



SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: A Lecture—Performance

THEY LIVE! HOLLYWOOD AS AN IDEOLOGICAL MACHINE

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(Mission Impossible theme plays)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Good evening. My name is Paul Holdengräber, and I'm the Director of Public Programs here at the New York Public Library, otherwise known as LIVE from the New York Public Library. Initially, Slavoj Žižek and I thought that we

would have a conversation with each other onstage, and we figured that if we did that, we didn't know who would outdo each other's accent. So we decided not to do it. You know, when people ask me where my accent is from, I simply tell them it's affected. **(laughter)**

It's a great pleasure to welcome you tonight to what I think will be a lecture, perhaps, and certainly a performance. I won't say very much more, because Slavoj Žižek will be coming in a few minutes. I would like to thank 192 Books for selling the books, both of Slavoj Žižek and the current issue of the *Believer*. I highly recommend you pick that up, too, because it has a video of *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* by Slavoj Žižek. I think you might enjoy it. I would also like to thank *Metro*, who is our sponsor for all things print. I also would like to tell you about upcoming events, particularly an event about James Baldwin. It's a tribute we're doing to James Baldwin, and it's happening next Tuesday. We sold out of the small space, South Court, with 200 people, and just opened it up, and I highly recommend that, if you're interested you sign up as quickly as possible. It will have Colm Tóibín, John Edgar Wideman, Manthia Diawara, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Michael Thelwell, and the moderator will be Walton Muyumba. I just discovered, I must admit, the work of James Baldwin, and I am just deeply moved and so I feel that I want to share this joy with you, so please come.

Now, some of you may not know the other kinds of events we have coming up, so I recommend you join our e-mail list. There you'll see not only are we doing a Baldwin event but we are finishing the season with a celebration of Ian Fleming, who will celebrate, if he were to be alive today, a hundred years of existence, and we will be doing

a Bond event, and I don't yet quite know who's coming, but I think it might be quite fun, and I know that Slavoj Žižek has a take on Bond and he might digress on that in a few minutes.

Now, many of you might wonder who Slavoj Žižek is, since very few of you have come today, and I just wanted to let you know who he is, so I asked Žižek to write, sorry I'm turning my back to you, I asked Žižek to write a Žižek by Žižek, I don't know if any of you read this, but it gives you a sense of the man. Slavoj Žižek, philosopher and psychoanalyst with three basic orientations: a Hegelian in philosophy, a Lacanian in psychoanalysis, a Christian materialist in religion, and a Communist in politics. Arguably the only living philosopher who uses positively the terms "dialectic materialism" and "dictatorship of the proletariat." His work triggers continuous controversy. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, he analyzes the 9/11 event, was attacked as an anti-Semitic in Israel and a Zionist in Egypt. In his numerous books, he always returns to Hollywood. Good cinema is for Žižek a school of critical dialectics for the uneducated masses. So without further ado, I'd like to introduce my Marxist friend to you, Slavoj Žižek.

(applause)

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: We often find reference to psychoanalysis embodied in the very relations between persons. For example, the three Marx brothers: Groucho, Chico, Harpo. It's clear, Groucho, the most popular one, with his nervous hyperactivity, is superego. (Groucho Marx: "Well, that covers a lot of ground. Say, you cover a lot of ground,

yourself. You better beat it, I hear they're going to tear you down and put up an office building where you're standing. You can leave in a taxi. If you can't get a taxi, you can leave in a huff. If that's too soon, you can leave in a minute and a huff. You know, you haven't stopped talking since I came here?") Chico, the rational guy, egotistic, calculating all the time, is ego. ("You're charged with high treason, and if found guilty, you'll be shot." "I object" "Ohh, you object. On what grounds?" "I couldn't think of anything else to say." "Objection sustained.") And the weirdest of them all, Harpo, the mute guy, he doesn't talk. Freud said that drives are silent, he doesn't talk. He of course is id. (clip ending with Harpo's horn honking) The id in all its radical ambiguity. Mainly, what is so weird about the Harpo character is that he is childishly innocent, just striving for pleasure, likes children, plays with children and so on, but at the same time possessed by some kind of primordial evil, aggressive all the time and this unique combination of utter corruption and innocence is what the id is about.

Thank you very much for coming here, although this was for me a slight embarrassment, like whenever I see myself on screen like this, I try to avoid it, my first automatic reaction is to ask you, "Would you allow a guy like that to take your daughter to cinema?" No, the answer is obvious, no. Seriously, I want to thank Paul. I always like to be here. In the movie, not a big success, but an interesting one, I think, Roland Emmerich's, you remember, *The Day After Tomorrow*, I think this building was practically the only one in New York City where—which where people survived the big freeze. I think it's the correct thesis. New York Public Library is for me a wonderful mixture of what I cannot but call spiritual obscenity, so I like to be here.

Since I have, as usual, many things to say, let me go directly to the point, and if you are religious, pray that all this technical stuff with clips will function. So, let me begin.

Ideology in cinema. It sounds either an old-fashioned traditional Marxist question or rather stupid irrelevant one. But I think it is still relevant. Where are we to look for it? I think not in a film's big topic but in an apparently marginal narrative feature which, as it were, provides the frame for the big event. Think about the production of a couple motif which frames a typical Hollywood narrative about a big historical event, war, natural catastrophe, or whatever. This motif is quite literally the film's ideological surplus enjoyment. Although we directly enjoy the spectacular shots of the catastrophe, war, battles, the gigantic waves which destroys cities, *Titanic* sinking, or whatever, the surplus enjoyment is provided by the subnarrative of the couple. It is this frame, the frame through which we perceive the spectacular events, this frame is the film's surplus enjoyment, that which, as it were, bribes us libidinally to accept the ideology of the story.

Now I would like to begin now with a variation on this same motif, namely the deadlock, impasse of the paternal authority and then its restoration. I think, for example, this is a motif which secretly runs through practically all Steven Spielberg's films. *E.T.*, *Empire of the Sun*, *Jurassic Park*, up to *Schindler's List* and *War of the Worlds*, I think they're basically all variations on the same motif. Let me begin with *E.T.* The crucial detail to note from the very beginning is that the family, the family of the small boy to whom E.T. appears, the family was deserted by the father, as we learn at the very beginning, so that E.T. is ultimately a kind of a vanishing mediator who provides a new father. You

remember, at the film's end when E.T. finally goes home. There is already a good—the only good scientist who—scientist who in the film's last shots is already seen standing by the mother as a future partner. So I think that you shouldn't be too fascinated by E.T. and all that crap—it's really a story about reappearance of the father. Now, Dave, please, if you can now, I pray that it will work, see the two clips.

(Clips from *E.T.* play.)

The paternal figure, played by Sam Neill, jokingly threatening a kid with a dinosaur bone. This bone is clearly the tiny object, a version of what Winnicott called the transitional object, object which later explodes into gigantic dinosaurs, so that I intended to say that within the film's phantasmatic universe, the dinosaurs' destructive fury only materializes the rage of the paternal superego, which is why, later, in the middle of the film, the pursued group of paternal figure Sam Neill with the two kids, they take refuge from the murderous carnivorous dinosaurs on a gigantic tree. When they do this, significantly, the dinosaurs which approach them there turn out to be the benevolent herbivorous kind. Kids tire, then they fall asleep, and the paternal figure of the Neill character throws away the dinosaur bone that was stuck into his belt, signaling that he is now reconciled with the children, displaying warm affection and care for them. It's again, what's crucial is this move from bad father who rejects children to good father taking care. Please, the two clips from *Jurassic Park*.

