



SLAVOJ ZIZEK: A TALK

Are We Allowed Not To Enjoy?

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PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So brothers and sisters, I am still Paul Holdengräber, I am still the Director of Public Programs, and Slavoj Zizek is still Slavoj Zizek. And he is going to give now a talk about Freud, which will last, as you know, fifty-two and a half minutes, after which time you will hear that famous music. Slavoj Zizek, for those of you who don't know, and I read from our program notes, is a dialectical materialist philosopher and psychoanalyst, co-director of the International Center for Humanities,

Birkbeck College, University of London. Among his latest publications, some of which you can find when you exit—*The Parallax View* and *How to Read Lacan*. And today's talk is co-presented and sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York City.

I invite all of those of you who have not joined our e-mail list to do so, it has been circulating, if you did not, do, because it will provide you with two free tickets for the remainder of the season and also for the upcoming season. I am happy to tell you that we will start the season on the 14th of February, which is, as you all know, a very important day in the life of people who love each other—it's Valentine's Day—but for that day we have chosen to have Robert Crumb (**laughter**) interviewed by his wife Aline Crumb or the other way around. And they have called their program in advance "Dirty Laundry." Two days after that, I will be interviewing Werner Herzog, the great filmmaker and director, the sixteenth of February, and then we have many, many more events—Andre Aciman and Colm Tóibín, also I will be interviewing Günter Grass at the end of June. So I invite you all to join the e-mail list, spread the word, let the life of the mind live a very healthy and dialectical life. Slavoj Zizek.

(applause)

SLAVOJ ZIZEK: Thanks very much. Like all of you, I was also delighted by the debate with (**inaudible**) and I found it so difficult not to intervene in it. For example, when there was that question with Israel's problems with Freud, I cannot only confirm. I mean, only two months ago I was in Israel, and correct me if I am wrong, but my friends there told

me that even now you don't have *Collected Works* of Freud in Hebrew. We went even a step further. Me, a Slovene, from a shitty, small country, two million people, we checked it on the Internet, we have—there is more Freud, literally, translated into Slovene than in Hebrew, so I think the guy was right. There is a problem there.

(laughter)

Okay, let me begin. First part is more scholarly, if you will excuse me, and then we will go a little more wild. Okay. In the last years there is a new wave of the triumphalist acclamations of how psychoanalysis is dead. With the new advances in brain sciences, it is, so we are told, finally put where it belonged all the time, to the lumber-room of prescientific obscurantist search for hidden meanings, alongside religious confessors and dream readers. As Todd Dufresne put it, no figure in the history of human thought was more wrong about all its fundamentals, with the exception of Marx, some would add.

(laughter) And effectively and predictably, in 2005, the infamous *Black Book of Communism*, listing all the Communist crimes, was, in France, followed by the *Black Book of Psychoanalysis*, listing all the theoretical mistakes and clinical frauds of psychoanalysis. In this negative way, at least, the profound solidarity—I still believe in it—of Marxism and psychoanalysis is now for all of us to see.

There is something to this funeral oratory. A century ago, Freud, as we all know, located psychoanalysis into the series of three successive humiliations of men, the three narcissistic illnesses, as he called them. First, Copernicus demonstrated that Earth turns

around the Sun, and thus deprived us humans of the central place in the universe. Then Darwin demonstrated our origin from blind evolution, thereby depriving us of the privileged place among living beings. Finally, when Freud himself rendered visible the predominant role of the unconscious in our psychic processes, it became clear that our ego is not even a master in his own—its own—house.

Today, however, one hundred years later, a different picture is emerging. The latest scientific breakthroughs seem to add a whole series of further humiliations to the narcissistic image of man. Our mind itself is only a computing machine for data processing. Our sense of freedom is only a user's illusion of this machine, and so on and so on. Consequently, with regard to today's brain sciences, psychoanalysis *itself*, far from being subversive, rather seems to belong to the traditional humanist fields threatened by the latest humiliations. No wonder that in Europe, in France, in Germany, many psychoanalysts, are now making a quick pact with some theologians, even Catholic theologians, like, against this cognitivist threat.

Is then psychoanalysis today really outdated? It seems so, on three interconnected levels. First, the level of scientific knowledge, where the cognitivist, neurobiologist model of the human mind appears to supersede the Freudian model. Second level, that of psychiatric clinic, where psychoanalytic treatment is rapidly losing ground against chemotherapy and behavioral therapy. And third level, that of the social context, where the image of society, of social norms, which repress the individual's sexual drives, no longer appears valid with regard to today's predominant hedonistic permissiveness.

Nonetheless, in the case of psychoanalysis, so I claim, commemorating the memorial service is perhaps a little bit too hasty, commemorating a patient who still has a long life ahead. Psychoanalysis is a little bit like—you remember—from *Tom Sawyer*, where there is a funeral service but the two guys are up there, watching and smiling. In contrast to the evident truth of the critics of Freud, one should insist that it is *only* today that the time of psychoanalysis has arrived and that Freud's key insights gain their full value. Why? How?

One of the standard topics of today's conservative cultural critique is that in our permissive era, children lack firm limits or prohibitions. This lack frustrates them, driving them from one to another excess. It is only a firm limit, set up by some symbolic authority, that can guarantee not only stability, but even satisfaction itself, satisfaction brought about by way of violating the prohibition, of transgressing the limit. In order to render clear the way the negation functions in the unconscious, Freud, as we all know, evoked a reaction of one of his patients to a dream of his centered around an unknown woman. "Whoever this woman in my dream is, I know one thing for sure. It is not my mother." A clear negative proof for Freud that the woman *was* his mother. **(laughter)**

However, what better way to characterize today's typical patient? And this is confirmed to me by many of my friends, analysts, tend to imagine, they claim this happens to them all the time, to imagine the *opposite* reaction of a patient to the same dream. "Whoever this woman in my dream is, I am sure it has something to do with my mother."

