

On the Dialectics of Slavoj Zizek —Reinterpretation of Hegel and Schelling

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Abstract: While "repeating Lenin" on the political, Zizek is also reviving dialectical materialism in philosophy. His theoretical opponents are mainly discourse materialism and new materialism. The main problem of the former is the identity politics of multiculturalism, and the latter is that the return to vitalism covers up the rift between subject and object. Zizek attempts to introduce concepts such as Lacan's death drive and signifier logic into the philosophy of Hegel and Schelling in order to rediscover materialism. In the interpretation process, we can see Zizek's use of dialectics.

Keywords: Dialectical materialism; Zizek; Hegel; Schelling.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Zizek's theoretical interest has gradually shifted from the early Lacanian psychoanalytic ideology criticism to the Lacan-Hegelian interpretation of dialectical materialism. In Zizek's interpretation, we can see his Lacanian interpretation of the classic problems of German classical philosophy. In Zizek's interpretation of German idealism, he particularly emphasizes the importance of the problem of the beginning in the philosophical systems of Hegel and Schelling. Hegel's *Science of Logic* begins with "What must science begin with?" In the philosophy of the late Schelling, not only the importance of the beginning is emphasized, but also the pre-ontological state before the beginning is paid more attention. Around the problem of the beginning, Zizek lays the death drive and the logic of the signifier into German idealism.

2. ZIZEK'S COMMENT ON MATERIALISM

Zizek's comments on classical Marxist dialectical materialism are mainly focused on the introduction of *The Parallax View*. In today's Western academic community, dialectical materialism has been neglected amidst a myriad of strange theories, which Zizek calls the "era of retreat of dialectical materialism". What he wants to do is to find the incommensurable disparity between the Hegelian-Lacanian idealist position and the materialism of dialectical materialism. Zizek said that the mistake of the classic "Stalin system" lies in "because he theorized the difference between dialectical materialism and historical materialism, and assumed that the difference between them was the difference between general metaphysics and special metaphysics [1]6." That is to say, the "Stalin system" regarded the natural-objective field as a universal ontology, and the historical-subjective field as a special ontology. The dialectical materialism in the natural-objective field had a dominant position over the historical materialism in the historical-subjective field. The laws in the historical field were the application of general laws in the natural field to special laws. Nature and history are related to the subject and the object. The "Stalinist system" has the problem of overemphasizing the object side and neglecting the subject side, which makes the entire philosophical system easily reduced to the modern philosophy's subject-object dichotomy.

On the one hand, the dialectical materialism of the "Stalin system" has theoretical weaknesses, and on the other hand, it faces challenges from the new materialism under the rule of late capitalism. In the introduction chapter of *Absolute Recoil*, it is stated that there are four main forms of current materialism: 1) reductionist 'vulgar' materialism (cognitivism, neo-Darwinism); 2) a new wave of strong criticism of religion (Hitchens, Dawkins, etc.); 3) any remnants of 'discourse materialism' (Foucault-style analysis of discourse material practice); 4) Deleuzian 'new materialism' [2]. However, throughout Zizek's polemic, there are mainly two types of opponents in his extensive polemic.

One is discourse materialism. Zizek's critique of discourse materialism involves, on the one hand, the disappearance of traditional subjects in structuralism, and on the other hand, the identity subject of Laclau's multiculturalism. For the former, the traditional Cartesian thinking and acting subject is arranged under the domination and suppression of the omnipotent big Other (Foucault's panopticon and Althusser's subjectification

interrogation), and the structure replaces the subject, which disappears in the network of signifier chains; For the latter, the proletarian revolutionary subject of classical Marxist theory is replaced by a signifier identity in the signifier chain: proletariat, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities... The historical inevitability of the proletariat replacing capitalism becomes a struggle against capitalist hegemony by various identity politics. In this sense, hegemony is contingent, and the subject of resistance to hegemony is no longer inevitable.

Zizek believes that the subject in structuralist theory disappears because of the assumption of an omnipotent big Other, in which the subjectified subject is conceived as the subject itself. On the other hand, although Laclau inherited Lacan's "non-total" logic, the master of the hegemonic position is the master of the signifier itself, which is lacking and incompetent. However, such identity politics is still defined within the hegemony of the master signifier. The question is whether such resistance can overthrow the entire system framework and open up a new world.