(Clips from *Jurassic Park* play.)

So again I think it's crucial to watch the film from two different perspectives—on the one hand it's the fascinating story about the dinosaurs. On the other hand, the true frame is this story of reasserting paternal authority and I claim that if we go on even *Schindler's List* is at its most basic level, a remake of *Jurassic Park* with the Nazis as the dinosaur monsters, Schindler's as the film's—at the beginning—cynical profiteering opportunistic paternal figure and the ghetto Jews as threatened children. I mean, their infantilization in the film is for me eye striking so the story really tells—the film really tells the story about Schindler's gradual rediscovery of his paternal duty towards the Jews, of his transformation into a caring, respectable father figure, and even *The War of the Worlds*—is it not the last installment of this saga?

Tom Cruise, as you know, plays a divorced working-class father who neglects his two children. The invasion of the aliens reawakens in him the proper paternal instincts and he rediscovers himself as a caring father. In the last scene, he finally gets the recognition from his son, who, throughout the film, despises him. So in the mode of the nineteenth-century novels, which had an explanatory subtitle: “The Story of a Young Gentleman” and so on, the film *War of the Worlds* could also have been subtitled “A Story of How a Working-Class Father Finally Gets Reconciled with His Son.”

No wonder, then, that the same key discloses the underlying ideology of the greatest cinema hit of them all, James Cameron's *Titanic*. Namely is *Titanic* really a film about the catastrophe of the ship which hits the iceberg? I claim that beneath the story of a love

couple, *Titanic* tells another story—the story of a spoiled, high-society girl in what we call an identity crisis. She’s confused, doesn’t know what to do with herself, and much more than her love partner, Jack, played by DiCaprio is a kind of again, vanishing mediator, whose function is to restore her sense of identity and purpose in life, to restore her self-image. Quite literally—he draws her image. Once his job is done, he can disappear. So please, the first clip from *Titanic*.

(Clip from *Titanic*.)

Okay, now of course there is the love story, but even there, we should be very attentive how to read it, namely we should be attentive to the precise moment of the catastrophe. When does the ship hit the iceberg? The catastrophe takes place when the two lovers, Leonard DiCaprio, Kate Winslet, immediately after consummating their link in the sexual act, return to the ship’s deck. This, however, is not all. If this were all, then the catastrophe would have been simply the punishment of fate for the double transgression—illegitimate sexual act crossing class divisions. What is more crucial is that, on the deck, Kate passionately says to her lover that she’s decided when the ship will reach New York the next morning she will live with him, preferring a poor life with her true love to the false, corrupted life among the rich. At this exact moment, the ship hits the iceberg. Please, let’s go on.

(Clip from *Titanic*.)

Stop, please. I think what's the underlying logic here? My solution is very simple. Why does the ship hit the iceberg? In order to prevent what would have been the true catastrophe, the couple's life in New York. **(laughter)** One can safely guess that the misery of everyday life would destroy their love. So the catastrophe occurs in order to save their love, in order to sustain the illusion that, if it were not to happen, they would have lived happily forever after.

You know, it's the same as, let me give you an association, a similar example, I am saying this as a leftist, from politics. If you are old enough, you will remember how we were all crushed and sad Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact forces in '68 invading Czechoslovakia. I am more and more convinced it was a blessing in disguise, because imagine the Soviet army would not invade Czechoslovakia, what would have happened? I don't think there was really a chance of building a truly democratic socialism, whatever. Sooner or later, this liberal communists, Dubček and company in power, would have forced, would have confronted the true choice. Either, they simply join the West or slowly reassert communist power. So I claim that it's the very Soviet intervention—and I'm not saying they did it for this reason, I'm not celebrating them—what I'm saying is that their very intervention, in a way, saved the illusion—“oh what a chance this was for truly democratic socialism.” They were the iceberg hitting Czechoslovakia there.

But let's now go to that central scene of the film, which is so weird, or at least has this tiny weird feature which people even usually I noticed don't note it. Remember the final moments of DiCaprio. He's freezing in the cold water, dying while Kate Winslet is safely

floating on a large piece of wood. Then, when she becomes aware that he is dead, listen to this detail—see it and listen to it carefully.

(Clip from *Titanic*.)

You noted this: “When she said, ‘I’ll never let you go,’ she pushes him away.

(Clip from *Titanic*.)

So Cameron’s superficial, so-called Hollywood Marxism. You remember, his all-too-obvious privileging of the lower classes and his caricatural depiction of the cruel egotism and opportunism of the rich should not deceive us. Beneath this sympathy for the poor there is another narrative—the profoundly reactionary myth, first fully deployed as far as I know by Rudyard Kipling’s *Captains Courageous* of a young rich person in crisis who gets his or her vitality restored by a brief intimate contact with the full-blooded life of the poor. What lurks behind the compassion for the poor is their “vampiristic” exploitation. So I think again that you know beneath this surface of sympathy for the poor, love, there is another story told, pretty reactionary.

Now, the ridiculous climax of this Hollywood procedure of staging great historical events as the background of the formation of a couple is Warren Beatty’s *Reds*, in which Hollywood found a way to rehabilitate the October Revolution itself, the most traumatic historical event of the twentieth century—you know, in the key development in the center

of the film the couple of John Reed and Louise Bryant—Warren Beatty and Diane Keaton—are in what we call an emotional relationship crisis. Their love is then reignited when Louise watches John delivering a impassionate revolutionary speech. What then follows is their lovemaking, intersected with the archetypal scenes from the revolution, some of which reverberate in an all-too-obvious way with the lovemaking. Say, when John penetrates Louise, there is a cut onto a street where a dark crowd of demonstrating people envelops and stops a penetrating, phallic tramway, and so on. All this against the background of singing “The Internationale.” So when, at the orgasmic climax, Lenin himself appears, addressing a packed hall of delegates, he’s more a wise teacher overseeing, teacher leading the couple’s love initiation than a cold revolutionary leader. So even the October Revolution is okay if it serves to reconnect the couple. So you will see at the end of this clip—you even have a Christmas tree, it’s the happy American couple that’s reconstituted. Please.

(Clip from *Reds*.)

You see, that’s how you do it in Hollywood—anything goes, October Revolution and so on, just the couple with Christmas tree should be reconstituted. Now you will say, “Okay, but why only Hollywood? What about other cultures?” So, okay, let me take a look at the successes of the October Revolution itself. Let me look at what is the ultimate Stalinist epic. Chiaureli’s famous or rather infamous *The Fall of Berlin*, from 1948, the supreme case of the Stalinist war epics—the story of the Soviet victory over Hitler’s Germany, and if you wonder about how Stalin appears in the film, you should bear in mind always

that Stalin, as it is proven today, cowrote those lines. The film begins—it's really, that's my how do they call it in Perry Mason novels, the big case for the prosecution or what it is.

