

Journal of Theoretical & Philosophical Criminology

ISSN: 2166-8094

Jtpcrim August 2022: 44-60

'Circulus Vitiosus Deus': The Death Drive Now and Then

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Abstract

Starting from an exploration of Freud's notion of the *Death Drive* and applying it to our times (said to have arrived at the *End of History*) this contribution argues that our contemporary thanatological moment does still offer, against all odds, the possibility of the invention of new way of living. Deploying and assembling insights from authors such as Lacan, Derrida and Stiegler, it may indeed be argued that history is over, and that, thanatologically speaking, our ever-destructive way of late capitalist life has been running on memory and repetition since the late 1980s. We are living in the end times. However, it is in facing up to this painful truth, mourning the past, and recognising that we are now, more than ever before, caught in the primal death drive, that we will discover a better, more humble future. What is proposed here is a return to the idea that what we need to do to escape from the fatal circularity of death drive capitalism is to lean on psychoanalysis and the theory that recognition, realisation, and a coming to terms with our situation will open up a minimal distance from the necessity of the inertia of natural being and enable us to establish a new minor (non)humanism characterised by an understanding and acceptance of the constitutive nature of lack, vulnerability, and finitude.

Keywords

Anthropocene - Death drive - Jacques Derrida - Ecological Catastrophe - End of History - Excess - Finitude - Sigmund Freud - Jacques Lacan - Minor Humanism - Psychoanalysis - Endless Repetition - Bernard Stiegler - Violence

Freud's Vicious Circle

In *Beyond Good and Evil* (2003) Nietzsche explains that God is a vicious circle in order to (con)fuse ideas of necessity and freedom. If the point of the idea of the vicious circle is to emphasise the horror of endless repetition, what Nietzsche elsewhere calls the eternal return, thus capturing humanity's absolute unfreedom before time that simply repeats, then god is a symbol of freedom from necessity and the ability to escape from the inertia of nature. Although many commentators have pointed to Nietzsche's influence upon Freud (for example, Lehrer, 1994; Assoun 2000), making the connection between the philosopher's idea of the vicious circle and the psychoanalyst's concepts of the compulsion to repeat and the death drive, Daniel Chapelle (1993) is more unusual in respect of the way in which he reads the Nietzschean idea of fatality against the Freudian theory of drive to excavate a 'therapeutics of Thanatos' that we might compare to the Heideggerian philosophy of being-towards-death. In this reading of the relationship between Nietzsche and Freud, the death drive is not simply about an instinctual, hard-wired, biological tendency to return to the state of nothingness that came before existence, but rather the possibility of coming to terms with repetition and fatality *in life* in the name of moving towards consciousness of finitude and a positive version of nihilism equal to a weak form of freedom. Here, recognition of the fatality of the death drive, and the fact that we cannot escape the metabolism of nature where life runs into death that leads to more life and so on *ad nauseam*, involves understanding the necessity of finitude, limitation, and vulnerability.

There is a 'weak' form of freedom in this self-understanding, in the sense that he or she who knows their own limits is no longer a prisoner of the modern, Promethean fantasy of a life lived without constraint that cannot but crash upon the rocks of the fact that nobody lives forever. It is, therefore, the fatal extremism of the Promethean fantasy of the man from nowhere, which we might also understand in terms of the Freudian notion of the absolute narcissist, that ends up conjuring the dark fiction of complete necessity, where we behave without hope that we might discover even a slither of distance from the nihilistic wheel of nature. The emergence of this bleak vision, a story of endless repetition without possibility of escape, is therefore the result of the necessary failure of the man who believes in his own divinity. The truth is very different. In reality Nietzsche's (2003) god of the vicious circle, the god who returns to haunt the period marked by the death of God, is a particular type of god, a weak god, a god who is godlike because she knows her own limits and is no longer trapped somewhere between the twin infinitives of absolute freedom and complete necessity.

But if the weak god is a Nietzschean innovation, I think that we also find this figure in Freud. In the Freudian case, we might think about the analysand, the humble god of psychoanalysis who, unlike the monotheistic God of *The Future of an Illusion* (2001b), comes to recognise the finitude built into their nature, and by extension the natural process that sees life pass over into death into life and so on, and is able to lay claim to some form of freedom on the basis of this recognition of limitation.

To be a weak god is to be human. On the one hand, the human is the animal that thinks, that knows itself, and that stands above the world. As Heidegger (1995) noted, the human is separated from the animal by a metaphysical abyss. Where the animal simply behaves, the human thinks and, on the basis of thinking, acts upon the world. The human is free. In this respect, to be human is to be a God. This is what Freud (2002) meant when he wrote about the Promethean God who remakes the world in his own image. On the other hand, conscious reflection, looking upon the world, and understanding nature, is a curse because of the insights that it brings. The Animal God is immediately castrated by his divine knowledge that life is finite and that he is ultimately no more than compost. He possesses the mind of a god, but occupies the body of a creature, and it is this cursed animality that Freud identified with the unconscious that means that we can never really think straight. Reason is forever corrupted, upset, shot through with primitive instinctual drive. The body always comes back to haunt the rational mind. Although we can kid ourselves, and imagine eternity in the form of culture and civilization, we consciously know that one day we will die. Even though Freud thought that this recognition was never available to the animal unconscious, that deep down in the space of the death drive we never really believe in our own mortality, the very fact of understanding the compulsion to repeat and the inertia of nature would

suggest a conscious realisation of now human finitude. Of course, this is not easy to take. It is hard to be a weak god and reconcile the idea of divine eternity with the realisation of the finitude of animal life, which is precisely why the human takes flight into unconscious drives focused on escaping from the horror of limitation: let's pretend we can live forever in the nothingness promised by the death drive. The alternative is to recognise the reality of the vicious circle and the compulsion to repeat and try to understand and come to terms with our own finitude.

This is how I propose to re-read Freud's (2003) concept of the death drive, making the point that it is only by coming to terms with, working through, and accepting endless repetition, and the limits of natural life in a high-tech civilization that leads to the fantasy of the Promethean God who knows no limits, that we might move beyond the vicious circle that still haunts our world. That is to say, coming to terms with the fantasy that humanity can leap over every natural barrier, including death, which then reverses into its nightmarish opposite in the techno-scientific vision of absolute, repetitious nihilism without possibility of escape that simultaneously represents, but at the same time destroys the idea of divine freedom.