The second is the new materialism of Deleuzeism. The new materialism places the streams of matter, life, and active self-consciousness on the same plane of internality. This theory does not believe in the spirit that transcends matter, and the materiality of matter comes from its vitality. Matter possesses a capricious production capacity. The new materialism is a kind of vitalism, which gives material a beautiful virtue. Therefore, the problem lies in the basic ambiguity of the new materialism. Whether the vitality and agency of material is the result of human's "benign anthropomorphism", which is to imagine the big Other as a person who can be understood and similar to human beings when facing the pain of material. For Hegel, the rift between subject and object lies in the fact that the object externalizes subjectivity onto the subject, becoming a material entity. This is because "the idea is a certainty that has become truth... This certainty no longer considers itself as something that opposes the object and will not stop until it destroys it, but rather strips or externalizes this subjectivity, and forms a unity with its stripping or externalizing activity [3]47." For new materialism, they are re-writing subjectivity into the object, trying to return to the perfect state of the pre-Oedipal stage, and trying to cover up the rift between subject and object.

In the current version of materialism, the main problem lies in the improper handling of the two fields of nature-object and history-subject, either focusing on one side or trying to cover up the rift between the two. Without exception, the substantive substance disappears in the network of ideas. Zizek believes that idealism is to find eternal concepts in the changing material world, while materialism is just the opposite, needing eternal material in the changing conceptual world. In other words, the key to reviving dialectical materialism lies in returning to the theory of ideas, introducing the death drive into the cracks between dialectical materialism and historical materialism, and searching for a solid "non-human" core.

3. REPETITION: STAYING IN NEGATION

In the article "Beginning", Hegel first explained the two ways of thinking as philosophical origins and beginnings, namely, the objective side of "water" and "one" and the subjective side of "thinking", "intuition" and "subjectivity". However, the two beginnings mentioned above are not pure beginnings. According to Hegel's terminology, they have already acquired a defined existence. This involves Hegel's mediating nature, and it is at this level that Zizek introduces Lacan's logic of the signifier to achieve a mutual reading with Hegel. In Saussure's linguistics, the signifier and the signified are in a one-to-one correspondence, while Lacan emphasizes the status of the signifier and the priority of the signifier. The significance of the symbolic order lies in the mutual sliding between the signifiers, which means that there is no ideological connection between the subjects. The communication between subjects always relies on language, and the meaning of language is generated through the misrecognition of speech. The signifiers between subjects, so Lacan emphasizes a kind of inter-signifier. In a symbolic order, the manifestation of meaning lies in the mutual circular identification of S2-S3-S4... Such a circular chain of signifiers is what Lacan calls the death drive.

In the sense of Lacan's signifier logic, "water" and "thinking" are already in a symbolic order of mutual reference. Hegel's intermediary is equivalent to Lacan's death drive, but Hegel's philosophical system can reflect more than just the death drive. Returning to Logic, after criticizing the intermediary beginning, Hegel said that the beginning should be direct. "The so-called beginning is logical, which means that it should originate from a free, self-existing thinking element, from pure knowledge." It is obvious that there should be no preconditions for metaphysical discussions, and pure knowledge of the beginning should be the first priority. However, the paradox lies in this: Hegel also said that the beginning should not be direct or intermediary. At the beginning of speech, the beginning has already been an intermediary beginning. "Here, existence is the initiator and appears as a thing produced through an intermediary process that simultaneously sublates itself [3]47," Hegel concluded that the beginning is a

directness through intermediation.

In the interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, Žižek is particularly concerned about Hegel's "pre-set", which he explains using the term "retrospective". The beginning should be a direct beginning, but this directness is obtained through intermediary activities. Through intermediary activities, the subject retrospectively realizes the directness of the beginning, and this intermediary activity disappears through sublation. Žižek often says that dialectics should count up to four, and through the above explanation, a logical sequence can be derived: ① beginning; ② The intermediary activities at the beginning; ③ Beginning; ④ The abandonment of the intermediary activities at the beginning. From the sequence ①③, we can see two "beginnings", the beginning of sequence ① is obtained retrospectively, and the beginning of sequence ③ is in the signifier network of knowledge. Although they are equal in the same law, there is an inherent inconsistency between the two. The pure knowledge and original essence at the beginning are already a primal division, which is known as the "One" and the "Two".

From the chapter "Beginning", we can see that the beginning returns to the inconsistency between the beginning and the original essence itself when it manifests itself to the subject, and this inconsistency becomes the driving force for cognition. Hegel's philosophy emphasizes a kind of repetition, in which generation occurs through repetition. Žižek calls this "the tautological repetition of 'things returning to themselves,'" and within this repetitive activity there is also a sense of rupture and negation. It is in negation that dialectics can discover new things, that is, tarrying with the Negative [4]216.