The film begins in 1941, just prior to the German invasion of the Soviet Union. The hero, a Stakhanovite model steelworker is in love with a local teacher, but too shy to directly approach her. He is then awarded the Stalin prize and received by Stalin in his dacha—Stalin's dacha. Women see this and fortunately in a scene which was cut out after 1953 and then lost, because in that scene also Beria appears. Beria was after '53 a nonperson, this is a tragedy. What you see—I have the scenario, I know, I got it from my friends in Moscow. In this scene, after the official congratulations, Stalin notices a kind of nervous uneasiness in the hero and asks him what is wrong. The hero confesses to Stalin his love problems, and Stalin advises him on how to win the girl's heart (**laughter**), which Pushkin verses to recite to her and so on. Of course, my God, if you got advice from Stalin, it cannot fail, so (**laughter**).

Back home, the hero succeeds in seducing the girl. However, at the very moment when he is carrying her in his arms into the grass, obviously to do *it*, something happens, as you will see—the bombs from German planes starts to fall all around, it is June 22nd, '41. It's an incredibly, you know—the same as in *Titanic*, here the iceberg is how exactly—you should be always attentive, I claim, in Hollywood—or in Soviet Hollywood—when a catastrophe occurs at what precise moment it occurs. So listen to the—in the first shot

that you will see, be careful, attentive to the music, listen and behave, they no longer make such films today. Please.

(Clip from *The Fall of Berlin*.)

Now it's the Khrushchev censorship—now he is back, and note the wonderful, theatrical ridicule of this short love scene. “I want to kiss you, but watch it now,” she says. Okay, stop, stop, stop, please. I have to explain it. And then, in the ensuing confusion, the girl is taken prisoner by the Germans, taken to a working camp near Berlin, while the hero joins the Red Army, fighting in the first lines to get back to his love. Now, at the film's end, when the jubilant crowd of camp prisoners liberated by the Red Army mingles with the Russian soldiers, a plane lands on an open field nearby. Stalin himself steps out and walks towards the crowd, which greets him passionately—passionately. At that very point, as if, again, mediated by Stalin's presence, the love couple, they recognize each other in the crowd, and the love couple is reunited. The girl notes—takes note of the hero in the crowd, but, nonetheless, she, after greeting him, approaches Stalin and asks him if she can give him a kiss. Wonderful scene. Please watch it, please.

(Clip from *The Fall of Berlin*.)

[spoken while clip is playing] You can read in the memoirs of the director when Stalin wrote these lines it was... First she saw Stalin, then as if guided by, she saw him. “Can I

give you a kiss, Comrade Stalin?" You know the actor who is here Stalin was not allowed to play any other role, like it would be too much.

[clip ends] Stop, okay, so true, again, they no longer make films like this today.

(laughter) But again did you notice how *The Fall of Berlin* is effectively the story of a couple reunited? The World War II serves as the obstacle to be overcome so that the hero can reach his love, like the dragon the knight has to kill to get to the princess imprisoned in a castle. The role of Stalin, again, is that of a magician and matchmaker who wisely leads the couple to their reunion.

Another thing to be analyzed in a closer, more refined approach is did you notice something that a very precise economy that the two scenes share, that is, beneath this ridicule, how they, in the first scene in the film, they, the girl and her future husband/lover, embrace but it is as if there must be an outburst of passion but which must be staged. "No, but we have to go apart so that then you are"—and so on. And it's the same at the end, basically they see each other but it is as if they need their time to organize the passion, you know. She looks a little bit and then, "Oh, Alyosha, are you there?" it's a very strange temporality, where not official speech, but passion is basically presented as something that ultimately has to be organized and staged and so on.

Okay, just, the last example from this comical series, then we go unfortunately to more serious stuff. I think the same interpretative key fits also science fiction catastrophe films. In Mimi Leder's *Deep Impact*, a gigantic comet which is threatening to hit the Earth also

creates a couple, although an unexpected one—the incestuous couple of the young, obviously neurotic, sexually inactive TV reporter and her promiscuous father, who has divorced her mother and just married a younger woman. The film is effectively a drama about this unresolved incestuous father/daughter relationship. The threatening comet obviously gives body to the self-destructive rage of the heroine. So the entire machinery of global catastrophe is set in motion so that the father's young wife will abandon him and the father will return, not to his wife, but to her daughter.

The culmination of the film is the scene in which the heroine rejoins her father, who, alone on a beach, awaits the impending wave and my thesis is that this scene is to be read against the background motif rendered famous, for example, in Fred Zinnemann's *From Here to Eternity*, of a couple making love on the beach brushed by gently, softly by waves, you know, Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr. Here the couple is the truly deadly incestuous one.

(Clip from *Deep Impact* plays.)

Okay, now enough of fun, let's move towards slightly more serious waters. First, an interesting thing to note is how even high-art cinema is not free of such ideological framing. Let me take a well-known serious film, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* and compare it with Stanislaw Lem's classic science fiction novel, also *Solaris*, on which it is based. Solaris is a planet with an oceanic fluid surface which moves incessantly and from time to time imitates recognizable forms. Soon after his arrival to a spaceship above the

planet Solaris, Kelvin, the hero, finds at his side, in his bed, his dead wife Hari, who years ago on earth killed herself after he abandoned her. Kelvin finally understands that Hari is the materialization of his own innermost traumatic fantasies. Solaris is a gigantic brain which directly materializes our innermost fantasies. So, Tarkovsky's Solaris is really about the hero's inner journey, about his attempt to come to terms with his past sins, with his repressed truth. Basically, it's the same as dinosaurs and so on—it's really a story of a man coming to terms with his mistakes in his love life, and the planet is just a pretext.

But not in the novel. Stanislaw Lem's novel, which is much better, I think, focuses on this inert presence of the planet, of this thing which thinks. The point of the novel is precisely that Solaris remains an impenetrable other with no possible communication to it, through it returns to us our innermost fantasies but it remains through totally impenetrable. Why does it do it? Is it a purely mechanical response? Does it play demonic games with us? Does it do it to help us or whatever? It would be interesting to put Tarkovsky in the series of Hollywood commercial rewritings of novels which have served as the base for a movie. Tarkovsky does exactly the same to the novel as the lowest Hollywood producer would have done it, reinscribing the enigmatic encounter with an impenetrable otherness, into the framework of the production of the couple. It is interesting to note this.

However, Tarkovsky, as a true artist, also shows the way out of this ideological deadlock. There is a famous scene in his *Mirror* in which the heroine, who works as the proofreader

for a daily newspaper in the Soviet Union of the mid-1930s, runs in rain from her home to the printing office and then runs there along the corridors looking desperately for where are the proofs because there is a suspicion that she missed an obscene misprint of Stalin's name. Tarkovsky, incidentally, refers here to a well-known legend according to which in the time of the darkest purges, an issue of *Pravda* was almost printed in which Stalin's name was misspelled Sralin. "Sral" means to shit, not a good thing to do in the mid-thirties. Okay, then, that's all the narrative event. Just she runs there and finally, relieved, discovers that the mistake was corrected but here is Sean Martin's nice comment on this scene. I quote: "It is as if Tarkovsky were content just to watch Margarita Terekhova, the actress, running through the rain, down steps, across yards, into corridors. Here Tarkovsky reveals the presence of beauty in something that is apparently mundane and paradoxically, given the period, also potentially fatal for Maria, the heroine, if the mistakes she thinks she had made has gone to press." Please.