This is, of course, precisely what the Freudian struggle between the irrepressible life drive and the unstoppable death drive is all about. In Freud's second system that emerged in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003), the human is compelled to return to a state of nothingness in the name of escaping from the trauma of incompleteness. The death drive is, therefore, paradoxically about immortality, freedom, and escape from natural limits, which is why it ends up fusing with the life drive that creates, constructs, and builds in order to deny the inevitable in a form of mechanisation that looks a lot like necessity and death. Beyond this frozen dialectic of (a) total freedom and divine escape and (b) complete necessity and animalistic technological behavioural automation, the main objective of the contribution at hand is to read the Freudian discovery of the death drive as the possibility of consciousness of finitude, which on the one hand imposes a sense of realism upon the fantasy of total freedom and on the other hand creates a minimal distance from natural / technological necessity through the very process of recognition, that has the potential to imagine a new, minor form of humanism marked by an understanding of vulnerability before nature.

Building upon the idea of a 'therapeutic Thanatos', which we would have to recognise is far from explicit in Freud's own explanation of humanity's suicidal tendencies in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003), the point here is thus to re-read the theory of the death drive for the 21st century and seek to show how we might unearth some sense of hope from this most pessimistic of ideas. However, before we reach this point, we must ask the question 'why now?'. What is it about the present moment that makes concern with the death drive particularly relevant? Given its concern with the experience of time, the exercise of re-reading the idea of the death drive, which we remember Freud developed more or less one hundred years ago, for our own period of history is not simply about tearing Thanatos out of one context and placing him in another alien world. Indeed, focusing on the relationship between the idea of the death drive, understandings of time, and the movement of history will enable a demonstration of on the one hand, the peculiar *untimeliness* of the concept itself and on the other hand, the strange *timeliness* of Freud's thought of circularity that seems perfectly appropriate to thinking about our own period of history beyond the end of the history declared by Francis Fukuyama (1992) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While the untimeliness of the death drive refers most clearly to Freud's explicit efforts to situate the idea beyond human history, in what Mircea Eliade (2018) writes about in terms of cosmic time founded upon the ceaseless repetition and endless recurrence of nature, we must also remember that the theory of a relentless struggle between Eros and Thanatos at the heart of not only human reality but nature itself, was never really accepted in the early 20th century, never mind one hundred years later. The death drive is often considered a mistake, a *faux pas* in the history of psychoanalysis.

Even in the 1920s the theory of the death drive was considered excessively speculative and Freud himself recognised that he was pushing the boundaries of scientific psychoanalysis based upon observation and evidence. The death drive is, therefore, a strange, rogue, untimely concept that nobody seems to believe in. Although it is possible to argue, in much the way that Todd Dufresne (2002) does in his book on Freudian crypts, that psychoanalysis had always made use of mythology and the projection of insights drawn from dead cultures into the present, the idea

of the death drive appeared to stretch this approach past breaking point to the extent that it seemed that what Freud was really doing was attempting to use mythological thinking to understand reality with only the most limited empirical evidence to support his conclusions. Given a modern culture of science, technology, and a progressive understanding of history, it is not surprising that Freud's theory of the death drive has been seen to be problematic, but this is precisely why I think it is possible to make a case for the strange, uncanny *timeliness* of Thanatos. Although we still live in modern culture, and somehow continue to believe in history driven into the future by science and technology, there is a sense in which this belief only remains because we have no other viable utopian forms of thought left to replace it. Beyond the post-modern critique of the modern progressive meta-narrative, which took in the deconstruction of the white, male, European view of the world and the techno-scientific hubris that has characterised much of modern history, the modern social, political, economic, and cultural system staggers on under the weight of our general disbelief (Lyotard, 1984; Stiegler, 2011, 2012). The modern system is mortally wounded, on its last legs, yet keeps going because we have nothing better to structure our thought.

We remember Fukuyama (1992), and his declaration that history was over and that following the demise of the Soviet Union and really existing socialism in Eastern Europe the liberal democratic capitalist model was the only game in town, but we now know that this moment ushered in a new (or old) strangely pre-modern sense of (circular) time marked by the failure of hope, the future, and any sense of progress. There is a sense in which Fukuyama recognised the implications of this moment. Beyond the celebration of the triumph of American values, Fukuyama realised that the end of history would lead to a new era of disenchantment, boredom, and nihilism. However, it was left to Jacques Derrida, who wrote *Specters of Marx* (1994) in response to Fukuyama's work, to fully develop an understanding of the impacts of the end of history and the defeat of the key modern utopian story, Marxism. Writing on the final demise of really existing socialism as a viable alternative to liberal, democratic capitalism, Derrida imagines a new period of history we might think about in terms of post-mortemism. In this new period of (non)history beyond the dialectic, which if it did not result in ever-increasing freedom, at least maintained a space of serious critique, Derrida writes of what we might take to be the final, funereal, form of liberal, democratic capitalism that nobody really believes in. In the classic liberal view, capitalism has no utopia, but is rather a space of endless contestation. The idea is that the individual pursues their own self-interest which then results in the emergence of some kind of functional society by the strange logic of market forces. In this way consideration of liberal and neoliberal economic thought from Smith to Hayek suggests that capitalism does in fact survive on the basis of a vision of utopian coherence. In the work of Smith and Hayek what we find is the idea of a *systematic* utopia, first in the theological concept of the invisible hand and then second in the cybernetic idea of the quasi-autonomous system, premised on the ultimate value of individual freedom and social function (Featherstone, 2017). As Max Weber (2010) explained, capitalism relies on belief. It has its own utopia. But what happens when we no longer believe in the capitalist system?

Despite the fact that the capitalist utopia is in a sense very similar to what Marx imagined the communist utopia would look like, in the respect that the communist society would work in the name of both the collective and the individual, the overriding problem with the late capitalist system is much the same as the one that finally condemned the really existing socialist society that it eventually overcame: the sacrifice of the good of the majority to the good of the minority who claim to lead in the name of the good of the system that secures the overall good. It is this problem that eventually put paid to the socialist-communist utopia and has similarly ruined the utopian socio-economic fictions of the liberals and the neoliberals. In much the same way that the story of individual and collective freedom never convinced in the former socialist bloc, which is what eventually led to the collapse of the socialist-communist regimes across Eastern Europe, what Derrida (1994) shows is that the late capitalist system that emerged on the other side of the end of history was equally one nobody could really believe in or sign up to as a longer-term progressive project. In other words, Derrida shows how Fukuyama's (1992) end of history was never simply about the end of the dialectical struggle between capitalism and socialism, and the consequent triumph of the Anglo-American system of organising society, politics, and economy, but rather the collapse of really-existing socialism-communism in Eastern Europe *and* the related failure of the belief in the modern, liberal, democratic capitalist project that had maintained the west since at

least the industrial revolution. It is the birth of this post-dialectical, post-mortem, system that Derrida suggests conjures a parade of ghosts, ghouls, and spectres from the past that emerge in response to the failure of the future.

