

The Absolute Not Only as Substance, But Also as Subject: The Non-sublated Dialectics

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Abstract:

This article intends to argue that Zizek's dialectics is far from a vulgar progressive sublation of all reality in Concept but a systematic acknowledgement of its radical impossibility. Firstly, the fundamental point of Zizek's dialectics is not the notion of the sublation of all immediate-material reality but a "sublation of sublation". The conclusive of moment of a dialectical circle is the immanent act of abrogation or releasing. Then, through the elementary triad structure of the Hegelian notion of reflection (positing, external, determinate reflection), the ultimate secret of Zizek's dialectical process consists in a "determinate reflection" or a necessary redoubling reflection. The two quintessential examples of this redoubling reflection are the paradoxical monarch and God's reincarnation. Once his dialectic movement is elaborated, the esoteric definition of subject and subjectivity, as well as the mysterious Hegelian thesis "Substance as Subject" will become rather easy to understand.

Keywords:

Zizek; Substance as Subject; Dialectics; Determinate reflection; Redoubled reflection

Subjectivity or human agency has always been a key issue in Žižek's all-embracing theoretical edifice. However Žižek's definition of subject in his popular book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* is notoriously difficult to understand: "the subject is the abrogated/cleansed substance, a substance reduced to the void of the empty form of self-relating negativity" (xiii), which corresponds to Lacan's conception of transferring from substance to subject as from S to \$. In this article, I will endeavor to argue that Žižek's dialectics is far from a vulgar progressive sublation of all reality in Concept but a systematic acknowledgement of its radical impossibility. Firstly, the fundamental point of Žižek's dialectics is not the notion of the sublation of all immediate-material reality but a "sublation of sublation". The conclusive of moment of a dialectical circle is the immanent act of abrogation or releasing. Then, through the triad of reflection (positing, external, determinate reflection), Žižek's matrix of dialectical process consists in a "determinate reflection" or a necessary redoubling reflection. Once the feature of his dialectics is grasped, the esoteric definition of subject and subjectivity, as well as the mysterious Hegelian thesis "Substance as Subject" will become clear to us. Among the threefold intentions of *The Sublime Object*, the "reactualization" of Hegelian dialectics is obviously the most fundamental step whose theoretical contribution to the rehabilitation of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the critique of ideology could not be overemphasized.

1. Sublation of Sublation: The Culminating Movement of Dialectics

In his preface to the new edition of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* "The Idea's Constipation," Žižek refutes the standard interpretation of Hegel's absolute Substance-Subject as "thoroughly constipated—retaining within itself the swallowed content" (xii). By reversing the common digestive metaphor to a discomforting one, shitting,¹ he illustrates the final stage of the absolute Idea as releasing Nature or liberating it after the notional deployment is completed. So instead of some quasi-dialectical synthesis, the counter-movement "abrogation" is the immanent conclusion of the entire dialectic process without which the sublation process will continue ad infinitum. This culminating movement of sublation is actually a "sublation of sublation," or more precisely, "the self-relating gesture of sublating itself"

(*The Sublime Object* xv). Accordingly, Žižek suggests a prescription of some effective laxative for the critics of Hegel for misunderstanding the matrix of dialectical process.

Žižek's sublation or *Aufhebung* is not the sublation of all immediate-material reality as the most "idealist" deems it should be. Žižek's *Aufhebung* is rather a fundamental reduction: to abstract from the multiplicity of determinations the essential notional determination, which is the single predominant core of the thing. His dialectical process starts with the abstraction of Understanding, which tears the thing out of its empirical context and simplifies it into its essential determinations. Equivalent to Lacan's "the unary feature,"² the fundamental operation of this simplification is "a kind of epitomization by means of which the multitude of properties is reduced to a single dominant characteristic" (*The Sublime Object* x). So what survives in the end is a simplified edition of the thing, whose actuality is reduced to a possibility and whose immediacy of Life is lost forever.