(Clip from *Mirror*)

[speaking while clip plays, inaudible] We are seduced into looking at the scene, taking note of its phenomenal nature, the intensity of movement, the dilapidated, crumbling, but nonetheless in a strange way attractive, background and so on. So that's I think the movie to do what Gilles Deleuze called from the image—sorry, from movement image to time image. When things go slow, you suddenly, as it were, notice the background. I think it's a beautiful procedure, so let's simply go on a little to the end, please. And then please

next go on with the next clip, which is from the Chinese film *Still Life*, let's just enjoy this as a background. So what happens here is such a procedure with the couple.

My next example will be, I think, a beautiful Chinese film, I'm not sure I will pronounce the director's name correctly, Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*, which really can be said to reinvent Rossellini and Antonioni in a Chinese film. It provides a Chinese quality to the production of the couple...**[spoken over clip, inaudible]** ideologically resonate in the general background context.

More generally the whole of *Still Life* is characterized by the properly dialectical tension between form and content, a tension which brings to mind not so much Rossellini and Antonioni as, rather, Robert Altman, who is I think the true, one of the few true great masters of American cinema. For example, Altman's *Short Cuts*. Altman's universe, again, best rendered by *Short Cuts*, is that of contingent encounters between a multitude of series, parallel destinies, a universe in which different series communicate and resonate at the level of what Altman himself refers to as subliminal reality, meaningless, mechanical shots, encounters, impersonal intensities, which precede the level of social meaning. We are still with *Mirror*, I think. Okay, it's a background. What this means is that one should avoid the temptation, the usual leftist temptation, of reducing Altman to a poet of American alienation, rendering the silent despair of everyday life in the upper-middle-class suburbia and so on. There is another, much more optimistic, Altman, the one of opening oneself to joyful, contingent encounters.

I think one should do to Altman what Deleuze and Guattari proposed to do to Kafka. We shouldn't be deceived by this Kafkaesque obsession with this bureaucracy, absent God, search for meaning, and so on. Look, it's this big background absence which blinds us for the joyful present, small object things—like Kundera, whom I otherwise—Milan Kundera, the Czech writer—don't appreciate so much, had a wonderful line. He wrote somewhere that for these metaphysically obsessed Western people Kafka is the poet of alienation, absent God, but that for many Czechs—I hope this is true, what he said—Kafka is a poet of, it's like comical children's fairy tales. "Isn't it funny, you go to sleep, you waken as a giant insect or whatever," I mean, okay, it's not exactly to laugh. But the point is that if there is a Kafkaesque despair, it is nonetheless rooted in this experience. Kafka is a profoundly comical author, which again in no way cancels his existential anxieties and so on.

He should rather, I think, be read in the same level as, for example, the fact that all good films about Holocaust are comedies, not because it was easy, like we can laugh at it, but—this is my old topic that I like to emphasize. When things get really horrible, you can no longer make a tragedy, it's an obscenity to make a tragedy. If you make a standard tragedy. Imagine in Auschwitz, an evil Nazi officer confronting a Jew, or a Gypsy or a prisoner there and the prisoner proudly stands up, "no, rather give my life," and so on. it's ridiculous. It gives too much dignity to the Nazis. You were too humiliated there to play this heroic role.

Now we are at the other background, this one, so, again, I think it's the same thing—that's what provides the true wealth, richness, and artistic excellence of Altman's universe, I think. It's not really about all this alienation of American couple, you should read it against the background of this much more refined texture of the film. It's totally different ontology, and this is what accounts—This accounts for the tension.

I am sorry I don't have time, because I usually talk too long. I even wanted to make at this point a kind of a musical excursion and propose to read against this background, as an example of communism in music, Erik Satie, you know all those gymnopedist and so on. It may sound strange. Like usually we associate with communism in music what we heard, there, you know, these bombastic cantatas, oratorios for the heroism of the working class, and so on. But, it's much more complex. Do you know—I was shocked to learn that in the last years of his life, Satie was not only a member of the French Communist Party but a member of the Central Committee. Do you know for example that another French composer who also usually stands for this kind of reserved bourgeois French attitude—Maurice Ravel, that he, for example, in '24, he rejected membership in Académie Française out of protest of how France is treating Soviet Union. He is also the first to set to music some anticolonialist African popular protest songs and so on. So my idea is that what you find—you know that Satie characterized his music as “*musique d'ameublement*,” “furniture music.” His whole point was that it should function as background—as rendering background palpable, which is why—to associate Satie with somebody who is undoubtedly closer to you—do you know that John Cage is a great, great admirer of Satie because of this. So, again it is my subversive communist seduction,

you know. Be aware when you listen to Satie, you are already under the spell of Communist propaganda or what. **(laughter)**

Okay, but let me go on. So, again—I think that the same—now I finally caught it up. The same as what I said for Altman also holds for *Still Life*. Even this obvious desolation, depression engendered by the film's content shouldn't deceive us. The underlying mood of the film, rendered by its formal texture, is the one of melancholic beauty, affirmation of life. This is what is, I think, a true art, true new domain of art in cinema. This is why for example, I was fascinated when David Lynch who does I think unfortunately many crazy things—all that meditation stuff and so on. That he fell in love I think with the city of Lodz I think in Poland and he was fascinated by this Tarkovskyian countryside of industrial building, falling apart, being recaptured by nature. Walter Benjamin had somewhere a wonderful line. He says that we only get a true sense of history when we see historical objects, monuments, half-abandoned, recaptured by nature. I think this is—here I see an option for truly great cinema today.

To conclude I wanted to do two Hollywood neglected masterpieces, I think it's better to skip the first one. So please, Dave, when this one is over, go directly to the clips from John Carpenter's *They Live*. I wanted to begin with John Frankenheimer's *Seconds*, which is, I think, an incredible neglected masterpiece. We don't have time, so I go to John Carpenter's *They Live*, from 1988, again I think the neglected masterpiece maybe of the Hollywood left. It's a true lesson in critique of ideology, in how even in Hollywood you can do some work against it, you can undermine it. It is—*They Live*, the story of

John Nada, nice irony, “nada” is Spanish for “nothing,” a proletarian position, as it were. A homeless laborer who finds work on a Los Angeles construction site. One of the workers, Frank Armitage, takes him to spend night at the local shantytown. When being shown around that night, Nada notices some odd behavior at a small church across the street. Investigating it next day, he accidentally stumbles on several more boxes hidden in a secret compartment in a wall full of sunglasses. When he later puts on a pair of these mysterious sunglasses, what happens?

Well, wait a second, let’s have a little bit of background. This is still the very end of *Still Life*. No, really, what I admire in this film is that he resists the obvious temptation of this wild, dissident attack on the Three Gorges Dam precisely by keeping this devastation, ecological devastation, gently in the background, it does a much more effective job of critique. I mean, everything is here, it shows the—here we are, perfect, let’s go on. What happens when you put the glasses on?

(Clip from *They Live* plays.)

