



## THE WAY THE IDEOLOGICAL DESIRE CONCEALS THE POLITICS, OR HOW J. LACAN TEACHES US TO COMPREHEND THE DESIRE

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In this article the paradoxical similarity between the concepts of ideology and desire is discussed, when the publicly proclaimed political problems are distorted and they are proposed to be tackled as if they were undisputed truths. The critique of the ideology of the political theory and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis – both in a characteristic way to each – question the modern kernel of reality behind which there lurks the impossibility of the truth and of the reality, and show that the reality perceived by us is as much ideological as traumatic. In the article it is attempted to discuss the way these two concepts supplement and broaden each other. The ideology and the desire as the centers of the political visualization allow us to ask anew: what is real? And what lies beneath this explicated appearance?

**Keywords:** desire, ideology, Lacan, politics, Žižek.

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### Introduction

Slavoj Žižek perfectly notices: “When we see the starving African children with a call to help them, the ideological message is this: Do not think, do not politicize, forget the true causes of poverty, just act, donate money, it means that you must not think!” (Žižek 2011: 4). The ideological messages are most often constructed precisely according to this principle: the image and the commentary, which conceals the *true* nature of the image. In a true sense, that the image and the commentary are in fact in a wrong form, which makes use of the very same content of “reality”. In the case of the African children, no one attempts to look for the causes of such situation, it is undisputable – the call not to politicize stands for the call not to change anything, but simply to take the pleasure in giving aid, to enjoy the view that we see. We desire to provide aid not to the children who have nothing to eat, but to ourselves, we desire the

view that we see. The relation between the desire and the ideology is one of the most interesting questions in the context of political philosophy, and not merely for the reason that these concepts are very closely interconnected, – perhaps more due to the fact that we always have to put forward the key question: does ideology create the desire, or is the opposite the case?

### First as farce, then as tragedy

Even though, following Louis Althusser, one could say that ideology always comes prior to the subject and creates the latter, contrary to this proposition stands the (in French *le désir*) concept of the desire by Lacan, which he took over from Sigmund Freud's conception of the will (in German *wunsch*). Even though the structure of the desire might be comprehended as a need (in French *le besoin*), the demand (in French *le demande*) and the desire, the most important in this triad is the last – the subconscious of the desire which the subject himself cannot control.

The Lacanian subject, we could say, does not exist, since its existence directly emerges from the objectivity of the Other, and at the same time, here we can notice the paradoxical causal connection, where the subject turns up as that which refers to what is desirable. In other words, the desire establishes itself through subjectivity, appearing to us as the objectivity of the Other. The subject desires not a concrete object, he rather attempts to desire the way the Other desires.

The example of the African children provided by Žižek teaches us how to “do good”, but it does not suggest us to turn our attention to the world of the shopping malls that surrounds us, where everything shines only for the reason that – perhaps – the African children themselves create this window-dressing, or that this window-dressing itself is the cause of the poverty of the children in Africa. One needs not to search for conspiracy theories which are yet another ideological fantasy – we should rather ask ourselves: why do we feel pleasure in submitting to the incitement to help the African children? Why do we not seek to find the causes of this poverty, why do we desire in a way that we are asked to? In short, why do we submit to the ideological desire? And what, after all, it really is – a distorted subliminate of reality or the reality itself, which the ideology and the desire allow to appear? Is the subject – a person, who gives aid to charity, lives ecologically, takes an active part in the social life, who obeys the law, who is always positive, joyful, who is a leader pursuing his career, who has the most wonderful family in the world – is this subject a clown that has been invited by the ideology to act an economically beneficial role in the *society of spectacle*, or is it the *Desert of the Real* generating matrix that has been taught by the desire of the Other to submit to it? Or perhaps the question should be: how to distinguish where does the call by the ideological interpellation to become the subject and the subjectivity dictated by the objectivity of the desire of the Other begin? These questions make one wonder whether there is ideology without the desire and desire without the ideology. Their dialectical correlation is much more likely than even their theoretical separation. Precisely because of this it is necessary to look for the way in which ideology becomes the desire, and vice versa, and how all of this is hidden beneath the sociality, the politics, in other words, how these

phenomenon become an objective reality, the questioning of which is impossible, since there is no reality on the other side of this one, no symbolic network, where not only this questioning itself would fit in, – no other structure exists where the deconstruction of the existing reality would be possible.

Due to the fact, that it is in principle impossible to step outside ideology, and it is impossible to conceive the subconscious desire, therefore we shall call the desire, which compels us to submit to ideology, the ideological desire. Ideology may call one to identify himself with a certain object, it may call him to identify himself as a certain subject, and it may exist as a command simply to have one or another notion, however here only that aspect of ideology will be considered, when it (ideology) is directly linked with the desire and teaches one how to desire, makes him desire in the pre-determined mode of desire.