Writing in the early 1990s, Derrida (1994) concentrated his attention on the spectres of Marx haunting the new globalised, late capitalist system that kept expanding without and perhaps precisely because it lacked any sense of a longer-term future. However, I would make the case that since the publication of *Specters of Marx* (1994) the ghosts and ghouls spooking the present in the name of the future have proliferated to the extent that we might now reaffirm Derrida's insight that we occupy a time that is strangely dislocated, disjointed, and out of joint with itself. In this post-mortem moment the past haunts the present precisely because there is no future. In our disjointed times facing the past more than anything that looks like a future, we grimly hold onto the modern progressive dream that the application of science and technology will continue to improve the world and imagine that tomorrow will be better than today which we think must be better than yesterday on this basis. But reality suggests an alternative reading of our situation. Surely it is difficult to now sustain the view that liberal democracy will realise the freedom of the many from misery. It is surely even harder to make the case that capitalism will achieve the emancipation of the poor and desperate from a state of economic necessity. Without this sense of belief, without this sense of hope for the future, what we have left in liberal, democratic capitalism is a funereal mechanism - an endless cycle of elections that repeat the failures of the past, an endless cycle of economic boom and bust, and an endless cycle of commodity exchange - which recalls Nietzsche's vision of the vicious circle and Freud's theory of the death drive that simply repeats without any sense of possibility for change. Writing in the wake of World War I, writing in the teeth of the Spanish Flu pandemic that tore through the world's population killing up to 50 million people, Freud could no longer believe in the idea of progress, that modern science and technology would lead humanity into the future, and instead imagined a cyclical version of time characterised by the inertia of nature. Everything that lives ultimately returns to the state of non-life from where it originally came.

From the perspective of the living, this state of non-life looks like death, which is why Freud (2003) wrote of the death drive, but in the longer view death is nothing more than a return to source that produces life. In this older mythical understanding of time history gives way nature and the untimely and the timely come together to create a kind of short-circuit that enables us to reflect on the uncanny similarity of the period when Freud wrote *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003) and imagined the idea of the death drive and our own time marked by post-mortemism, the end of the future, and a procession of ghosts, ghouls, and other creatures emerging from the shadows cast by the dark night of reason. From Wittels' early biography of the father of psychoanalysis, through Ernest Jones' work, up to Derrida's (2020) seminar on life and death, it has been normal to understand the death drive in terms of Freud's pessimism in the face of a culture of death and destruction wrought by the Great War, the Spanish Flu, which claimed his favourite daughter Sophie, and a general sense of the end of modernity. In this late period weighed down by death, Freud also wrote *Civilization and its Discontents* (2002), which lifted the idea of the death drive towards a social level, suggesting that civilization, society, and specifically social norms organised around Oedipus, were essential to prevent humanity bringing about its own extinction. In this account history and progress are miserable processes, and civilization is a kind of dire utopia, but these structures will keep humanity alive. This is the best we can hope for out of life. Fast forward through the collapse of Weimar, the rise of Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, and Hiroshima and we might imagine that Freud's vision of humanity precariously balanced on the edge of life and death was a perfect representation of much of the 20th century. The same would be the case for the second half of the century, represented by the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation, when American and Soviet leaders, from Kennedy and Khrushchev to Reagan and Andropov, sat with their fingers on the button, unconsciously caught somewhere between the will to live, preserve life, and survive, and the darker drive to (mega)death and the destruction of the other, knowing very well what would happen next.

Following the end of history, and the appearance of Derrida's (1994) spectres, who we might argue finally announced the victory of mythological / natural time by constantly reminding us of what once had been, it is uncanny that we have now travelled back to the future with the

Freud of *Beyond Pleasure Principle* (2003). Struggling to imagine a future under the weight of a global pandemic, war in Europe, the inexorable rise of extremist politics, and dire economic conditions, we remember Freud's own situation and wonder whether we are indeed trapped within the vicious circle of the death drive. Suspecting that we are condemned to repeat, we worry that contemporary post-mortemism is a sign of even more devastating endings coming down the line. We no longer believe in progress, we no longer believe in a future that is not ravaged by war, misery, and the fires of ecological destruction, which is precisely why we should re-read Freud's most pessimistic (un)timely work now.

But how should we understand the idea of the death drive today? Contrary to Freud's explicit catastrophism, which leads him to suggest that what human beings really want is the flatline of death, I think that the hidden meaning of the idea of death drive resides in its messianism. Although comparisons to the Nietzschean concept of the eternal return and the psycho-psychics of Gustav Fechner are well documented (See Lehrer, 1994; Dufresne, 2002), there is less recognition of the relationship between the idea of the death drive, Jewish thought, and specifically Jewish mysticism that understands time in terms of apocalyptic cycles characterised by the movement between catastrophe and redemption. Despite the fact that Freud is normally thought about in terms of his secular Judaism, a number of writers, including most importantly David Bakan (1990) and Joseph Berke (2018), have emphasised his debt to Jewish mysticism. Understood from the perspective of this hidden or unconscious Freud, I think that it is possible to reveal the redemptive messianism of not only the theory of the death drive, but also psychoanalysis itself, which we might similarly understand in terms of breaking out of repetitive, cyclical forms of behaviour that mean that we are never able to escape the past or the spectres that refuse to leave us alone to imagine the future.