But Žižek then reminds us that Hegel does not mean Understanding as the absolute power of tearing apart the elements is then sublated into a higher totality of Reason. It is not through the synthesis with the wealthy reality that we pass from Understanding to the unifying Reason. The problem of Understanding is that it is still external to the thing itself, i.e., the absolute power of Understanding is merely the power of our imagination without concerning the reality of the thing. In order to pass from Understanding to Reason, the power of Understanding has to be "... displaced from our mind into things themselves, as their inherent power of negativity" (*The Sublime Object* ix). To borrow the terms which will be elaborated in the part 2 of this article, we overcome Understanding until we accomplish the transition from external reflection to determinate reflection. The passage from Understanding to Reason occurs when the subject becomes aware that an original fullness of Life beyond Understanding is actually retroactively posited by Understanding.³

To continue with Žižek's definition of *Aufhebung*, he then quotes Hegel's words to describe this "shitting" movement: "after the notional deployment is completed, reaching the full circle of the absolute Idea, the Idea, in its resolve/decision, 'freely releases itself' into Nature, lets Nature go, leaves it off, discards it, pushes it away from itself, and thus liberates it" (*The Sublime Object* xiii). Therefore, True cognition does not immediately arrive when its object is imposed on notional determinations. The process of appropriation of its object will proceed as long as cognition remains incomplete. True cognition happens only when it can afford to liberate and release its object. This act of releasing the other is thoroughly immanent to

the dialectical process and is its conclusive moment of the dialectic circle. The process of sublation culminates in the self-relating gesture of sublating itself. The typical example of this counter-movement is certainly the God's incarnation. God freely releases himself into temporal existence in the form of a finite mortal: Christ.

And there is another example of early modern art: after the accent has shifted to poetry as a more direct presentation of subject's spirit, the "dead nature" (including not only landscapes and flowers, but even pieces of food and dead animals) can freely appear on the paintings without the burden of expressing human subjectivity. The direct and autonomous representation of natural environs symbolizes the fact that modern art is born. It is also worth mentioning here that the object, dropped after the notional reduction has done its job, is ultimately the object of cognition which can itself develop its own self-deployment without the subject's active intervention. At the level of Absolute Knowledge, the cognizing subject can only passively observe the thing to deploy its potential.⁴ That is why Hegel's philosophy of nature involves a passive attitude of an observer watching how nature itself sublating its externality instead of a violent reappropriation of this externality. In Žižek's words: the subject does not intervene in the object, "but merely registers the immanent movement of the object's self-differentiation/self-determination" (*The Sublime Object* xv). The agent of this process is not the subject but the system of knowledge which deploys itself automatically without any need for external pushes.

So the third syllogism of dialectical process can be generalized as followed: the speculative movement begins with the subjects immersed in the spiritual substance; then the wealth of this substance is reduced to its notional structure through strenuous conceptual work; finally the fully developed logical Idea can release Nature out of itself. However, the crucial part lies in the fact that this act of releasing is not a standard dialectical transition in which the subjective Notion in its totality becomes objectivity and the subjective turns into life. As Žižek reminds us that: "Hegel repeatedly insists here on this 'absolute liberation' being thoroughly different from the standard dialectical 'transition'" (*The Sublime Object* xvii). When the determinateness or reality of Notion is itself raised into Notion, there is no longer any immediate determination that is not equally posited and itself Notion. The pure Idea, in positing itself as absolute unity of Notion and reality, thus contracting itself into the immediacy of being, is an absolute liberation. The simple being from which the Idea determines itself remains utterly transparent to the Idea and is the Notion that abides with its determination. In essence, no transition takes place in this liberation.

Rather, it is more like a passage in which not only the Idea can freely release itself in its absolute self-assurance but also the form of the Idea's determinateness is utterly free. It is here this "transition" or passage which Zizek believes could answer all kinds of criticism against Hegel: the postmodern reproach—Hegel's dialectics admits antagonisms and only to resolve them magically in a higher synthesis-mediation; old Marxist reproach—Hegel resolves antagonism only through conceptual mediation while they remain unresolved in reality; and Lacan's critique of Hegel - "subjective disjunction". By quoting Hegel's assertion: "a previously unheard-of division that runs through the (particular) subject as well as through the (universal) substantial order of 'collectivity,' uniting the two," Zizek believes that it is this division cutting across the Particular and the Universal that "reconciles" them (*The Sublime Object* xvii). Instead of aiming to "resolve" the antagonism "in reality," Hegel's point is simply to "enact a parallax shift by means of which antagonisms are recognized 'as such' and thereby perceived in their 'positive' role" (*The Sublime Object* xviii).

