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# The Challenge of Power in Žižek and Foucault

## Summary:

The article maps Žižek's notion of agency against the background of Foucault's theory of power, especially as it emerged from *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. It argues that the awareness of the state of subjection is a necessary but not sufficient cause to effect social change, since any given subjection is inevitably eroticised, sustained by the disavowed pleasure we derive from being caught in a power mechanism. By considering the Foucauldian insight that knowledge is by definition drawn in the workings of power, we maintain that critical theory needs to reflect on the difference between resistance to power and the political act, thus marking the limits of epistemic practices as such. Rooted in the notion of the psychoanalytic act as radically shifting the symbolic coordinates of a given subject, Žižek's theorizations of social transformation go a long way in achieving this. Whether they amount to a model for social change based on collective political practice, however, remains questionable.