In this context, psychoanalysis becomes about the interminable struggle to recognise and overcome repetitive forms of behaviour connected to repressed traumas that ensure that the analysand remains a kind of fleshy automaton. Repeto ergo sum: I repeat, therefore I am. Against this vision of what it means to have a self, Freudian psychoanalysis imagines that recognising and understanding the causes of repetition will create a minimal distance between the analysand and their animal behaviour driven by unconscious forces. Thus, the analysand cannot say that they are free, in the sense of the Promethean God who stands over and above the world, but equally they are not locked into their environment in the same way that the animal, unable to think, or rise above their situation finds itself wholly determined by instinctual forces and environmental pressures. Following the logic of mystical, messianic time, which I think it is possible to uncover in Freud's work, the analysand is, therefore, able to think otherwise, to think outside of repetition, and challenge their own behaviour. It is, moreover, this reading of psychoanalysis in general that I would seek to apply to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003) and the concept of the death drive. Contrary to the standard view, which regards the concept of the death drive as a mistake in the history of psychoanalysis, my reading would be that what Freud really arrived at through the idea of Thanatos is a kind of radicalisation of the theory of psychoanalysis itself, concerned with understanding the fatal effects of repetition and moving beyond these through recognition, realisation, and the practice of working through. Despite the explicit pessimism of the idea of the death drive, in what follows I want to suggest a hopeful, utopian, messianic reading of Thanatos concerned with unearthing or revealing possibility and weak forms of freedom in the face of catastrophe, hopelessness, and apparent necessity.

In order to develop this reading, in the second and final parts of my chapter I propose to first, sketch out the Freud's theory of the death drive set out in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003), before noting key interpretations of the text centred upon Freud's biography and longer-term relationship to cultural history. Second, thinking through the relationship between Freud's idea of history, the end of history, and our own period, I propose to explore the meaning of the death drive *now* and *then*. Recognising Freud's theory of the circularity of time, this work will entail discussion of the period from the end of history to *now*, where the idea of now relates to the notion of the messianic now time set out by Walter Benjamin (2003) in his work on the concept of history, before cycling back to *then* in order to consider the natural, organic history of the death drive. In the first part of this historical discussion concerned with *now*, I will make reference to Lacan's (1991) re-reading of the death drive, Derrida's (1994) work on the end of history, and Stiegler's

(2018) recent critique of what Han (2021) calls death drive capitalism. In the final part of the chapter focused on *then*, and the natural history of the death drive, I will take off from a comparison of Freud's (2003) theory of Thanatos and Bataille's (1991) vision of an economy of cosmic / natural excess, before concluding through reference to Norman O. Brown's (1985) cultural history of the death drive that explains the idea in terms of sublimation and the rejection of the body. The point of this section of the chapter is to try to rethink understandings of Freud's biologism, which have traditionally sought to oppose his reductionist 19th century Darwinian world view, in the name of an alternative position focused on a properly psychoanalytic recognition of the natural limits, finitude, and the vulnerabilities of the embodied human caught somewhere between the animal and the divine. The value of this reading for our own period marked by the Anthropocene, the complete humanisation of the natural world, and the consequent destruction of the biosphere, is to open up a space for thinking about a new form of minor humanism founded upon the apocalypticism of the Freudian death drive.

The Death Drive Now

Developing his first system, comprising the tension between sexual and self-preservation instincts, Freud arrived at a new theory of the struggle between the life and death drives in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003). The starting point for the new system was a concern with the limits of the pleasure principle. That is to say that if the objective of human psychology is to maximise pleasure and minimise pain, it is unclear why we continue to replay or repeat painful and traumatic episodes. In seeking to explain this condition Freud referred to observations of his grandson, Ernst, son of Sophie who would later succumb to the Spanish Flu, and in particular the game of fort / da. This now famous game revolved around Ernst's response to Sophie leaving him alone. Freud observed that every time Sophie stepped away, leaving Ernst in his own company, the young child would throw a wooden spool across the room, before reeling it back in using the string tied to the back of the toy. Ernst would repeat this game, which Freud named fort (gone) / da (there) in reference to the child's playful vocalisations, for the duration of his separation from Sophie. Responding to this episode of play, Freud takes off into his explanation of the other side of the pleasure principle. In his view, Ernst's game might be seen to represent an attempt to master the trauma of his mother's departure in symbolic terms. However, since playing the game changes nothing about the reality of Sophie's situation, Ernst cannot bring her back, and Freud explains that he must play the game over and over again. Now it is on the basis of this observation that Freud develops the idea of compulsion to repeat and the suggestion, which has since become entirely accepted in theories of human psychology, that the ways in which we seek to make sense and respond to traumatic events that have happened to us is by replaying them. Since we are unable to make sense of traumatic events, or integrate these into our psychological structures, Freud's point is that we repress them into our unconscious. But we know that this is not the end of the story. As Freud explains in his 1915 paper, *Repression* (2001a), the repressed never stays repressed for very long, but continues to return to haunt the present. In this respect, it is possible to argue that the idea of the compulsion to repeat, which Freud develops in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003), is simply a development of the ideas set out in *Repression* (2001a). It is, however, more difficult to make the same argument about the next steps Freud takes in developing the theory of the death drive.

Expanding the idea that humans are repetitive creatures, constantly re-running painful experiences from the past in order to try to make sense of them in the present, Freud suggests that our psychology is little more than a representation or reflection of the repetitive cycles embedded in nature itself. The great myth of modernity, which we have ended up believing is a reflection of reality, is that time is linear and that development is endless. According to this story, which we can attribute to Hegel and others including Comte, history is concerned with the progression through time into the future. This is *not* how Freud understands time. Despite the structures of civilization that suggests that we move from the past through the present into the future, Freud explains that natural time is circular and endlessly repetitive. There is no development from the past into the future, but only the repetitive cycle of natural metabolism. Like every other complex organism, we are born, live, and die to give way to new people who progress

through the same cycle. So far so good, but this does not explain the idea of the death drive. This idea emerges on the basis of Freud's understanding of the way in which we interact with this natural history.

Returning to Ernst, Freud's point is that the compulsion to repeat represents our relationship to cycles of life and death. In seeking to escape from the trauma of separation from Sophie, in a manner which foreshadows what will happen later when he passes through the Oedipus complex, Freud's point is that what Ernst is really trying to do is escape from the pain of life that is all about the individuation of the complex organism. What would it mean to return to mother after one has been born and the cord has been cut? Beyond the crime of incest explored in *Totem and Taboo* (2001c), Freud's idea, which would later be developed by Otto Rank in *The Trauma of Birth* (2014), is that returning to mother, and returning to a state of in-uterine immersion that would take away the pain of separation, would look a lot like death. That is to say that going back to the beginning in order to escape the pain, trauma, and anxiety brought about by progressive individuation, would entail a return to source, a return to a state of nothingness before one was born, and the death of the organism. In short, this is Freud's theory of the death drive. From the moment we are born, and experience the trauma of separation from mother, we seek a return to the oceanic peace of communication and what Bataille (1992) would later call, *continuous being*. Of course, the very shortest circuit from life back to a state of nothingness represented by death, would be infantile suicide, but Freud rules this out. We never take the very shortest route back to nothingness. We live in a state of delay and detour.