Okay, stop. Okay, as you saw, he then discovers that there are aliens among us, controlling us, and so on. Now, then Nada escapes and returns to the construction site to talk over what he has discovered with his friend Armitage. And then comes one of the other key sequence of the film. There is something so obvious going—they are so obviously strange that we don’t even usually notice it. Nada wants his friend to put on the glasses so that he will see reality and the friend resists. And it’s a totally irrational scene,

legendary, maybe known to some of you, going on for over ten minutes. It's totally irrational, but I think deeply convincing—why? So, please, Dave, let's go on with the second scene. You know, he always wants to convince himself the other guy is human.

(Clip from *They Live* plays.)

Dave, can you please put voice a little bit lower, because this will go on for ten minutes for my final reflections, as it were. Then, you will see, in the final battle, after destroying the broadcasting antenna by means of which the aliens controlled us, Nada is mortally wounded. As his last dying act, he gives the aliens the finger. With the signal now missing, people suddenly see the aliens in their midst. So, first, let me develop a little bit about this beautifully naïve mise-en-scène of ideology. Through the critical ideological glasses we directly see what, in my psychoanalytic jargon, I would have called the master signifier beneath the chain of knowledge. We learn to see dictatorship in democracy. There is of course a naïve aspect in this staging, reminding us of the not-so-well-known fact that—some friends told me this—in the 1960s the leadership of the Communist Party of the United States, in order to account for its failure to mobilize workers, seriously entertained the idea that the U.S. population is already controlled by some secretly distributed drugs in air, in water supply, and so on.

But I think we do not need aliens or secret drugs or gasses or whatever. The forum of ideology does the work without them. It is because of this forum that the depicted scene nonetheless stages our truth. Look at the front page of our daily newspapers. Every title,

even and especially when it pretends just to inform us, contains an implicit injunction. So when you are asked to choose between liberal democracy and fundamentalism, it is not only that one term is obviously preferred. What is more important—the true injunction is to see this as the true choice, to ignore third options. So again, naïve as it may seem, the film’s staging of ideology is nonetheless more complex than it may appear. Once you put the glasses on and see it, it no longer determines you. Which means that, before you see it, through the glasses, you also saw it, but you were not aware of it.

I used to hear a joke that I am almost ashamed to tell the story again—I use it so often—but nonetheless I will do it briefly. You know my joke with Donald Rumsfeld ontology: Known knows, unknown knows, and so on. Literally, through these glasses, you see the unknown knows, things that you don’t know that you know but nonetheless you read them, they determine you.

There is a further scene which makes—sorry, feature—which makes this scene of putting on the glasses contemporary. In it, the ideological injunction is hidden, so that it can only be directly seen through the glasses. Such a relationship between visible and invisible is predominant in our so-called postmodern, nonauthoritarian consumerist societies, in which we subjects are no longer addressed on behalf of some deep ideological identity but we are simply addressed as subjects of pleasure. Today’s ideology doesn’t tell us, “sacrifice yourself for your country”. The dominant message is “realize yourself, enjoy life, make the best of it,” and so on and so on. The master’s injunction is hidden.

But this is not how traditional ideology works. In the traditional, more traditional ideology, it is almost an inverse relationship. The explicit text addresses us as followers of some deep cause, while the implicit message, delivered between the lines, concerns the obscene surplus enjoyment with which we are bribed if we subject ourselves to the cause. Like, for example, because a good fascist. Let's imagine a fascist poster. "Do your duty towards your country. Defend it against Jewish communist plot. Become a fascist." Then, you put on the same glasses and you can read, okay, and you can read, "and you can steal from the Jews, beat and lynch them, and so on and so on." "Become a good Catholic priest, serve God." You put on the glasses, you can read, "and you can play with young boy as a dessert for it." Or, "get properly married," and you put on the glasses, "and an occasional discreet affair is tolerated."

So we can imagine for more traditional ideology, again the opposite ideological glasses, where what you read is not the explicit order as here, underlying the appearance of capitalist freedom, but on the contrary, you read the obscene, invisible, unseen underground. And I think we can go pretty far into how this works today. For example, imagine a scene of starving children in Africa with a call to do something, help them, you know, like "Are You Aware?" Or, you know, all this stuff which I think is absolute manipulation, not that it's not true, but the ideology inscribed into it, like Are You—sorry, stop, stop, stop please. Like, are you for every word that I spoke here, a hundred children died of malnutrition in Africa. It sounds so humanistic, but I think, if you put the ideological glasses on, the true message of this alertness, "Do something. People are starving," is "don't think, don't politicize. Forget about the true causes of their poverty."

Just act, contribute money so that you will not have to think.” I think this is the true message. I think again that this emergency state rhetorics—we in the States are living in an ivory tower and so on—it’s already appropriated by those in power.

Then, there is the scene you have just seen—the long fight between Nada and Armitage. Worthy of *Fight Club*, another, I think, masterpiece of the Hollywood left. As you saw, it starts with Nada saying to Armitage, “I am giving you a choice. Either put on these glasses, or start to eat that trash.” The fight, as you noticed, is taking place among overturned trash bins. Then the fight went on, you saw, for unbearable ten minutes. And it’s a very strange fight—there are moments of exchanges of friendly smiles and it’s in itself totally irrational. Why doesn’t Armitage accept to put the glasses on, just to satisfy his friend? The only explanation is that he knows that his friend wants to see him something dangerous, to attain a prohibited knowledge which would totally spoil the relative peace of his daily life.

The violence staged here is—this violence of the two of them fighting, is a positive violence, a condition of liberation. The lesson is that our liberation from ideology is not a spontaneous act, an act of discovering our true self. And that’s what I find convincing in this simple scene. Just think how it totally turns around the usual New Age idea of critique of ideology. Which would be in everyday life we have ideological glasses, learn to put down, take off, the glasses and see with your own eyes reality the way it is. No, unfortunately, it doesn’t work like this. Liberation hurts. You have to be forced to put your glasses on.

The problem is that, again, we are naturally in ideology, our natural immediate sight is ideological. It is thus quite appropriate that the final gesture of our dying hero is—I already hinted it—is that the one of “up yours,” the finger, and then you will see because that antenna which emits the rays by means of which aliens control us explodes, people start to see, you will see a couple of comical scenes where people simply see who are the aliens among themselves. And I didn’t do it on purpose, but in the very last scene by mistake I cut it too short. You will see a prostitute on the top of a customer, no, and then you see, but it’s a poetic truth that the scene will be cut short, because in the film you see, well, you see this kind of a zombielike alien, no—now you can see your governor, whatever, I don’t know. **(laughter)** Let’s see this very short scene, please.

(Clip from *They Live* plays.)

So this “up yours,” this so-called impudent finger mentioned already in ancient Roman writings. And it’s quite consistent, this gesture, because it is difficult to miss the Christological resonances of this scene of the dying hero who saved the world. No longer then that in a unique moment in the history of art, the dying Christ himself was portrayed in a similar way. In Michelangelo’s unfinished drawing of Christ on the cross which he first gave to his passionate, intimate friend Vittoria Colonna, and then inexplicably asked her to return it to him. It’s a great mystery in the history of art. What is so terrible that he wanted it terribly back?