This is where Hegel is a much more radical "materialist" who claims "a complete notional determination of an entity ... is in itself an abstract notion, an empty abstract possibility," according to Zizek (*The Sublime Object* xix). The existence of an entity would immediately result from adding "being" to its notional determination. The lack of being is always due to its inherent lack of some notional determination. For example, the empirical objects are perceived as opaque beings precisely because some of their notional determinations have to be met while other determinations have to be lacking. In other words, their notional determination is abstract, or their Notion is not full actualized. Therefore, things "exist materially" not when they satisfy certain notional requirements, but when they fail to meet them as a sign of imperfection or lack. In this sense, the externality of Nature with regard to Idea is not that of the Idea's constitutive exception but rather the mark of the non-All of the Idea's totality.⁵ That is why Zizek in the Introduction of his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* claims that Hegelian dialectics is: "far from being a story of its progressive overcoming" but "a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts" (xxix). The final dialectical reconciliation is not a sublation of all reality in the Concept but a consent to the fact that Concept itself is non-All.

This inconsistency of Notion can be seen in Zizek's frequent dictum "Society does not exist": when the subject faces the enigmatic, impenetrable society as the Other, he must understand that his question to the Other is already the question of the Other itself. The mysterious impenetrability of the Other or some hindrances preventing the penetration

of the substantial Other is nothing but an immediate evidence that the Other is itself already a lack, or a failure of symbolic integration. So the subject's inability to grasp the concept of society as a Whole has an ontological foundation indicating that Society itself does not exist. The fact that its concept is already marked by a radical impossibility renders that it can absolutely in no way to achieve a full identity with itself. And for this reason, Society as Substance, is already subject.

To summarize, Žižek thinks that Hegel's dialectic is not the endless cycle of appropriation-reappropriation but releasing or dropping the content after the appropriation. This externalization concludes the whole dialect process, symbolizing its highest dis-alienation:⁶ one really reconciles himself with the object not when he still has to strive to master it, but when he can afford the gesture of releasing it. So the Hegelian subject as 'absolute Knowledge' is a thoroughly emptied subject, whose position is reduced to a solely observer of the self-movement of the object. From another perspective, "absolute knowledge" also designates a subjective position which finally accepts "contradiction" as an internal condition of every identity. Therefore, this Hegelian dialectical process as a "process without a subject" is exactly what Hegel's fundamental thesis means: "it is crucial to grasp the Absolute not only as Substance, but also as Subject": "the emergence of a pure subject *qua* void is strictly correlative to the notion of 'System' as the self-deployment of the object itself with no need for any subjective agent to push it forward or to direct it" (*The Sublime Object* xxii).

2. Determinate Reflection: The Ultimate Secret of Dialectical Speculation

In this second part of the essay, by resorting to Žižek's triad of reflection (positing, external, determinate reflection), I will prove his repeated emphasis that the crucial mystery of Hegel's dialectical speculation lies neither in the conceptual mediation-sublimation of the rich and empirical reality, nor in the deduction of diverse reality from the mediating movement of absolute negativity, but in the fact that the absolute negativity must embody itself again in some totally contingent corporeal element to attain its "being-for-itself". For example, the State as the rational totality to achieve its effectivity has to be on the basis that the State is embodied in the inert presence of the King's body. It is in his idiotic, biologically determined body that the State as the rational organization of social life exists effectively. Or from the perspective of Hegel's famous speculative assertion "The Spirit is a bone," his dialectics is far from a circle of

dialectical mediation in which the subject “sublates” all the inert objective leftover. On the contrary, Zizekian dialectic movement implies there is always a certain leftover escaping the circle of subjective appropriation-mediation, and the subject is correlative to this leftover. The monarch, by means of its objective presence, filling out the void and embodying the impossibility of the signifying representation of the State, corresponds precisely to the concept of subject.

In order to explain the movement which brings forth the feeling of the Sublime, Zizek introduces the three movement of reflection: positing, external and determinate reflection. Borrowing Zizek’s hermeneutical example of text reading, “Positing reflection” refers to a naïve claim to immediately grasp the true meaning of the text which is actually no more than a pretension; When numerous mutually exclusive interpretations all declare itself as the true reading, “External reflection” provides a way out of this impasse by displacing the “true meaning” or “essence” into a transcendent “Thing-in-itself”; The passage from “external” to “determinate reflection” is to perceive how “this very externality of the external reflexive determinations of the ‘essence’ ... is already internal to this ‘essence’ itself” (*The Sublime Object* 242). This esoteric speculative formulation simply means that the internal “essence” is already in itself “decentred,” consisting in the series of partial reflections of the true meaning of the text as the external determinations. “Essence” itself is nothing but this self-rupture or self-fissure of the appearance. The fissure between appearance and essence is not only a fissure internal to the essence, but also internal to the appearance itself; and it must be reflected in the very domain of appearance. This is the definition of “determinate reflection”.