Although we are possessed by primary masochism, and the will to destroy ourselves, which we then project onto others in the form of a sadistic desire to annihilate the self in the other, Freud made the case that the death drive is forever held in a state of tension with the life drive, Eros. If the death drive, personified by Thanatos, compels us to return to source, and play out what Freud calls the inertia of being without further delay, Eros pushes us to stay alive in the name of the reproduction of the species and communion with others. In this respect Eros might be seen as a social instinct, an instinct concerned with establishing relationships with others, and building civilizational structures. Thus, Eros leans on the idea of the Oedipus complex, which establishes rules and regulations around mother and returning to origins, and the development of the super-ego that polices our behaviour and stops us killing ourselves and each other. Understood in the context Freud was writing, early 20th century Europe, it is not surprising that his sociology became more or less conservative and functionalist. The basic idea behind his second system was to find ways to control the self-destructive tendencies in humanity that find external representation (projection) in the sadistic violence of self against other. But in the face of this will to destruction founded upon the desire to escape from the pain of life, the structures of civilization appear increasingly flimsy, and we can understand why Freud became more and more pessimistic. How else would one respond to the events of 1914-1918, the Spanish Flu, and a world that seemed to be in a state of collapse?

However, the concept of the death drive was not simply the result of the internal development of Freud's own system of psychoanalysis or a commentary on his view of world wracked by war and disease, though there is no doubt that biographical factors contributed to his thinking. As Dufresne (2002) explains in his cultural history of the idea of the death drive, Freud was influenced by a range of scientific theories emerging in the period, including the work of Gustav Fechner, who developed the concept of the constancy principle, and the innovations of Lord Kelvin and Max Planck who discovered the second law of thermodynamics concerned with heat loss and the tendency towards entropy. Thinking about these new developments in relation to insights drawn from Schopenhauer, who suggested that the final objective of life is death, and Barbara Low, who introduced the idea of the Nirvana Principle, we can start to arrive at an understanding of the theoretical pre-history of the idea of the death drive. Once we factor in other possible influences, including the work of Nietzsche, who Freud claimed never to have read, and Sabina Spielrein (2018), who wrote the essay 'Destruction as the Cause of Becoming' that is often considered to have introduced the idea of death drive, though the father of psychoanalysis once more denied her influence, and we can see that the theoretical ideas developed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003) were situated within an intellectual milieu focused on making sense of the movement of energy within complex systems and understanding the relationship between life

and death. Regardless of these intellectual influences, however, Dufresne (2002) is persuaded that we might find the real origins of the death drive in Freud's own *Todeangst* or anxieties about death. Noting Ernest Jones' comment that Freud would often take his leave by saying 'Goodbye, you may never see me again', Dufresne explains that Freud had a morbid obsession with his own death. Moreover, in Dufresne's view Freud's preoccupation with his own death filtered through into a fascination with dead cultures haunting the living and the creation of psychoanalysis itself, which, from his perspective, was never about anything but Freud's own inability to come to terms with his fear that one day he would be no more.

We remember that similar readings of biographical influence upon the origins of the idea of the death drive are common. Freud's first biographer, Fritz Wittels, makes the case that the death drive emerged from the psychoanalyst's pessimistic view of the state of Europe in the early 20th century. David Bakan (1966) suggests that we might see Freud's cancer of the jaw as representative of the death drive in cellular form. Although we might imagine that cancer may have influenced the development of the idea, this claim is less convincing since *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003) appeared in 1920, while Freud's cancer diagnosis was not made until 1923. We could express a similar view about the Spanish Flu pandemic and argue that the silent spread of the invisible virus represents the death drive in microbial form. Developing the line of argument connecting the flu pandemic that raged across the world killing up to 50 million people to the death drive that sets humanity on a course for self-destruction, Elizabeth Bronfen (1992) focuses on the impact Sophie's death upon Freud who called her his 'favourite child'. According to Bronfen, writing about the death drive would have provided Freud with the opportunity to come to terms with the death of his daughter and repair his wounded narcissism. In much the same that Freud reflected upon Ernst's game of fort / da concerned with coming to terms with mother's departure that would soon become permanent, Bronfen's thesis is that Freud imagined the death drive in order to make sense of loss of his daughter. The death drive was, in this reading, a narcissistic defensive move.

Drawing together these biographical readings of the death drive in his seminar *Life Death* (2020) Derrida writes of Freud's auto-thanato-biography. From this perspective we can make the case that in response to living under the heavy weight of a culture of death through the early 20th century, Freud first imagined the death drive that ensures that the end is never very far away, but then second, countered this by exploring the possibility of endless life in the form of simple organism, the famous protozoan that takes centre stage in chapter six of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003). Consideration of this thesis might lead us to conclude that it is not in fact death that represents the basic state of (non)existence, but rather life that is essential or necessary, which is precisely what Freud went on to argue. In this view, Freud imagines the world of the protozoan as a kind of uni-cellular utopia before the emergence of death, which only comes onto the scene with complex life and sexual reproduction that separates out the immortal germ cell that lives on through the species and the mortal somatic cell that expires with the individual organism. Since the single-celled organism knows nothing about sexual reproduction, but instead relies on replication or cloning, Freud's point is that there is no need for death, but only endless life that eventually exhausts itself when the mother cell gives up the ghost. It would be a mistake, however, to call this death since the mother is essentially repeated in the daughter who is then repeated in her own daughters and so on. Thus, the protozoan offers a vision of immortality through endless repetition. In this way Derrida points out that Freud sought to use the work of August Weissman to tip the balance of power away from the death drive towards the life drive in order to ease his own narcissistic wounds. The problem with this position, which Derrida (2020) similarly takes up in his reading of the molecular biology of Francois Jacob, is that the uni-cellular utopia is a myth. Reading Jacob, Derrida notes that the phenomenon of viral sex, which describes the process that sees the single celled organism merge with a viral other, is essential to evolution with the result that the state of complete isolation, purity, and cloning that Freud falls back on to challenge the horror of the death drive is a mythology of eternal life on a level with similar theological narratives that overcome death through the promise of ever-lasting life in some other place. As a result, Derrida (2020) asserts the essential difference between life and death and emphasises the point that there is no state of absolute narcissism. We are always living towards death.