The drawing renders the critical moment of Christ's doubt and despair, the moment of "Father, why have you forsaken me?" For the first time, so art historians claim, in the history of painting an artist tried to capture Christ's abandonment by God, father. But the key detail is you have to focus on the right hand of Christ. There are no nails to be seen, but the hands, okay, not the middle finger, but the point finger is stretched out. A vulgar gesture which according to Quintillion's *Rhetorics of Gestures*, which it can be proven was known to Michelangelo, functions as a sign of Devil's rebellious challenge, and it's a nice different reading. Christ's "why?" is not a resigned "why?" but an aggressive, accusatory one. There is in the drawing even an implicit tension between the expression of Christ's face, despair, suffering, and the mode signaled by his hand, rebellion, defiance, as if the hand articulates the attitude the face doesn't dare to express, and I don't have time, it would be nice to go here for example to the *Fight Club*, you remember that wonderful scene of Ed Norton beating himself in front of his boss, where, also, his hand disobeys him, his hand starts to beat him.

So the lesson of Michelangelo is here a very precise one. One should abandon the notion of Christ as a model of self-erasing humility, modest self-abandonment, and surrender to the higher paternal authority—"Father, let your will be done," and so on. We should rediscover a Christ who is strangely close to a fallen angel like Lucifer, a Christ of obstinate rebellion against the order of things, a Christ who is ready to persist on its own against all odds. This is the Christianity we need today. Thank you very much.

(applause)

We continue with subliminal communist propaganda—you heard Satie there.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: We'll put on some Erik Satie for you. Can we have one minute of Satie again, just a bit of subliminal propaganda in the Library. You hear the propaganda. Slavoj Žižek, comrade, you will take some questions now. We have a mic there.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: Unfortunately, yes, we have to pretend that we are in democracy and I'm always for a dialogue, but you know for what kind of dialogue, it's my old joke, late Plato's dialogues. You know them. One guy talks all the time. The other guy says, every ten minutes, "By Zeus, so it is, you are right, Socrates, and so on." **(laughter)** So, yes, I am ready for this kind of dialogue, please.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And the questions should be a little bit like the response. If I may ask that questions in my view last about fifty-two seconds. So ask them quickly, and you'll get a long answer.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: I will try also to, yeah, I will try my best to do, that will be my ideal, when you get a difficult question, this kind of a Zen answers, you know, like you ask me a complex question—"what did Lacan mean by this?" I say, "clap with one hand" or something. Sorry, let's go on please.

Q: I'm just wondering what you think the implications, ideologically, are for the fact that in the Gospels when Christ says, "*Eli Eli Lama sabachthani*. God, why have you forsaken me? My father, why have you forsaken me," that that's actually a quotation from a psalm, which starts out that way as a voicing despair but ends up being a hymn of affirmation. And that that's an allusion that would have been known to the readers at that time.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: I know this fact, but I'm not sure that it—but the only thing is that I don't think, you know, in the way I deal with ideology, I don't think that one shouldn't not underestimate but also one should not overestimate, I think, the sources because, you know, ideological struggle is violent. You take something you make it into a totally different mode. The much more crucial comparison or parallel would have been for me the Book of Job, I'll repeat my point. If there is a text which deserves the title of the first critique of ideology, it's the Book of Job. You know why? We know what happens there. Job thinks, look sad for him, blah blah blah everything destroyed. Then ideology enters. The three ideological friends. Read it closely.

What happens there is that each of the three friends offers an ideological justification for his catastrophe. The first one, it's a rather simple one, like "God is just, so you must have done something wrong even if you do not know why—what." The second one is slightly more refined version, something like "this can be some kind of a God's trial, checking up how strong your faith is." The point is that what they all try to convince Job is that his misfortunes have meaning. And Job's protests are not about how "No, I was a good guy,

I didn't do anything wrong." He just insists that "No, I don't buy it that there is any meaning in this difficulties," and the beautiful point is that when God comes at the end, he says, "you know, every word the three ideologists said is wrong, everything that Job said is right."

And also my favorite theologian, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, has a wonderful reading of that famous God's response, where God said, "Do you know what monsters I created," is that usually this is read as God's absolute arrogance, like, "Who are you, I created horses, this, that, whatever." I read it like Chesterton in a much more ambiguous way that basically it's God's despair. God is overwhelmed by his own Creation. God's message is, "You complain, but look—like, you complain about your mess, but look, all Creation is one big mess," and so on, which is why I think it's crucial to read the death of Christ against background of this, of Job. Christ is Job radicalized. In what sense? What dies on the cross is not—that's the big question. It's not a representative of God, it's not God is there, we are here, God sends a messenger, sorry it looks bad, he returns, it's as Hegel put it out—it's the God of beyond himself who dies.

God is the big other. In what sense? I always hated this disgusting metaphor of religion as "things look bad for us, but from a larger perspective, like God sees the true context," you know, I love this. Once, with all my Palestinian sympathies, I heard Louis Farrakhan on a British radio. And he was asked, "But you said Jewish religion is the religion of gutter, of pigs, no?" And he said, "No, no, this is not anti-Semitic, it sounds so because you have torn it out of context, no?" Okay, I am absolutely sure that if Hitler were to be

caught in the '50s, he would say, "you should put my Holocaust in the proper context." I think, you know, this disgusting metaphor, which is that of a painting, you know? You see an image from too close, you see a stain. When you see it from a proper perspective, you see that the stain contributes to the global harmony. But Christ's death means that this doesn't work. What we know today, like isn't it obscene to say, gulag, Holocaust, it appears to us as a terrible stain, but from a proper context, it contributes, I don't know how, to divine harmony, or whatever.

I think that this dies with Christ. I read his death as literally the death of God. God resigns. "I can no longer play that role of guaranteeing meaning." God throws himself into, as it were, his own Creation. The message is "what comes after me?" Holy Spirit. And you have a wonderful model of Holy Spirit. I wanted to do it but it would take too much time. Do you know—now I appeal to your leftist memory. Do you know that wonderful simplistic popular old leftist American song performed by Paul Robeson or in Woodstock by Joan Baez, "Joe Hill?" Did you notice how it's a very Christological song. The dead organizer of Wobblies Joe Hill whose murder was planted on him, he was killed, appears to an ordinary worker, that's the story of the song and the guy says, "But Joe, you are dead, how can be here?" And then Joe Hill answers simply, "It takes more than a gun to kill a man. What they—the bad guys—couldn't—could never kill it went on to organize itself." And then it's that simple message—"Where am I? Whenever the two of you are together to organize a strike, I am there," all that stuff, which is for me exactly the same as when Jesus says "whenever the two of you love each other," and agape is for

me—the only correct translation of agape is political love. “Whenever the two of you love yourself, I am there.”

So it’s totally wrong to look for reincarnation, like some idiot there arises. No, it’s here, it’s already here, reincarnation, in what we are doing, without any guarantee in the big other. I think the way to read it is not “We will do what we can, God will help us.” No, we don’t have to trust God. God has to rely on us. It’s kind of an open, open, open historical perspective. It’s God says, it’s all—it’s up to you. And again, if we read it against all this, then things get interesting in Christianity. This is how I try to read it, this materialist reading of “God renounces and what happens is Holy Spirit,” as to put it bluntly I wouldn’t say Communist Party but an emancipatory collective. **(laughter)** I think it’s quite consequent reading, you don’t need any—the big other is dead, there is no guarantee.

