designate the former—a sort of conflict ontology in which "matter disappears" only as nonconflicted—as a dialectical materialism of weak nature and the latter—a kind of hyperstructuralist ontology in which matter disappears *tout court*—as a "dialectical materialism" (being really neither essentially dialectical nor materialist) of strong form. This second "dialectical materialism" is akin to what is captured by Žižek's examples of the diet version of a substance (*materialism*) deprived (*without*) of its substance (*matter*), free of alcohol, caffeine, and fat (thereby becoming unappetizing and unsatisfying). Moreover, this matter-free "materialism" of strong form calls for doubts about Žižek's materialist credentials identical to those Žižek casts upon Badiou's formalist, pure-mathematical, set-theoretic ontology.

The two distinct alternatives of what "a *materialism without matter*" could be are run together by Žižek in a single sentence, separated only by a long dash—"Dialectical materialism is, first, a *materialism without matter*, without the metaphysical notion of matter as a full substantial entity—in dialectical materialism, matter 'disappears' in a set of purely formal relations." Before the dash, one has a dialectical materialism of weak nature, but after the dash, it is a "dialectical materialism" of strong form instead. Therefore, additionally and correspondingly, there are two parallel senses in which Žižek tries to "push idealism to its limit": one in which a "limit" qua tipping point at which a twisting transition is made to materialism proper is accomplished (weak nature) and another in which a "limit" qua maximum or peak of idealism is reached (strong form). There is no

difficulty in guessing what the Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* would have to say, with some justification, about the second of these reinventions of dialectical materialism.

But, the problems with Žižek's elaborations of his updated dialectical materialism do not end with this. Even when advocating a materialist ontology of weak nature (rather than a pseudomaterialist ontology of strong form), Žižek, in violation of his own weak-naturalist stipulations regarding "the disappearance of matter" (qua "the metaphysical notion of matter as a full substantial entity"), seems surreptitiously to slide back into, despite himself and perhaps even unconsciously, a belief in a strong Nature as a holistically self-cohesive field of being(s). This possibly inadvertent slippage usually happens (within the pages of *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil*) in close proximity to employments of the Hegelian dialectical-speculative distinction between "substance" and "subject" (translated by Žižek into the Lacanian mathemes of S and \$ respectively).³⁸ In good materialist fashion, Žižek insists upon the ontological and temporal/genetic priority of substance over subject, with the latter emerging from the former.³⁹ But when he does so, he also tends to flirt with the notion that substantiality prior to the emergence of subjectivity (i.e., prehuman nature *an sich*) is not weak (as per Hegel's *Ohnmacht der Natur*) but strong qua a Whole organically at one with itself and its parts. In *Less Than Nothing*, he stresses that "the subject always, constitutively, comes second, it refers to an already given Substance, introducing into it abstract distinctions and fictions, tearing apart its organic unity"⁴⁰ and goes on to claim that "Man is . . . an anamorphic distortion of nature, a perturbation of the 'natural' rhythm of generation and corruption."⁴¹ Although the quotation marks around "natural" in the second of these two quotations allude to nuancing caveats, the gist involves presupposing or positing the "rhythm" of an "organic unity," something glaringly at odds with other formulations by Žižek as well as, arguably, with his ontology in its most fundamental, systematic dimensions.

Žižek's glosses on Hegel's substance *als Natur* and subject *als Geist* in *Absolute Recoil* likewise flirt with implying that there actually is, in fact, a substantial harmony subsequently disrupted by the genesis of subjectivity. Therein he states that

the Spirit is itself the wound it tries to heal, that is, the wound is self-inflicted. "Spirit" at its most elementary is the "wound" of nature. The subject is the immense—absolute—power of negativity, the power of introducing a gap or cut into the given-immediate substantial unity, the power of differentiating, of "abstracting," of tearing apart and treating as self-standing what in reality is part of an organic unity.⁴²

In addition to this talk of “substantial” “organic unity,” in the same precise context, Žižek also speaks of “broken symmetry,” the “ruining” of “the preceding peace,” and “the full and sane Body into which the wound was cut.”⁴³ In short, substance (S), before the emergence of subject (\$), enjoys, as Žižek’s mathemes themselves suggest, an unbarred (i.e., harmonious, unified) status, namely, strong positive plenitude rather than weak negative deficiencies.