Indeed, looking back over the course of 20th century from the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003) to the delivery of his own seminar in the mid-1970s, we can imagine

that Derrida's overall objective was to deconstruct the idea of absolute purity that had inspired the totalitarian movements in Germany and the Soviet Union and in particular show that there are no biological grounds for defending the idea of the reproduction of the same without otherness. At this point we should note the wider context, which is that the Nazis sought to overcome the trauma of the period from 1914 onwards through the reproduction of a form of armoured subjectivity entirely separate from all others (See Theweleit, 1987, 1989; Huyssen, 1995). However, in seeking to connect this idea of absolute narcissism to the endless reproduction of life in the shape of the pursuit of a Thousand-Year Reich, Lebensraum, and so on, what we now know is that the Nazi life drive very quickly reversed to take on the form of a murderous death drive focused on the destruction of all others who might get in the way of the purity of the self. Given that this thanatological project finally ended in Hitler's suicide in his Berlin Bunker, and that World War II was itself brought to a conclusion with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I think that it is possible to begin to sketch out the pre-history of the *now* time of the death drive running from the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003) through the rise of the Nazis and the horror of the Holocaust up to the atomic attack on Japan and birth of the nuclear age.

We know that the rest of the 20th century was lived out under the shadow of a nuclear version of Thanatos that threatened the destruction of the entire human race and that it was only when the really existing socialist-communist empire imploded that we entered a new period marked by the end of history, the end of dialectics, and the end of the linear experience of time that had organised life since the start of the industrial revolution. Although the Cold War liberalism of a thinker like Karl Popper would suggest that dialectics was always a fantasy, a vision of history that was never anything but a kind of quasi-theological story of redemption, and that the new post-Cold War meta-narrative should revolve around science, technology, invention, and endless development into the future, the problem with this position is that techno-scientific modernity has itself become thanatological in an age where we have become acutely aware of the mis-match between the human system and natural, environmental, biospheric conditions that support life (Stiegler, 2018). Given this situation, we have now reached the point where a preoccupation with modernity, development, and progress has become thanatological and the idea of the future has broken down before a new form of hopelessness and catastrophism that recalls the nihilism of Freud's (2003) theory. This is the key problem of the *now* time of the death drive. After the Cold War, beyond the declaration of the end of history, everybody is an American. There is nothing beyond the American model. But what happens if the American system, and the American commitment to techno-scientific growth, itself turns thanatological? What happens when we confront death drive (globalised) America?

Before Derrida responded to this question in *Specters of Marx* (1994), Lacan (1991) re-read Freud through the prism of the death drive over the course of the Cold War period of history. The reason Lacan's re-reading of Freud's theory of the death drive is important in this particular context is because what he very clearly shows is the ways in which the kind of nihilistic repetition outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003) found expression in the late capitalist model of society, politics, and economy that gradually globalised over the course of the second half of the 20th century until it became more or less entirely dominant the moment Fukuyama (1992) wrote about the end of history in the wake of the collapse of really existing socialism-communism in the late 1980s / early 1990s.

In his classic work, *Death and Desire* (1991), Richard Boothby explains the ways in which death, and centrally the idea of the death drive, permeates Lacan's work. Starting with the concept of the mirror stage, elaborated in his paper 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function' (2007), Lacan concluded that the fabricated, integrated self, the imago, reflects a state of essential alienation forever plagued by the lack of the real, which essentially represents his re-reading of the Freudian idea of the primitive, animal unconscious. Given the way in which the real, unconscious, fleshy thing, which sits behind the vision of the self we gaze upon in the mirror, interacts with the imaginary self or imago, Lacan was clear that it comes to represent death and the destruction of the ego. The real represents the animal body, the body in bits and piece (*le corps morcelé*), which exists before the development of the idea of the integrated self through the mirror stage, and that haunts us throughout our lives. Following identification with the image of the self in the mirror, which centrally represents a mis-recognition of what we are, because the image is never the real

thing, the real takes on the form of the lack that characterises human life. In this respect, it is possible to see that Lacan essentially re-wrote the Freudian story of fort / da, or the game of peek-a-boo which works in much the same way, in respect of the way in which he opposed the level of representation (the game of fort / da, the imago) to the level of essential reality (mother leaves, the real), that ends up becoming the thing that we lack. The difference between the two models is, of course, one founded upon the fact that Freud explains how we seek to overcome the difference between the representation of traumatic reality and the traumatic reality that we hope to resolve through a process of ceaseless repetition that endlessly misses its target precisely because it operates on the level of representation rather than on the level of the experience of the thing itself.

However, Boothby (1991) explains how Lacan repeats this Freudian move, which sets up an idea of the self as a dynamic representation endlessly seeking to escape from its own essential constitutive lack of being, through the introduction of the concept of the symbolic order, which we enter through the Oedipal phase. Successful completion of the Oedipal stage projects the imaginary self into the universe of signs, symbols, representations, and chains of signifiers that stand in for the real thing that it (the troubled self) feels that it lacks. As a result of this thrownness into the universe of signs, the Oedipal self-lives its socio-symbolic life in pursuit of representations of the real thing, the thing that it lacks, even though these representations will always miss their mark and never hit the spot. This means that Lacan's self of the symbolic order is characterised by the endless quest to overcome its constitutive lack through this, that, and the other object that it imagines might produce a state of wholeness, unity, and peace that would look a lot like living death. Moreover, while this endless parade of this, that, and other objects seem to represent a universe of difference, possibility, and hope for the future that might eventually lead to some kind of utopian resolution, Lacan is keen to return to Freud by emphasising the key point regarding the compulsion to repeat. That is to say that even though we might think about this, that, and the other representation of the thing itself in terms of difference and understand our relationship to this chain of signifiers in terms of our progression through linear time, what really matters is our tragic relationship to these symbols of the real that can never take away the fundamental lack that eats away at the heart of the self.

