

THE SUBLIME OBJECT OF IDEOLOGY (THE ESSENTIAL ZIZEK) BY SLAVOJ ZIZEK



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Review

“The Elvis of cultural theory.”—Chronicle of Higher Education

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About the Author

Slavoj Žižek is a Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic. He is a professor at the European Graduate School, International Director of the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, Birkbeck College, University of London, and a senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. His books include *Living in the End Times*, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, four volumes of the *Essential Žižek*, and many more.

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Slavoj Žižek, the maverick philosopher, author of over 30 books, acclaimed as the “Elvis of cultural theory”, and today’s most controversial public intellectual. His work traverses the fields of philosophy, psychoanalysis, theology, history and political theory, taking in film, popular culture, literature and jokes—all to provide acute analyses of the complexities of contemporary ideology as well as a serious and sophisticated philosophy. His recent films *The Pervert’s Guide to the Cinema* and *Žižek!* reveal a theorist at the peak of his powers and a skilled communicator. Now Verso is making his classic titles, each of which stand as a core of his ever-expanding life’s work, available as new editions. Each is beautifully re-packaged, including new introductions from Žižek himself. Simply put, they are the essential texts for understanding Žižek’s thought and thus cornerstones of contemporary philosophy.

The Sublime Object of Ideology: Slavoj Žižek’s first book is a provocative and original work looking at the question of human agency in a postmodern world. In a thrilling tour de force that made his name, he explores the ideological fantasies of wholeness and exclusion which make up human society.

- Sales Rank: #28614 in Books
- Brand: Zizek, Slavoj
- Published on: 2009-01-05
- Released on: 2009-01-05
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.74" h x .87" w x 5.17" l, .71 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 272 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

33 of 35 people found the following review helpful.

An early masterpiece of Zizek's

By C. B. Murphey

In typical Zizekian fashion, this book (his first published in English) is all over the place, from Shakespeare to Kafka, from Hitchcock to strange sexual practices. But don't get caught up in the distractions; Zizek works through some major theoretical points.

This was a major point in the book for me, and gives you an idea of where you're heading:

"But the case of so-called 'totalitarianism' demonstrates what applies to every ideology, to ideology as such: the last support of the ideological effect (of the way an ideological network of signifiers 'holds' us) is the non-sensical, pre-ideological kernel of enjoyment. In ideology 'all is not ideology (that is, ideological meaning)', but it is this very surplus which is the last support of ideology. That is why we could say that there are also two complementary procedures of the 'criticism of ideology':

- one is discursive, the 'symptomal reading' of the ideological text bringing about the 'deconstruction' of the spontaneous experience of its meaning - that is, demonstrating how a given ideological field is a result of a montage of heterogeneous 'floating signifiers', of their totalization through the intervention of certain 'nodal points';

- the other aims at extracting the kernel of enjoyment, at articulating the way in which - beyond the field of meaning but at the same time internal to it - an ideology implies, manipulates, produces a pre-ideological enjoyment structured in fantasy." (140)

The first procedure operates at the level of the imaginary and symbolic, while the second operates in the real. It is at this second level that we find the sublime object of ideology.

This book is for philosophers and others inaugurated into critical theory. As someone said in a recent review: just as you wouldn't buy a race car and complain that it goes too fast, don't get this book if you're going to complain that it's too 'dense.' If you have any grounding in Lacan, though, you should be able to get through it. Might take a reread.

35 of 40 people found the following review helpful.

The Sublime Object Of Ideology

By Nin Chan

This is where it all began for Zizek, and I would say that this really remains his best book. It is certainly the most useful of all of his texts, alongside *The Ticklish Subject*, as well as being the most organized of them

all. It is here that Žižek provides his fullest exposition of his method, demystifying in the process a series of misconceptions regarding Marx and Freud. Central to this text is his reclamation of Freud from the devastating critique of Deleuze & Guattari (*Capitalism & Schizophrenia*). If you remember, Deleuze & Guattari's objection to Freud lay in his fetishization of the dream's 'latent (Oedipal) content' over its formal, machinic assemblage- what results is an occlusion of the dream's subversive socio-political content, foreclosing the productive power of the unconscious by quarantining it in the familial triangle. Hence the persistent opposition of asignifying 'desiring-production' to mythological 'expression'. Žižek, in his reading of *The Interpretation Of Dreams*, reveals the structural homology of Freud and Marx- Marx, in his conception of 'commodity fetish', is close to the Freudian problematic of the dream. In both, the question is a strictly formalist one: why does the dream/commodity assume this determinate form and not another? This is the guiding question of Žižek's materialist critique- how do specific ideologies 'quilt' and constitute themselves? How does a symbolic field mask its Real (the immanent gap that prevents it from closing in on itself) through fantasmatic (Imaginary) displacements? Why are such displacements necessary, if an ideology is to hide the irrepressible antagonism that lies at its core? Is the postmodern annunciation of the 'end of ideology' the consummate expression of ideology, its ultimate historical realization? Take it from me, this is worth your time.

21 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

The Real Deal

By Theodor Adorno

This was his breakthrough book that led to him becoming an internationally recognised thinker who consistently brings complex philosophical/psychoanalytical concepts into the spotlight.

Anyone with any pretensions to being philosophically inclined should welcome the legions of new readers Žižek has attracted to such difficult writers such as Kant, Hegel, Schelling etc.

I think knee-jerk reactions that use phrases such as "charlatan" reveal more about the accuser than the accused. It's also rather surprising that such an allegedly "obfuscatory" writer should sell books in such large quantities to non-specialists who somehow manage to engage with his ideas with gusto.

There are plenty of reasons to disagree with Žižek, but to claim there is nothing behind his work can perhaps best be explained by the concept of negative transference???

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