Not at all accidentally here – when discussing the ideological desire – it is referred to the Lacanian notion of desire and it is stated that the “desire is simultaneously the heart of human existence” (Evans 2007: 36). Or as Lacan himself said: “desire is the essence of man” (Lacan 1977: 128). The desire is what the whole linguistic network of significance of human existence is structured around, it is the relation with the big Other of the Symbolic (in French *symbolique*) space. It is obvious, that it is a relation with what establishes the subject, with what teaches him what is desirable. Bruce Fink, writing on the Lacanian subject, notes how often Lacan himself would repeat the same thought:

“‘Man’s desire is the Other’s desire’, ‘Man’s desire is the same as the Other’s desire’, and ‘Man desires what the Other desires’, all of which convey part of meaning. For man not only desires *what* the Other desires, but he desires *in the same way*; in other words, his desire is structured exactly like the Other’s. Man learns to desire *as another*, as if he were some other person” (Fink 1997: 54).

This thought, repeated many times, shows that it was very important for Lacan to emphasize the dependence of the human desire on the Other, or, in other words, that the Other is the source of the desire. However, it is difficult for us to grasp how these theoretical implications work “in practice”, or we could ask: what is this Other for the Other? The Otherness in the Lacanian theory of psychoanalysis has two aspects – the alienation (in French *aliénation*) and the separation (in French *séparation*). It can be briefly said that both the alienation and the separation show not the relation of the subject with the Other, but the non-conformity between the subject and the desire of the Other. Since, according to Lacan, totality does not exist, then, of course, the complete co-existence of the subject with the desire of the Other is also impossible: this connection is always designated with a lack, shortage. The subject appears alien to himself, since the complete identity does not exist.

Here it is purposeful to return to the ideology and to attempt to define it:

“Ideology can have any meaning at all – from the contemplative approach, in which case the dependence on the social reality is not comprehended, to the convictions that urge to take up action, from the irreplaceable medium where the individuals realize their belonging to the social structure, to false ideas that legitimate the dominant political power” (Žižek 2005: 70–71).

Such vagueness shows that ideology in essence does not submit to any boundaries, since these boundaries themselves are infected by the ideology. When the key character in the famous movie *The Matrix*, Neo, steps out of the ideological “world” of *The Matrix*, he sees the *Desert of the Real*, as the reality on the other side of the ideology, on the other side of *The Matrix* that had enslaved him. But the question of what is the relation between *The Matrix* and *The Desert of the Real* is never raised in the film: in other words, in the movie there is no space for the question over who had constructed *The Matrix*. The Lacanian answer would be: the reality is just another Matrix, since no reality is possible on the other side of the reality. We are constantly in a linguistic matrix. The most essential aspect of ideology is not considered in the movie: the fact that it does not enslave, – rather we desire it (ideology), we want to be in its servitude, ideology is not a “reversed consciousness”, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels held in their *German Ideology*. Ideology is rather the desire, the desire of the Other, the form of which we choose as the heart of our existence.

It is questionable: why is the desire ideologically framed. Or more precisely – why must the ideology be desirable, why is the ideological desire inevitable, so that we should put on the social costume made by it when taking part in the social feast? And why can it neither be forcible, nor – in the Althusserian sense – simply an interpellation? We may provide here few possible answers, one of which could sound like this: in order for the subject to be able to socialize, he first of all requires language, and the rules concerning the behavior within the socium, precisely this could be the equivalent for the Symbolic space – the non-personal structure of language and social rules. However, in a paradoxical way we are not forcibly pushed towards socialization, we do not necessarily have to answer the interpellation, we socialize because:

“The subject should come to recognize and to name his desire; that is the efficacious action of analysis. But it isn’t a question of recognition of something which would be entirely given <...>. In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world” (Lacan 1988: 228–229).

### To enjoy your tragedy!

The subject names his desire when creating his appearance in the world – this paradoxical idea explains why we cannot go out to the other side of the ideological desire: our very appearance itself is always already implicated by both the ideology and the desire. A question may arise – why is the desire ideological? Why cannot it be simply explained as a certain subconscious modus of the subject’s expression that has nothing in common with any ideological context? The possible answers are also multiple: first of all, when attempting to express the desire, the subject makes use of language, the linguistic reality is created only with the help of ideology and it would be naive to try to prove that a language cleared of all ideological distortions is possible, on the other hand, one must not forget that what the subject desires is not the satisfaction of the desires that lie within himself, but the desires of the Other and in the way this Other desires. And this desire is conditioned not by the urge to satisfy something, but it is designated by a want (Evans 2007: 37). Therefore, the subject not only attempts to

make his appearance in the world by his desire, to establish himself, but also to fill in the want, which is the cause of the desire.