Thus, Lacan (1991) returns to Freud in order to capture the idea of endless repetition. The symbolic self is essentially a kind of robotic switching machine endlessly oscillating between non-being and being, lack and excess, and longing and satisfaction for the real thing that will make it whole once more (See Liu, 2011). In short, this is the Lacanian death drive and understanding of the self as a kind of cybernetic feedback machine that we might use to make sense of the thanatological dimensions of late capitalism and particularly consumer culture. The basic idea point here would be to say that if psychoanalysis teaches us that civilization is essentially symbolisation, and consumer capitalism is a particular civilizational form that equates symbolisation with commodification, then thanatological or death drive capitalism is what happens when our search for the real in commodified objects that always miss their mark becomes increasingly frantic in a context that reinforces our anxiety, lack, and insecurities. This is, of course, precisely what consumer capitalism seeks to achieve through the culture industry in the name of creating endless consumer need. Akin to the junkie, who must progressively increase their consumption of junk in order to stave off the terrible effects of withdrawal, consumer capitalism ensures that we need to consume ever more of this, that, and the other in order to block out the basic lack at the very heart of capitalist civilization, which the neo-Marxists, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, would explain in terms of mutilation, surplus repression, and subjection to the performance principle (See Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997; Marcuse, 1987). In this respect, we can start to better understand the thanatological properties of late capitalism and understand why this particular socio-economic system is psychologically absolutely committed to growth. Growth is everything in capitalist civilization. There is nothing beyond growth.

Looking back on the history of the 20th century, Alain Badiou (2007) explains this addiction to growth in terms of what he calls a passion for the real. While the totalitarianisms of the first half of the century were concerned with realising the purity of race and class by destroying all others, Badiou explains that the American approach to seeking out the lost real and overcoming lack has taken the form of an obsession with number, quantification, and endlessly pushing for more. We need more of this, that, and the other. We need to work harder. We need to increase outputs. We

need higher rates of consumption in order to stimulate more productivity in order to generate more growth. More, more, more. From a Lacanian point, this is the death drive in action. Indeed, a psychoanalytic thanatology to late capitalism, and particularly neo-liberal capitalism that has extended the commitment to performance to every aspect of life, would explain that what the obsession with more really reveals is an economy founded upon a commitment to excess concerned with screening out its own constitutive lack.

The key point is that it is lack that matters. Lack is what sustains the addiction to excess and, though we may not be able to take away this lack completely, because, as we have come to see, lack is what makes us human, what we really need to do to respond to the problem of death drive capitalism is find a way to take care of our lack by acknowledging finitude, recognising vulnerability, and understanding that one day we will be no more. This is the religion, the minor humanism, of the weak god that, I believe, we encounter when we read Freud (2003) and Lacan (1991) on the idea of the death drive. Moreover, it is precisely this realisation of the endless circularity of the death drive, a recognition of the tragic effort to escape from lack, that I think we also find in Derrida's (1994) reading of the end of history. While it was possible to sustain a sense of utopia to come in a bi-polar world, where we imagined that we would escape from lack if only we could overcome the other side of the Cold War ideological struggle, Derrida's point is that the end of the Cold War and the end of historical process able to defer lack endlessly into the future, created a new situation where the repetitive nature of the late capitalist model became clear in first, the lack of a clear sense of the future beyond ideological struggle and second, the return of the various spooks and spectres that might be seen to represent this lack or absence of hope.

We might, therefore, conclude that Derrida's (1994) hauntology is an effect of the realisation of the Freudian / Lacanian thanatology that reflects the moment when history gives way to what Lisa Baraitser (2017) writes about in terms of dead time, characterised by a new sense of uncanny duration represented by delays, pauses, remaining, endings, repetition, and the strange feeling that we been here before. What we experience in the contemporary moment, then, is a deep sense of dead time, defined by endless repetition and the return of that which we thought had long since passed, in the context of a social and economic system obsessed and addicted to novelty, development, innovation, and modernity precisely because real transformative change seems impossible. This is, in my view, the tension at the centre of the contemporary politics of the now time of the death drive. In the face of this situation, we can either follow psychoanalysis, recognise repetition, the circularity of time, and understand that our world is defined by an economic system concerned to escape from an inescapable lack, or continue to take flight through a kind of pseudo-history of symbolisation and excess concerned with screening out the reality of our finitude. The problem with the latter strategy, and the reason the concept of the death drive remains so important today, is explained by Bernard Stiegler across a number of books, but most particularly his late work, *The Neganthropocene* (2018). Although he does not provide a reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2003), my own take on Stiegler's work is that what he offers is an account of the final days of death drive capitalism confronted by planetary limits.

The fundamental point here, which is precisely what requires us to conclude with a discussion of the natural history of the death drive or what I'm calling the death drive *then*, is to say that if the death drive is all about the deferral of traumatic lack into an economy of symbolic excess that simply repeats on the basis that this economy cannot provide access to the thing itself, we have to wonder what happens when the socio-economic expression of this psychological condition runs into environmental / biological limits that it cannot overcome, beyond sci-fi (or indeed psy-fi) fantasies of extremophiles, terraforming, and exo-planetary escape from the limits of growth. This is, in my view, the problem Stiegler raises in his final works concerned with the Anthropocene, or the complete humanisation of planetary space-time, and the neganthropocene, or idea that what we must do to prevent self-destruction based upon the psychology of the death drive is to try to invent an alternative form of (non)humanism. Sketching out a vision of the present as an apocalyptic moment, caught somewhere between the funereal time of the death drive based upon nihilistic repetition, and the obsessive innovative temporality of late or neoliberal capitalism that cannot see beyond more, more, more, Stiegler explains that we need to *bifurcate* and come up with some other way of being in time in order to escape from the terminal condition of the endless return of the same that refuses to say its own name.

In conclusion, I propose to return to the idea that what we need to do to escape from the fatal circularity of death drive capitalism is to lean on psychoanalysis and the theory that recognition, realisation, and a coming to terms with our situation will open up a minimal distance from the necessity of the inertia of natural being and enable us to establish a new minor (non)humanism characterised by an understanding of the constitutive nature of lack, vulnerability, and finitude. To this end and taking into account that Stiegler's (2018) thanatological apocalypse of the Anthropocene concerns a problem of a mismatch between a socio-economic psychological machine and an environmental biological system, I propose to return to source and consider the organic roots of the death drive *then*.