Also for the clarification of the two kinds of determinate reflection, it is convenient here to introduce “the double meaning of the notion of reflection in Hegel” (*The Sublime Object* 258). The first common notion of reflection designates the simple relation between essence and appearance: appearance “reflects” essence. Or we can say that essence is a negative movement of mediation which sublates and in the mean time posits the world of appearance. So we are still in the circle of positing and presupposing: the essence posits the objectivity as mere appearance and meanwhile presupposes it as its starting point of negation. The second kind of reflection designates the relationship between the essence as a movement of absolute negativity and essence presupposing itself in the inverse-alienated form of some substantial immediacy. This second kind of reflection will be explained in detail in part 2.2. In fact, the subsequent two kinds of determinate reflection derive from this double meanings of the notion of reflection.

2.1 Positing of Presuppositions

According to the first or common level of interpretation of the logic of reflection, the passage of positing into external reflection coincides with that of positing into presupposing. This level of reflection is the activity of the essence which posits the appearance. It is the negative movement sublating every given immediacy and positing it as “mere appearance”. But this reflexive sublation is always in itself bound to the world of appearance, which functions as the basis of essence’s negative mediation activity. So the passage from positing to external reflection is accomplished when the movement of reflection takes notice of how it is always bound to some given, external presuppositions which are then mediated through its negative activity.⁷ Then, in order to accomplish the passage from external to determinate reflection, we simply have to notice the fact that the very presuppositions are already posited. We are already in determinate reflection which Zizek defines as “the reflexive movement which retroactively posits its own presuppositions” (*The Sublime Object* 258).

With the help of two examples of the “beautiful soul” and “the suffering mother,” Zizek emphasizes Hegel’s “fundamental lesson” (*The Sublime Object* 245). When we are going to actively intervene in the empirical world, the first real move is not the particular, factual intervention but a symbolic one; this symbolic move consists in a preceding act by means of which we restructure our symbolic universe or shape our perception of the world in a certain mode in advance; without this previous formal symbolic act to open the space for our empirical activity (or inactivity), our next factual practices couldn’t be possible. By means of a purely formal act, both the “beautiful soul” and “the suffering mother” somehow structure their social reality beforehand so that he/she can assume the beautiful role of a passive victim while overlooking their formal responsibility for the given state of things.

Quoting an enigmatic passage from Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Zizek then explains this purely formal act as “... the conversion of the bare mode of objective knowledge into that of knowing reality as something produced by consciousness” (*The Sublime Object* 247). In this conversion, what is objectively given as reality is turned into something produced or “posited” by the subject as “effectivity”. To rephrase the whole process again: the subject first presupposes the “world,” on which he will perform his empirical activity, as the objectivity given in advance. But before he actually commits himself to intervening, he has to structure his perception of the world in advance to open the space for his factual intervention. This “act before act,”⁸ namely the subject retroactively posits the very presuppositions of his activity, is a purely formal “conversion”. Through it, the real world is

transformed into our perceived world as if it were resulted from our activity. And we must correspondingly be formally responsible for the given stated of things.

In this sense, the subject doesn't do anything in the real world and he only assumes the guilt-responsibility for the given state of thing. The transition from the substantial positivity (reality as "objective knowledge") to the result of his activity (reality as "produced by consciousness") is a purely formal one. The subject just pretends that the objective reality which he encounters in empirical world is his own work. This gesture of formal conversion is Zizek's "positing of presuppositions": the positing-producing subject posits the very presuppositions of his activity, of his "positing" (*The Sublime Object* 250). And it is here that the passage from external to determinate reflection is accomplished.