So I think it’s totally pagan, this reading that somewhere up there, there is God or if some of you know theological topic—this reading that which I why I disagree with Orthodox Russian Christianity. The main point of it is that you should distinguish divine economy, how God deals with the world, with God in himself, so that you have trinity of God up there already existing all the time, but I think this then you totally lose the point—if Christ is all the time with God, then the fact that Christ came here and died means nothing—it was just a joke, the three of them were really all the time having nice time up there and the point was, “You go down and fake that you are dead, so that we make a

good impression on people.” **(laughter)** It was a kind of a PR. Okay, sorry, I was too long but I hope that I made some kind of point, I’m not sure what.

Q: Hey there. I noticed before you were a little dismissive about David Lynch’s Transcendental Meditation thing, so I was kind of curious about that. But I’d read in some of your books, you’d talked about how you thought that kind of New Age Asiatic thought had become like a prevailing ideology for Western postindustrial capitalism, but I mean, don’t you think that’s kind of esoteric practices—I mean, a lot of people feel that, you know, esoteric meditation, yogic spiritual disciplines are something that the West kind of lost, and that’s why kind of religion ended up in a kind of sterile form, but bringing those back actually has validity, and that also if you look at Transcendental Meditation, they’ve done studies, in like, I think in a precinct in Washington, D.C. They had a set of meditators doing TM around the clock, the murder rate actually went down during that time, so it suggests that there might actually be some kind of tangible material benefit to spiritual disciplines and spiritual practices.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: I know! I know the story. I know how the standard defense, even of radical critics of religion like Sam Harris, no, is that they take exception to Buddhist meditation, claiming this is not really about any superstitious thesis about supernatural beings, it’s something which can be even dealt with in scientific terms, whatever. But, you know, first I doubt in the—of course you can always find some statistics. But I think—I doubt if it’s really about—how should I put it—I doubt if the crime rate went down. I doubt first if it was really the effect of meditation as such, or if it was first some

pres—how should I put it?—preselection. What type of people have chosen to do it and some other thing because let me tell you, okay I will not go so much into it, but with all my respect which I otherwise have for meditation, for Transcendental Meditation and so on, I don't think it does any better in social life, helping prevent crime, whatever you want.

And again, I always quote the same story here. Brian Victoria *Zen at War*, which proves how not only the entire—literally with five, six exceptions Zen Buddhist community in Japan in the '30s and '40s supported the Japanese war effort, but they even actively justified it precisely in the terms of Zen Buddhism. For example, the name well known to all of you if you are unfortunately as old as I am already Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, the great hippie name. What people don't like to hear is that in the '30s and early '40s he was writing different types of texts. For example, when Japanese invaded China, he fully supported it, claiming that Chinese don't get it, the sword that is killing him is really a sword of love. More precisely, he provided very precise advices how if you achieve this the inner peace of—and distance of—Zen meditation, how it's much easier to kill. He takes the example if you remain caught into your false self, then you perceive a situation like, “Sorry, I am killing you.” No? “That's wrong,” he said. “You must attain the attitude I float in the air and observe how my sword is moving in the air and you got stuck on my sword, how should I put it? Don't take it personally.”

And then he even went a step further. Sorry, this is not Suzuki, let's be fair, this is another priest, who developed a whole theory of how for ordinary people who don't have

time to spend years meditating, total unconditional military discipline is the best way to enlightenment, overcoming your false self and so on. So even then I read another very ironic text, who, some historian—I'm very sorry, but I'm not laughing—went to analyze like what effectively changed in far East countries where Buddhism took over, where Buddhists were the kings. How should I put it in slightly vulgar statistical terms?—the average rate of killing if anything went up, not down.

So I doubt about that, but again I'm not saying we are any better. I'm just totally pessimist here. I think the tragic thing to accept is that the authenticity of our whatever we call it, inner enlightenment, inner truth, or inner peace doesn't help, it's ethically neutral, and what I really appreciate in Suzuki. Now, let me avoid a misunderstanding. I'm not saying Suzuki pretended to be a Buddhist meditator and in reality he was a chief war propagandist. No, he was very good and very honest. In one of his books, people don't like to read it, he says, he says, "meditation is a technique. You can be," he says, "a communist, a fascist, a liberal, whatever you want, it doesn't matter." That's what we should hear from it. So again, to answer you, I think it's deeply ambiguous. Because you know when you say it's less killing, it is less killing, but there is always an opening to say it's not so much that they are less killing in reality but the killing itself is no longer experienced as traumatic killing, it just neutralizes it.

It's like you the terrible lines in Mahabharata. Or where, you know where, Ajuna confront, no so it—Arjuna confronts God, "what can I do? Should I go into battle?" And the God tells him, "what you see as reality is just a false reality so the true eye cannot be

destroyed, so go on and kill,” and so on. In other words, “go on nicely killing, but with a proper distance it doesn’t matter—you must always be aware, ‘sorry, don’t take it personally, if I kill you, I am just killing a false material appearance,’” and so on and so on. Things are very ambiguous here. Sorry. I speak too much, please strike back.

Q: You know, a thesis to condemn all philosophy because Heidegger was part of the Nazi Party, you could say—you could condemn spiritual practice because certain people used it to justify killing. But also if you look at the Bhagavad-Gita, what you’re talking about, Krishna says that for a warrior, if your dharma is to fight against evil, then you should make a war against evil, so then it’s a question of attaining a selfless perspective, so you can you know act properly through your dharma.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: No, I see—okay, this is now getting too—sorry, what was your first point, that one I want to answer.

Q: Just that you’re saying, “Okay, well, because inner peace is not important”—I’m reducing what you just said—“inner peace is not that important because if you look at D. T. Suzuki and Zen Buddhism that could be used as an ideological support for militarism.” Then I could say, well, then you could dismiss all philosophy because Heidegger was a Nazi.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: First of all, I don’t think all philosophy is about inner peace, and my example would precisely be Heidegger here. In my book, sorry for the propaganda, which

will be out in about one month (**laughter**)—I have a chapter which, okay, it's a bad joke, but then I immediately correct it. The title of the chapter is Why Did Heidegger Do the Right Step in 1933? But then there is a footnote, "although unfortunately in the wrong direction." My point is it was right for him to risk the engagement, just like he chose the wrong side. What I'm saying is that no, it's not, how should I put it? My God, I accept the results of Buddhist meditations and so on. What I'm saying is just repeating Suzuki—it's no help to fight evil or whatever. This is what I categorically deny. It doesn't guarantee any honesty or whatever, which is why it's way too simple to say if Suzuki supported Japanese war efforts it must have been something wrong in his philosophy, but, on the other hand, I think that the whole the majority of modern philosophy of subjectivity is definitely not about inner peace and here I, nonetheless, in a problematic way, I don't know, remain faithful to—in a materialist way of course—what interests me is the attitude to. What bombastically we call Judeo-Christian legacy. And Chesterton has a nice line where he writes, "What is the difference?" The difference is that in other pagan religions God is inside in the sense of you turn to your true self and discover the ultimate identity between your true self and God. The fundamental fact of Judaism, which also goes on in Christianity, is that God is outside. The Jewish experience of God is not you look deep into yourself. It's some stupid bush burns there, whatever, whatever, the, now you Clinton was between two bushes, I always like this joke, sorry.