Last Words: The Death Drive Then

Building upon Lacan's (1991) initial reading of the death drive and Derrida's (1984) economy of *différance*, Stiegler's sets up a theory of a technological Thanatos across a range of works starting with his history of technics and time (1998, 2009), moving through a consideration of the dynamics of disbelief and discredit (2011, 2012, 2014), before finally reaching exploration of the possibility of change in *The Neganthropocene* (2018). Taking his reader back to Plato's *Protagoras* (2009), and the story of the creation of the world, Stiegler (1998) reminds us that humanity was born in a state of default. While other animals were provided with the tools to survive in the natural world, humanity was left wanting, naked and poorly adapted, by Epimetheus who forgot to ensure that the human animal was ready to make it in the struggle for survival. The result was that Prometheus was forced to cheat on humanity's behalf, stealing fire from the Gods in order to give men and women a fighting chance, leading to a situation where they found themselves forever reliant on technology to stay in the game of evolutionary adaptation. The key issue here is that the need to invent technological fixes never ends, because every form of technology creates a new need for more technology, with the result that Stiegler's Epimethean-Promethean human is caught in a vicious circle characterised by lack, excess, and the search for a final, once and for all solution to the problem of environmental adaptation that never comes. Although Stiegler's key influences, Lacan and Derrida, tend to confine their interpretations of the Freudian economy of the death drive to the cultural sphere, what I think he achieves, particularly in his final work *The Neganthropocene* (2018), is a reading of Thanatos that returns to Freud through the naturalisation of the compulsion to repeat that takes off the from a consideration of the mythological, feeds through the level of the individual to the cultural sphere where the death drive takes on the form of a techno-economic system, until finally reaching an exploration of the way in which this civilizational model interacts with the natural, environmental economy of life and death. Thinking through the lens of this complex, it is Stiegler's (2018) conclusion that the human technological machine is now on the very outer limits of what the natural metabolic system concerned with the reproduction of life through death is able to sustain, which means that his techno-economic death drive pushes towards thinking a new level of destruction characterised by extinction and the very existence of entire species.

In this way I would suggest that Stiegler leads his readers back to a consideration of the death drive *then*, the primal, organic death drive Freud writes about in terms of the inertia of being, and that Bataille (1991, 1992) explores throughout his works on the economy of excess, violence, and death, by raising the stakes of the politics of Thanatos *now* concerned with an economy of extinction and existence. On the outer limits of Freud's (2003) theory of the natural inertia of being, we remember that Bataille (1985, 1991) bases his theory of the *accursed share* in a vision of the solar anus or the sun that constantly throws out heat and light in order to jump-start the economy of life and death. According to Bataille (1991), then, billions of years before Freud's repetitive vicious circle started turning over, and we became aware of the desire of the living to the return to a state of peaceful non-existence, the sun exploded into life and existence exceeded a state of nothingness that we can only really think about now in terms of some future extinction. Everything starts from this moment, the Big Bang, which troubles our existence. As Ray Brassier (2007) notes, primordial or, what he calls, aboriginal death, the state of nothingness before life itself, haunts, terrorises, and fascinates existence in the form of extinction to come. It is the problem of the compulsive drive to return to this aboriginal state, which is precisely the problem

Stiegler (2018) sets out in his work on techno-nihilism, that represents the political challenge of what I am calling the death drive *then*, which is also absolutely the death drive *now*, that I want to consider in my final words concerned with reading Norman O. Brown's (1985) work on the history of the economy of life and death.

Writing in the mid-20th century, in his monumental *Life Against Death* (1985), Brown explains that the death drive represents the basis of the neurosis of the human compelled to seek immortality through the final realisation of the objective of history. Thus, Brown sought to recast psychoanalysis as a response to the cultural pathology of history concerned with the once and for all escape from the trauma called living. However, there is, in his view, no salvation from life, no escape from death, into some kind of utopia of absolute peace that would put an end to the metabolism of nature. Instead, Brown thought that we must resist the tendency towards abstraction that mortifies life and return to the human body that makes us vulnerable, imaginative, creative, and most importantly, connects us to others and the natural world that sustains existence. Against the death drive, which seeks escape from the trauma of life through the funereal immersion in compulsive technological repetition, Brown suggests a new reality principle focused upon the resurrection of the organic body that functions as the primary contact zone between self, other, and nature. In this respect, Brown suggests opposing the narcissistic logic of Thanatos that pursues a purely defensive isolationist strategy towards others, in the name of the recreation of an alternative sustainable world characterised by an acceptance and understanding of human limitation and finitude in the more general economy / ecology of nature.

As a result, we see the point of returning to the idea of the death drive *then*. If Stiegler's (2018) reading of the Freudian-Lacanian system leads towards an understanding of the planetary expansion of the cultural version of Thanatos that ends up threatening death and destruction on the level of ecocide, then the study of the primordial death drive, the death drive *then* that cycles through aboriginal extinction through existence and back to the threat of extinction in the near future, suggests a return to the body, what Brown calls the resurrection of the body, for the sake of re-enchantment of life, which is valuable precisely because it is fragile, breakable, and exceptional in the context of universe of infinite darkness and ice cold nothingness. Of course, the final question concerns how we move beyond endless repetition set upon death, destruction, and escape into morbid immortality and reach this point where we can start to live again in full knowledge that we must make the most of the time that we have? My response is that this is precisely why we must confront the vicious circle, face up to the death drive, and work through our addiction to repetition, because it is only when we take this step that we will be able to accept who and what we are and start to develop a new humble, minor form of humanism defined by an understanding that sooner or later death comes to everybody. By virtue of the cunning of history, I believe that we are now on the edge of reaching this point, where we might be able to live in sympathy with ourselves, others, and nature. In my view, our current post-mortem period, a time characterised by what Laurence Rickels (1988) calls unmourning, represents the messianic moment I have sought to sketch out in my reading of Freud's (2003) theory of the death drive. Referring back to Lacan's later work on the death drive focused on the ethics of psychoanalysis and the destruction of the repetitive symbolic system itself (See Lacan, 1997), I think that our contemporary thanatological moment offers the possibility of the invention of new way of living. History is over, our way of life has been running on memory and repetition since the late 1980s, and it is time to face up to this truth. We are living in the end times (Zizek, 2008). It is in facing up to this painful truth, mourning the past, and recognising that we are now, more than ever before, caught in the primal death drive, that we will discover a better, more humble future.

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