Only from this perspective can Hegel's fundamental thesis that substance is to be conceived as subject could be comprehended. Contrary to Kantian-Fichteian "finite" subject who "is always bound to some transcendent presupposition (Thing-in-itself)," the Hegelian subject is an "absolute" one (*The Sublime Object* 250). Through the aforementioned purely formal conversion, or by pretending the given reality as his own work, the Hegelian subject is no longer limited by some given presuppositions. He himself posits these presuppositions. He acts as if he had already chosen the way it is now and assumes full responsibility for it. The subject feigns to be liable for what is happening without even taking part in it. This is how "substance becomes subject" should be interpreted. In Zizek's words: "... by means of an empty gesture,⁹ the subject takes upon himself the leftover which elude his active intervention" (*The Sublime Object* 251). Subject is precisely this "empty gesture" which changes nothing at the empirical level but must be added for the positive content to achieve its effectivity.

Moreover, Zizek points out the connection between this Hegelian concept of "Substance as Subject" and the fundamental feature of the dialectic process (*The Sublime Object* 251). In the dialectical process, it can be said that everything has already happened. And what actually happens is simply a pure change of form through which we notice that what we arrived at has always already been. In the example of the fissure between essence and appearance: the fissure is not "sublated" by being actively overcome. The dialectical process simply involves a pure formal act of conversion which is to state formally that the fissure never existed. This is why Kant's philosophy is one of "external reflection" and he fails to accomplish the passage from external to determinate reflection. Kant's feeling of the Sublime concerns only subjective reflection external to the

Thing, not the Thing-it-itself. Nevertheless Hegel finishes the leap that the trans-phenomenal Thing is nothing but this reflexive movement of subject's constant sublating every given immediacy and positing it as mere appearance. This negative movement of mediation is an immanent reflexive determination of the Thing-in-itself.

The quintessential example of this seemingly paradoxical subject is the Hegelian Monarch. The state without the Monarch is still a substantial order and the Monarch represents the point of its subjectivation. The Monarch's role is purely formal one because his function is confined to adding his signature or consent to the objective content of decrees or laws which in fact are proposed by his ministers. By granting his name or adding a few words "It is our will ...," the Monarch bestow a pure form of subjectivity on the objective orders. However, the Monarch's function must be limited to this formal act of subjective decision: once he touches on the real positive content, he oversteps the line between himself and his subordinates with a result that the State regresses to the substantial level. Perhaps the best example illustrating this point could be the famous Lacanian affirmation when Žižek explains the fetishistic misrecognition in relations between men:¹⁰ "a madman who believes himself to be a king is no more mad than a king who believes himself to be a king—who, that is, identifies immediately with the mandate 'king'" (*The Sublime Object* 17). "Being-a-king" is therefore not an immediate property but an effect of the network of social relations where a symbolic mandate is imposed on him, i.e., the subjects regard him as a king.

2.2 Presupposing the Positing

However, Žižek reminds us "one crucial weakness" concerning the passage from positing to external reflection which in fact is the problem of the first level of the logic of reflection (*The Sublime Object* 255). To supplement this simplified external reflection, Žižek then introduces another decisive feature of external reflection: "the essence presupposes itself as its own other, in the form of externality, of something objectively given in advance ... in the form of immediacy" (*The Sublime Object* 256). In external reflection, the essence, which is the movement of absolute mediation, a self-referential negativity, not only presupposes its other (objective-phenomenal immediacy) but also presupposes itself in the form of an Entity existing in itself as some alien substance excluded from mediation. And this is the second level of notion of reflection mentioned in the beginning of part 2. This reflection designates the relationship between the essence as movement of absolute mediation and the essence presupposing itself in the inverse-alienated form of some substantial

immediacy or some transcendent entity excluded from the movement of reflection.

To use Žižek's example of "Alienation," it can be seen clearly this decisive splitting of the essence into some substantial immediacy. Religious alienation is obviously a form of external reflection. But alienation does not simply mean that the human being externalizes his potentials in the outer world and deifies natural objects beyond his cognition as manifestation of some supernatural Being. The more important step of "alienation" means that man also has to presuppose himself in the form of an external substantial Entity, i.e., he "projects" or transposes his innermost essence into an alien Being. This external alien Being is of course the almighty independent God in form of which man perceives his own essence as the creative movement of mediation or transforming force of negativity. In this way, the essence itself splits, presupposing itself as something alien, as its own Other.