Whatever, like, you know what I mean, it's an irreducible alterity, and this is I think even the Christian solution is you don't become like God. You identify with Christ on the Cross, which is the point where God becomes split in itself. When you are abandoned by

God, you say, “but wait a minute. Now I’m in a position of Christ where God was abandoned by itself.” It’s a radically different existential position. It’s not the position of “I am one with universe when I”—this is this non-Judeo-Islam—I even include Islam here—non-Judeo-Islamic-Christian position is deep into yourself you discover, as it were, the ultimate identity between your ego and universe when you cleanse yourself—cleanse yourself of your faults, particular attachments, whatever, whatever.

I think that that Judeo-Christian-Islamic universe is totally different—it’s not that you—it’s not inner peace, it’s radical engagement, it’s different, it’s almost the opposite, I would say. What for traditional religions is sin—engagement, partiality and so on—that’s what I appreciate as a materialist, leftist, in Christianity. Truth is not neutral. Truth is in the engagement. Okay, maybe I simplify it here, but I simplify it here, I hope not so much in my books. If this will in any way amuse you, I am now finishing a book engaged in a big debate with that radical orthodoxy big guy, John Milbank. I wrote two hundred pages. He wrote two hundred and fifty pages. I found this personal attack that somebody dares to write more than me. **(laughter)** I am now replying one hundred fifty pages. Where we do go through all this, through all these topics in detail.

Again, to repeat my point. I am not saying Oriental meditation is false and so on. I am just repeating what they themselves are saying—it’s neutral. It’s neutral. I think it’s totally false to—Even as—a Japanese friend of mine told me something very beautiful. He told me all these dream that Oriental spirituality brings space, balance in the world,

this is your Western misreading. These false hopes projected into Oriental spirituality.
This is the true Western cultural imperialism if you look for it. Sorry, I was too long.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I would say based on how long the next response is, we'll take one or two questions.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: You have your natural evil, don't you?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I do, I do.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: Good that you confess. That's the first step towards redemption.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Enlightenment.

Q: The place of the virtual in your work has—the virtual has changed over the last probably ten years and become increasingly important. I was wondering if you could say a little bit about the relationship between that and ideology, which is what you were talking about tonight. I know that's huge, so to specify a little more, if there's a way to talk about it in terms of—do you see the virtual as adding anything to Lacan's theory, or is it just another way of explaining things that are already there?

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: Very good question. Obviously you as we put it, you know your job. You read the stuff. Why is it a good question? I think that—I just mirrored in my more

modest work, a big shift in Lacan. Of course, we are talking here about Lacanian notion of the real. The standard notion of the real, which is unfortunately still predominant and identified with Lacan, is that real—it's the real thing, too traumatic, too strong, you like sun, you cannot look it eye to eye or whatever, the harsh reality and then all the symbolic texture as a protection—like real is too strong to confront it. But later for Lacan, real becomes virtual, in the sense that the true real is not the harsh thing you see there. The true real is some—is precisely a nonexisting, not fully existing, virtual absent point of reference. Real becomes virtual.

As to ideology here, yes, it did change my critique of ideology, and I'll tell you where. It's just a very detailed move, but it's an important shift. For a long time, until a couple of years ago, I still participated in this leftist paranoid distrust of material texture of ideology. I was—with all my respect for her, to avoid misunderstanding—I was all too much in the Susan Sontag trap. You know Susan Sontag's reading for example of Leni Riefenstahl, no? Since she was a Nazi for those ten years, then you have to look before and after, already in her early mountain films, it's all the same up to her late photos and so on.

Well, first there are many empirical reasons to doubt this. Like her last *Das Blaue Licht*, *The Blue Light*, a mountain film, you know there is a slight problem. Her lover at the time all for a Nazi the worst combination possible, a Jew and a Marxist, Béla Balázs, the cinema theorist. He cowrote the scenario with her. So you can also give—and some of my friends are trying to do it—to read that film as much more ambiguous, almost leftist.

It's a girl, I don't know how she is called, alone on the mountain, outcast and so on. So I don't buy this idea of profascism, you know, ooh, like it must be [Inaudible] So to give you—and I think that precisely we should not be afraid to liberate those elements, and I will conclude with two examples which I was tempted to use, we don't have time.

The one is *Cabaret*. Do you have a friend whom you suspect is he truly intellectual or not? Show him from *Cabaret*, you remember when they are in the countryside, the heroes, they visit, stay for lunch at the small inn, local restaurant, and then a young boy starts to sing a song—“Awake, tomorrow belongs to me,” and so on. And then if your friend says, “Oh my God, how this engages people, now I understand what is fascism,” the friend is half intellectual. I think that what is fascist about that song? Nothing. I claim that if a communist were to sing that song and say “tomorrow a sign is red star,” and so on, “tomorrow belongs to us.” I totally buy that song. You know what I mean? I don't think that ideology is in this mini-texture. This mini-texture is what Alain Bourdieu calls this stupid multitude of *résonance* and now I give you a positive example.

I don't know how well they are known here in the States, that German band, hard rock band called Rammstein, you know this shard music, bombing you all the Nazi imagery and so on. Okay, the liberal attitude is it's dangerous, they are playing with fire? What if—and this is typical liberal patronizing—what if we all know that it's irony, ironic imitation, but what if there are some young people who will take it too literally and become Nazis or whatever. I think it's totally wrong. You know what Rammstein does?

Let me give you an example that I like. I will be brief, don't be too much in a panic, I see a panic in your gaze. **(laughter)**

Twenty years ago, north of my own country Slovenia, in Austria, there was a nationalist right-wing populist hatred toward Slovenes exploded as if we are some kind of a threat and wanted to reoccupy whatever—which is ridiculous, we are a small nation, nobody—that part Carinthia, *Kärnten*. And their formula was in German “*Kärnten bleibt Deutsch!*”—like “Carinthia will remain German.” And what did the Austrian leftists do? Something very intelligent. Not any critical or ideological analysis, blah blah blah, they just published in main newspapers, paid ad, with taking this formula and just then proposing obscene variations, like “*Kärnten bleibt Deutsch!*” This is correct German, Carinthia remains German, “*Kärnten bleibt Deutsch!*” and “*Kärnten deibt Bleutsch*” and “*Kärnten leibt Beutsch*” and so on, and it was an extraordinary obscenization, you know, suddenly the charm was lost, what was a nice political motto become a dirty obscenity. I think that this is what bands like Rammstein are doing with Nazi ideology, so if you love this kind of hard music which mobilizes all the Nazi symbols, don't be afraid—fully identify with it, enjoy it, this is how you will undermine Nazism.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well, thank you very much for tonight.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: Thank you.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I would like to—Before we give a full applause to Slavoj Žižek, I would like to say that he is not signing his book that is about to appear, that will be the next time you come here, he’s signing other books that have appeared, quite a few, and your story about, you know, you wanted to tell us two stories, it reminds me at the very end you said I want to tell you two stories, and you were afraid that I was getting very nervous. It reminded me of that wonderful line of Woody Allen, who said, you know, “I’d love to leave you with something positive. Will you accept two negatives?”

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: We call this dialectics.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But I'm also reminded of Kafka being quite humorous—you know that line of Kafka where he says, “There is hope, but not for us.” Thank you very much for tonight.”

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: Thank you.

(applause)