4. DRIVE: THE ORIGIN OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

In his late philosophical system, Schelling continued the discussion of Kant's freedom issue in a theosophical way. According to Kant, the foundation of reason is rootless. On the one hand, it is necessary to find a basis of necessity for the concept of a thing, and on the other hand, it is necessary to find a concept for absolute necessity. A contradiction arises. If the highest necessity seeks an essence, then the highest necessity is already an all-encompassing whole. This is a nihilistic and meaningless tautology. However, discussing the absolute basis that every thing should have, there is an abyss that is higher than everything itself and cannot be self-sufficient. All essences originate from it, but all essences dissipate in it. Facing the abyss, Kant and Schelling took completely opposite paths. Kant chose a classical conditional network to avoid encountering the abyss, while Schelling viewed it as the madness before the birth of reason, a "past" of contradictory expansion and contraction tensions before the creation of the world. In this sense, the abyss of the pre-ontological is the real world where all symbolic orders dissipate. At the same time, at this theoretical node, Lacan encountered German idealism. The former ontology is a tangled mess, which is what Lacan called the mother-child community. Before the child develops self-awareness, the relationship between mother and child is chaotic and unclear. The child drinks milk when hungry, but the child does not realize that the mother's breast is not its own organ. As mentioned above, knowledge is in a network of differences in a signifier chain, which is also the self-reference in Hegel's reflective logic of essentialism. The essence of a thing is the representation of another thing, and the essence of a thing is interpreted using the representation of another thing. According to the abyss, the essence is indescribable, but a chain of signifiers has been established around it, similar to the Logos of Heidegger's discourse. Once a rational description is based on a foundation, the description of that foundation must rely on another description.

Furthermore, as a unified whole, the absolute basis expands within contraction, affirmation, and negation. If the absolute wants to realize its inherent negative potential, it must expand from its internal contraction. However, the more it wants to manifest negativity as reality, the more it must negate itself. As a result, negativity is no longer within the absolute itself, so the absolute must return to itself. Žižek compares this circular movement to a trapped beast, and the more the beast tries to escape from the trap, the stronger the spring of the trap becomes. So for Schelling, the basis of expansion and contraction in the creation of the world is the eternal sacred past of chaos, which can distinguish between the basis and the original basis [5]28. In Žižek's interpretation, we can see that the drive is an expansion of the original basis, but at the same time it is closed within itself, representing a "nothingness". We also learn that the drive revolves around the spiral of the basis's signifier. The suppression of the original basis means the loss of the mother-child community in the pre-Oedipal stage of the subject [6]. The original essence is always deficient and missing. The lack of the mother-child community stage represents the perfect state of the breast, which is also what Lacan called the small object *a*. In the entire speculative conceptual theory, there is a material loss from the "nothingness" of the original basis to the "nothingness" of the symbolic order. Just like in the acceptance of semantics, there is a material sound disappearing in it. This less than nothing thing, Žižek, becomes *den*. The appearance of *den* in the small object *a* is due to the division of *Taiyi*, and with the

disappearance of den, the trauma of division can be concealed. In this sense, den interpreted in German conceptual theory is connected with Lacan's small object a, becoming an eternal and indelible material core in the signifier chain.

5. SUMMARY

From the above interpretation of Hegel and Schelling by Žižek, we can see that the vortex of drive before the beginning is Lacan's real world, while the chain of signifiers after the beginning is Lacan's symbolic world, which is what Lacan calls the transition from drive to desire. Desire can never be satisfied, because in the chain of signifiers, the signifiers constantly slide and dislocate, and the subject constantly chases the metaphor and metonymy of the signifiers, which is a series of signifier symbols Signifier chain. At the same time, the signifier chain can trace back to the meaning provided by the signifier S1, thereby closing the gap between the master discourse and the university discourse, making the symbolic order manifest as a circular chain of Signifier chain. The establishment of the entire chain lies in the elimination of the inexhaustible residue at the break. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, it is the little object a, and in Žižek's dialectical materialist system, it is the less than nothing den. Den is not something that comes before in time. Logically, den always comes back in time from the lack of the One. Den is accompanied by exceptions to the symbolic order. In Parallax View, Žižek uses the concept of parallax to revive materialism. There is a third-party gap space between dialectical materialism and historical materialism, which is the minimum parallax. The legitimacy of the space of minimal parallax lies in Žižek's interpretation of idealism. By stagnating at the negative break of dialectics and repeating over and over again, the temporal nature of repetition constitutes the field of den's appearance.

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