Žižek emphasizes that this is the often overlooked part of Hegel's reflection: "we can speak of the difference, the fissure separating the essence from appearance, only in so far as the essence is itself split in the way described above ..." (*The Sublime Object* 257). In fact, if the essence is not in itself split in the way of extreme alienation perceiving itself as an alien Entity, the essence/appearance duality can not even establish itself. The self-splitting of the essence means that the essence is "subject" and not only "substance". "Substance" is the essence because the essence reflects itself in the phenomenal world of appearance; in the movement of mediation, sublation or positing the objective appearance, the "subject" experiences itself splitting as some given, external, positive given Entity, and this is how "subject" is substance.

So it can be said that the paradoxical "subject is substance" is precisely because the subject experiences itself as some alien, external, positive substance. And Žižek finally gives out the definition of "Subject": precisely "... this inner distance of 'substance' towards itself, the name for this empty place from which the substance can perceive itself as something 'alien'" (*The Sublime Object* 257). If the essence does not split itself as some external alien substance, there will be no place for the essence to appear as "mere appearance" which is distinct from essence. In other words, essence can appear only on the condition that it is already external to itself.

Now it is time to explain the crucial passage from external to determinate reflection. If it is not too redundant, the two levels of Hegel's reflection includes: firstly, the essence as self-referential negativity, the movement of absolute mediation; and secondly, the essence in so far as it presupposes itself in the inverse-alienated form of some substantial entity

exclude from the reflection. The transition from external to determinate reflection is accomplished when we simply experience the relationship between these above two moments as that of reflection. Or in Žižek's more concise words: "... this image of the substantial-immediate, positively given essence is nothing but the inverse-alienated reflection of the essence as pure movement of self-referential negativity" (*The Sublime Object* 259).

If the relationship between two levels of notion of reflection is considered as that of reflection, then the second reflection, which reflects itself in the form of its own presupposition as an immediate substance, is in fact a reflection "redoubled". Unlike the first kind of reflection which is an absolute negativity mediating and positing every positive immediacy as mere appearance, the second reflection, called by Žižek as a "reflection-into-itself" of the essence, is one in which "the essence redoubles itself and thus reflects itself in itself, not only in appearance" (*The Sublime Object* 259). The immediacy that this reflection of the essence reflects into itself is not mere appearance but an inverse-alienated image of the very essence, or essence itself in the form of its otherness giving body to the very movement of essence. And more crucially, it is a presupposition which is not simply posited by the essence: in it, essence presupposes itself as positing. And the ultimate secret of "determinate reflection" is thus this structural, conceptual necessity of this redoubling.

In this sense, the relationship between the elementary reflection (appearance reflecting essence) and the redoubled reflection is not a simple one of succession: the first one is not simply followed by the second. The second reflection in fact conditions the first, or opens the space for the appearance so the essence can reflect itself. Žižek subsequently cites the example of "God's incarnation" to prove this necessary redoubled reflection (*The Sublime Object* 260). In Christianity, it is not enough to assert that "man is the truth of God," or it is insufficient that the subject recognizes or reflects himself in this alienated substantial Entity God as his inverse image. The gesture of recognizing the alien essence God as nothing but man's creative potential misses a crucial step:¹¹ the reflective relationship between God and man to reflect itself into God himself. To be more precise, the substantial Entity God must itself split and "engender" the subject (The superior God must himself turn into man). This is decisive step how the subject really overcomes alienation.

The necessity of this reflexive relationship means that it is not enough to affirm the subject posits its own presuppositions because this positing of presuppositions is already contained in the logic of positing reflection. The external reflection is surpassed when the subject must presuppose himself as positing. The subject in fact effectively "posits his presuppositions" by

presupposing or reflecting himself in them as positing. It is here that Žižek finally gives a precise formulation of the passage from external to determinate reflection: “the condition of our subjective freedom, of our ‘positing,’ is that it must be reflected in advance into the substance itself, as its own ‘reflexive determination’” (*The Sublime Object* 262). Determinate reflection is defined by the “reflexive determination” in which an element embodies again or gives positive form to the very movement of sublation of all positivity. The universe is certainly the manifestation of divinity, or the reflection of God’s infinite creativity. But for God to realize his effectivity, he must first embody himself in a particular person—Christ. The subjects overcome the Otherness or the almighty God not by proclaiming Him their own creature, but by presupposing in God himself the point of “incarnation”. That is why in Christian religion, human freedom is conceived as a “reflexive determination” of this strange substance—God.