However, some of Žižek’s other formulations that clearly avoid the apparent, surreptitious reintroduction of Nature-with-a-capital-N as a substantial big Other and self-consistent One-All bring with them their own difficulties. In *Less Than Nothing*, he recommends a “properly dialectical-materialist” move involving “not, of course, the direct spiritualization of nature in the mode of Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, but an immanent de-naturalization of nature”⁴⁴ (a line he repeats in *Absolute Recoil*⁴⁵). I must avow my very deepest sympathies with this idea of “an immanent de-naturalization of nature.” But these sympathies nonetheless are partly conditional upon exactly how one understands what Žižek has in mind here.

In Žižek’s recent work related to a resurrected dialectical materialism, he tends to speak of nature in and of itself as desubstantialized qua conflicted, disharmonious, inconsistent and so on, especially when addressing such topics as humanity’s distinctiveness (or lack thereof) in terms of animality, freedom, and sexuality (as well as when he touches upon ecology and “green thinking”).⁴⁶ Although this kind of talk differs from those of his other elaborations along the lines of “a *materialism without matter*” as a hyperstructuralist ontology of strong form(alism) (what I have rejected above as a betrayal, rather than reinvention, of dialectical materialism), Žižek sometimes, when articulating the tenets of a dialectical materialism of weak nature, seems too quickly to identify subject with insubstantial substance, *Geist* with *die Ohnmacht der Natur*, the barred subject of culture with the barred Real of nature (as also does Alenka Zupančič from time to time in some of her recent reflections).⁴⁷ At this juncture, it must be recalled that Žižek’s earlier-mentioned attacks upon contemporary (pseudo)materialist orientations subsumable under the heading of “democratic materialism” include dismissals of Deleuze-inspired “new materialisms” as indefensibly panpsychist, as implausibly spiritualizing nature (qua *natura naturans* and even *natura naturata*) in a regressive, mystical fashion.⁴⁸ But if the move is made of directly equating the two negativities of natural (in)substantiality and denaturalized/more-than-natural subjectivity, then how is this not tantamount to yet another panpsychism, albeit one with the historical distinctiveness of replacing an emphasis upon cosmic organic unity with one upon ubiquitous antagonisms and strife (Empedocles rather than Parmenides)?

Having reached this point, it might seem as though the Žižek of *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil* is inconsistent to the extent that readers are pushed into choosing between two incompatible options, both intensely unpalatable for any materialist agreeing with much of what Žižek elaborates upon so marvelously across the arc of his corpus: “pushing idealism to its limit” either by making “matter disappear” *tout court* (i.e., the Pythagorean–Platonic idealist metaphysical realism of strong form) or by lapsing into a disavowed panpsychism of the barred psyche (i.e., a spiritualization of nature in which the main difference from most other panpsychisms is that the spirit at work is split, rather than undivided, subjectivity [\$]). I am convinced that Žižek possesses and frequently utilizes claims and arguments delineating a compelling, novel variant of dialectical materialism avoiding and surpassing both of these unpalatable options. As on previous occasions,⁴⁹ I see myself as yet again conducting an immanent critique of Žižek himself, challenging some of his utterances on the basis of what I take to be the most charitable and powerful reconstruction of a systematic Žižekian metaphysics. All the same, this reconstruction requires carefully sifting through the black-letter contents of Žižek’s texts and selectively amending or disputing some of their details.

Playing Žižek contra Žižek, and moving toward a conclusion to this intervention, what sketch can I offer of a dialectical materialism that remains faithful to the spirit, while at the same time criticizes the letter, of *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil*? From my perspective, there are five lines of thought contained in these two monumental statements of Žižek’s philosophical position that fit together tightly. These intertwined lines of thought constitute a theoretical core both, one, supporting neither an idealism of metaphysically real forms nor a panpsychism of the split psyche as well as, two, able to be held up as a legitimate extension of the Marxian–Engelsian dialectical materialist tradition (as well as an inheritor of the enduringly valid aspects of the Hegelian philosophy of nature). In what follows, I pinpoint and briefly characterize these five facets of (partially) Žižekian dialectical materialism.

First, Hegel’s *Logic*, in all its mature versions, is not to be misconstrued as the Hegelian System in its entirety or even as the unique *Ur-core* of this System. By contrast with Platonic-style metaphysical realism, Hegel describes his *Logik*, on its own in abstraction from *Realphilosophie als Naturphilosophie und Geistesphilosophie* (i.e., *Logic as merely the first part of the three-part Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*), as “pre-ontological” (Žižek) instead of properly ontological.⁵⁰ The *Logic* unfolds the dialectical–speculative network of categories as epistemological conditions of possibility for the subjective thinking of the natural and spiritual