Speaking about human beings, Lacan, without a doubt, considered the mother to be greatest guide in terms of the desire, who becomes the mirror for the desires of the infant, however when we refer to the subject of the sociopolitical reality, we can assuredly raise the question: who stands for the mother here? And the political leaders, as well as other public figures, that are being followed, are the substitutes for the mother. They show the way one is supposed to desire, they are the attempt to fill in the want which flings open between the Imaginary (in French *imaginaire*) and the Symbolic spaces: the ideological fantasy in between the imaginary and the symbolic contents couples these:

“First of all, it is necessary to notice that fantasy not merely realizes the desire by the means of hallucination – its function is rather similar to the Kantian “transcendental schematism” the fantasy constitutes our desire, provides it with the coordinates; literary speaking, it ‘teaches us how to desire’” (Žižek 1997: 7).

Such a complicated and mixed-up explanation can result in many open questions, for instance, does the desire, being the central axis of existence, have any purpose, or does the subject attempt to desire *like* the Other only for the reason that his “non-appearance” would be filled up. Or, how does the ideological desire change the understanding of the sociopolitical reality? The first question implicates totality, which has since long ago been renounced by the contemporary philosophy, so we can leave it, while the other question is useful when discussing the very functionality of the ideological desire. We should not claim that Žižek’s quotation, which was considered at the beginning, is merely a distorted way to place the issue of the African children onto the public space. It is rather an unsuccessful “filling up” of the attempt to tackle poverty. The solution that appears in reality is unconscious, but it is “incorrect” not because of this, we should rather consider the very attempt to find the “correct” solution, as the only possible, to be the problem. When looked at from many aspects – it becomes a manifold problem where the most various solutions are possible. The ideological desire conceals the problem not in the sense that it proposes an unsuccessful “filling up”; it rather discloses the fact that this problem is our subconscious “lack”. The issue of the African children uncovers the nonexistent want of care. Since the Western world has to constantly establish itself as the “end of history”, which is so because it looks upon the Third world as a phenomenon that moves towards its end, it (Western world) looks for what it could take care of, what it should watch over, since this has been the desire of the Other since the colonial times.

The Western world is still absorbed into the role of the care-taker and is attempting everywhere to establish the lack of its order, so that it would be possible to declare its order as the most just. This inversion: when at first it is necessary to create a distorted problem and then to try to fill it up, expresses the very best sub-consciousness of the ideological desire: we always retroactively think that we “have got hold” of the problem and now we may solve it in a different way, but is not our Western view, however much twisted, an aporia? A dead-end that does not allow us to have a glimpse at what is on the other side of this *Matrix*?

These are questions that we could fix with the most simple – ant the most foolish – lack of the want of polemics and debates, as the concealment of the meaninglessness of “polemics and debates”, as if all we need to do is to have a talk and the problems will be done away with. We never truly think that the debates will change the positions which we bring with ourselves; we only debate so that we would have the “grounds” to show that what we believed in prior to the debates is being confirmed. The purpose of the debates is not to reveal the various different opinions but to publicly establish certain positions. We are simply afraid to openly state that we have come to the TV show only to turn our opinion into the object of public discussions. That we are not polemicists but rather the architects of our establishment that execute the legitimatization of our uncertainty concerning our values.

## Conclusions

When we say that we want to help the African children, underneath this gesture we hide the lack of the desire over the help for the Other, that we see on the TV. We want to commit a public act of humanitarian aid – to become heroes, who can only become such if there exist the weaker ones – those from the Third world, who are in need of our help in particular, without which they will not feel happy and without which they will not survive. Only then we create the fantasy of our importance to the Other. Then we feel righteous when saying that liberal capitalism and democracy are precisely those central values that the Third world should seek, if it wants to create a problem which it could later on care for. The ideological desire in its most banal sense is our excuse for who we are not and who we are not supposed to be. It is the foundation of our reality, beneath which, unfortunately, there is nothing. It is necessary for us exactly because of this – so that we would believe in the reality itself.

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## Movies

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## KAIP IDEOLOGINIS VEIKSMAS PASLEPIA POLITIKĄ, ARBA KAIP J. LACANAS MOKO SUVOKTI GEISMĄ

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### Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariamas paradoksalus ideologijos ir lakaniškojo geismo sąvokų panašumas, kai iškreipiamos viešai deklaruojamos politinės problemos ir siūloma jas spręsti taip, tarsi jos būtų nekvestionuojama tiesa. Politinės teorijos ideologijos kritika ir Jacques'o Lacano psichoanalizė – abi disciplinos savaip – kvestionuoja modernų tikrovės branduolį, už kurio slepiasi tiesos ir tikrovės negalimybė, ir parodo, kad mūsų suvokiama tikrovė yra tiek pat ideologinė, kiek ir trauminė. Straipsnyje siekiama aptarti, kaip šios dvi sąvokos viena kitą papildė ir praplėčia. Ideologija ir geismas, kaip politinės vizualizacijos centrai, iš naujo leidžia klausti: Kas yra tikra? Kas slypi po šia eksplikuojama regimybe?

Reikšminiai žodžiai: geismas, ideologija, Lacanas, politika, Žižekas.

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