Another example to elucidate this redoubling movement which defines determinate reflection: the Monarch. The subjects as citizens of course live an immediate life as opposed to the substantial State which determines the concrete network of their social relations. How do the subjects overcome the alienated substantial State as the presupposition of their activity—“positing”? Žižek believes that only by reflecting free subjectivity into the very State at the point of the Monarch, or by presupposing the effectivity of the State itself at the point of free subjectivity (Monarch’s empty-formal gesture “This is my will ...”).¹² In other words, subjects are subjects only in so far as they redouble themselves by projecting or transposing their formal freedom into the very opposing substance (the contingent person of the subject-Monarch as “head of the State”), or they presuppose the opposing social substance is already in itself as subject (Monarch) to whom they are subjected. Finally, the definition of subject can be given as: “... this redoubling of reflection, the gesture by means of which the subject posits the substantial ‘essence’ presupposed in the external reflection” (*The Sublime Object* 244). The subject is subject only on condition that he presupposes himself as absolute through this movement of double reflection.

In Žižek’s next book, *For they know not what they do*, which was published two years later after the more popular work *The Sublime Object*, he continued to expound his dialectics by comparing it with Lacan’s “logic of the signifier”¹³, whose application led to his postpositional analysis of enjoyment in the political and ideological crisis of that time when the aggressive nationalism and racism accompanying the disintegration of the socialism in Eastern Europe was wreaking havoc. He also pointed out his failure evident in his reading of the Hegelian “negation of negation” in his

first book: "... fails to formulate clearly the inherent structure of the Hegelian dialectical process" (*For they know not what they do* xxiii). What he means is that he in fact fails to elaborate the mechanism of this self-relating negativity which provides the driving force of the progressive dialectical movement. Whatever Žižek's dialectics is called this time, the dialectics of Being and Nothing, or the dialectics of the One and the Void of its place, etc., the basic principle is consistent with the one discussed in this article and we need repeatedly return to this apparatus for theoretical retrospection and comparison. Žižek's dialectics is one essential segment in his famous overlapping Borromeian knot uniting the other two fields including Lacanian psychoanalysis and contemporary criticism of ideology. With the dialectics as a theoretical thread running through Žižekian critique of politics and ideology, as well as Lacanian psychoanalysis as its theoretical framework, his systematic and kaleidoscopic philosophical insights make him a world-renowned cultural critic.

References

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Notes

1

If the Hegel's system of cognition process is considered here as one of digestion, the "shitting" is then the metaphor of its counter-movement.

2

It is what Lacan, referring to Freud, deployed as the reduction of a thing to *le trait unaire* (der einzige Zug, the unary feature).

3

Or, it can be said that the passage from Understanding to Reason entails an experience how the loss of immediacy by Understanding is actually a "loss of loss," a loss of something without proper ontological consistency (Žižek, *For they Know not What They Do*: 157–160).

4

But this utter passivity also need the subject's greatest effort to "erase himself," so the Hegelian subject is both active and passive and this is how Hegel

solves the standard dualism between System and Freedom (Zizek, *The Sublime Object* xvi).

5

It is a Lacanian term. For Hegel, the truth of a proposition is inherently notional, determined by the immanent notional content, not a matter of comparison between notion and reality. Hence there is a non-All of truth. (Zizek *The Sublime Object* xx).

6

Lacan calls this de-alienation “separation”: the subject experiences that not only he is forever separated from the object but also the Other hasn’t obtained it—that is to say, the Other is in itself blocked. The lack in the Other gives the subject a breathing space preventing his total alienation in the signifier (Zizek, *The Sublime Object*: 137).

7

External to the movement of reflection are precisely its presuppositions.

8

This formal conversion has close connection with Zizek’s “The forced choice of freedom” or a free unconscious choice (Zizek, *The Sublime Object*: 185-190).

9

This “empty gesture” is exactly Lacan’s concept of signifier designating the elementary, constitutive act of symbolization.

10

In explaining Marx’s way of discovering the symptom, Zizek mentions the displacement or repression of two kinds of fetishistic misrecognition (Zizek, *The Sublime Object*: 21f.).

11

According to Zizek, this is the logic behind the fundamental motif of Christianity which Feuerbach’s model overlooks.

12

This point of the Monarch is a “quilting point” of society and it confers the social effectivity.

13

What characterizes Lacan’s notion of subject is still a redoubled reflection, or “a signifier represents the subject for another signifier” (Zizek, *For they know not what they do*: 15, 21–27).