

## Slavoj Žižek – Sublime Object of Ideology

Slavoj Žižek (born 1949) is a Slovenian academic and public figure. The success of his book *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) opened the English-speaking world to the thought of the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis — Slovenian philosophers, sociologists, cultural critics and psychoanalysts interested in the deep transformational processes of Eastern Europe societies as well as contributors of a fresh perspective on Western European ideologies of freedom and capitalism.

Žižek's project might be summarised as a quest for diagnosis of human condition in the late XX-century — an „animal sick unto death”, torn between antagonisms of global trade who in the face of openly visible labour exploitation bathes in images and phantasies of popular culture and entertainment. (Does this formula sound like a description of a radical marxist standpoint or perhaps it is a depiction of everyday's Instagram reel scrolling session?). From the one hand, this perspective's sociological and economical structure finds its theoretical foundation in the work of Karl Marx. From the other, the inner dynamics of individual's *psyche* coping with world's traumas and antagonisms seems to be conceptually graspable by the means of psychoanalysis (of the school of Jacques Lacan, whose teachings Žižek applies in his work).

Where those two levels of analysis disjoint is in how exactly the dominant ideologies conform with the human desires. To be more concrete: what is *it* that bends everyday routine of a „local” family member, neighbour or friend to the „global” presuppositions on race, ethnicity, gender or political affiliation — all in the context of purposefully ignored but truly „urging” problems of labour, ecology and violence?

In this moment, Žižek notices an important property of ideology itself. It is always easy to dismantle a „foreign” ideology by its inner antagonisms (e.g. from the Western perspective, communism must fail because... etc.). But how is it that at the same time what constitutes the impossibility of a certain ideology (e.g. communism) renders it possible to come into being at a one point in political history (e.g. USSR, China)? The danger: a functioning ideology *takes into account its own radical impossibility*. The example: *democracy* — a system aiming at being free of radicalism and oppression, whose values turns into radical tools of oppressive solutions within USA's foreign policies (in the name of democracy). Ideology primarily consists of many of such acknowledgements of antagonisms.

This observation allows Žižek to find the hidden link between sociology and psychoanalysis. A *specific* sociopolitical process described above has been already expressed in *general* terms by German idealist philosopher G. W. F. Hegel: the failure of a subject approaching the „absolute knowledge” (paralleled to the astray manifestation of an ideological utopia) is the foundation of its very subjectivity. Žižek catches a trail and „respells” the Lacanian psychoanalytical models in the terms of Hegel's dialectics — everything being constantly referred to the actual political changes and linked with familiar artefacts of Western culture

(e.g. cinema, literature, popular jokes) foundational to the moderns human's understanding of his or her very *self*.

But why do I regard Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* as playful and creative? First of all, the Slovenian philosopher demonstrated that an infamous 200-years old speculative system of Hegelian dialectics may be used to provide not even a crucial insight, but the whole conceptual bridge between many different fields of human thought (sociology, philosophy, politology, political history, psychoanalysis...), showing that boundaries between different fields are walls erected by human against himself. Such a discovery can be compared with the most creative use of proxy data analysis, when data traditionally belonging to the field A is used in the research within the field B.

Second, although the book is 250-pages long, the main hypothesis is formulated right in the opening chapter. Next chapters consist of reformulations of many well-known ideas, trialed with the newly proposed reading of Hegel (or vice versa — respelling Hegel with the psychoanalytic terminology).

Finally, all of it is at all times sustained by the most up-to-date references to the cultural landscape. This is not purely didactical in nature. Each artefact — *signum temporis* — most likely constitutes a source of meaning for the contemporary human, whose condition is here at stake.