Traditionally, psychoanalysis was expected to allow the patient to overcome the obstacles which prevented him or her the access to normal sexual satisfaction. If you are not able to get it, go to the analyst, he will enable you to get rid of your inhibitions. Today, however, when we are bombarded from all sides by the different versions of the injunction, “Enjoy,” from direct enjoyment in sexual performance to enjoyment in professional achievement or in spiritual awakening—I think the greatest hedonist today is the Dalai Lama, of course **(laughter)**—one should move to a more radical level. Psychoanalysis is today, so I see it, the only discourse in which you are not not allowed to enjoy, but allowed not to enjoy. Not prohibited to enjoy, but relieved of the pressure to enjoy. **(laughter)** Nowhere is this paradoxical role of psychoanalytic interpretation clearer than in the case of dreams. If we ask an average intellectual today to tell us in a nutshell what Freud’s theory of dreams is about, he will probably say, “For Freud, a dream is a phantasmatic realization of some censored unconscious desire of the dreamer which—this desire—which is, as a rule, of sexual nature.”

Are we aware that this is totally false? How? Let me turn to the very beginning of a book which was already displayed here today, Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, where Freud provides, as an exemplary case of what he wants to do, a detailed interpretation of his own dream about Irma’s injection. It is reasonable to suppose that Freud knew what he was doing and was careful to choose an appropriate example which was supposed to be the example, the example to introduce his theory of dreams. And it is here that we encounter a big surprise. Are you aware that Freud’s interpretation of this dream, its logic, is basically the same as the logic of a good old Soviet joke on radio Yerevan—you

know, the famous crazy radio station. A listener phones and asks Radio Yerevan, “Did Rabinovitch win a new car on the state lottery?” Radio Yerevan answers, “In principle, yes, he did, only it was not a car, but a bicycle, it was not new, but old, and he did not win it. It was stolen from him.” **(laughter)**

So, is a dream the realization of the dreamer’s unconscious sexual desire? In principle, yes, only, the desire in the dream Freud has chosen to demonstrate his theory of dreams is neither sexual nor unconscious—and I don’t have time to prove it today, but if you read it closely, it’s not even *his* desire. It’s basically the desire, it’s pure transference, it’s the desire of Fleiss, who was worried that he screwed up the treatment of Irma. It’s again neither sexual nor unconscious and on top of it it’s even not Freud’s desire. Now, why? How? Remember, the dream begins with a conversation between Freud and his patient Irma about the failure of her treatment due to an infected injection. In the course of the conversation, Freud gets closer to her, approaches her face, and looks deep into her mouth, confronting—all this happens in the dream—confronting the horrible sight of the live red flesh. At this point of some kind of primordial horror, the tonality of the dream changes. The horror all of a sudden shifts into comedy. Three doctors, Freud’s friends, appear, who in a ridiculous pseudoprofessional jargon enumerate multiple and mutually exclusive reasons why Irma’s poisoning by the infected injection was nobody’s guilt—there was no injection, the injection was clean, and so on.

So, the desire of the dream, the so-called latent thought, the dream thought, articulated in it, is neither sexual nor unconscious, but Freud’s fully conscious wish to obliterate his,

and by transference, his friend's, Fleiss's responsibility for the failure of his treatment of Irma. How, then, does this fit with the thesis on the sexual and unconscious nature of the desire expressed in dreams? It is here that we should introduce a crucial distinction, which, as a rule, is simply missed by most of the readers of Freud. The unconscious desire of a dream is not the dream's latent thought, which is displaced, ciphered, translated, into the explicit texture of the dream. It is the unconscious, but the unconscious desire inscribes itself through the very distortion of the latent thought into the dream's explicit texture. This is the paradox of what Freud calls, *Traumarbeit*, the working-through of the dream. We want to get rid of a certain pressing but disturbing thought, of which we are fully conscious—like in Freud's case, feeling responsible for the failure of Irma's treatment. So we distort this thought, again which is fully conscious as a rule, nothing to have with sexuality. We translate it into the hieroglyphs of the dream. However, it is through the very distortion of the dream thought that another, much more fundamental, desire inscribes itself into the dream, and this desire is unconscious and sexual.

So here's a nice dialectic here. It's not that you penetrate the core of the dream, oh, you will see the mystery. The core of the dream is something very ordinary. We are fully conscious of it. The paradox is that the very masquerade, the very mystification, of the core of the dream, it's the very mystification of this thought of the dream, through which the true unconscious wish inscribes itself into the dream. Now, one should even add a further complication here. Why do we dream at all? Freud's answer is deceptively simple. The ultimate function of the dream is to enable the dreamer to prolong his sleep.

This is usually interpreted as bearing upon the dreams we have just before awakening, when some external disturbance—noise—threatens to awaken us. In such a situation, we quickly imagine a situation which—I mean, we imagine by dreaming—a situation which incorporates this external stimulus, and thus we succeed in prolonging the sleep for a while. You know, like, there is a phone disturbing you. You quickly imagine, you dream about a scene in which the telephone rings so you can go on sleeping, and, so the ordinary reading goes, then, when the external signal becomes too strong, you finally awaken.

However, are things really so straight? In another dream from *Interpretation of Dreams*, another dream about awakening, you all know it, maybe the most famous of all of them, a tired father who was spending the night watching at the coffin of his young son, who recently died of some grave illness. The father falls asleep and dreams that his son is approaching him all in flames, burning, addressing at the father the horrifying reproach, “Vater, siehst du nicht dass ich verbrenne?” “Father, can’t you see I’m burning?” Soon afterwards, the father awakens and discovers that due to the overturned candle, the cloth of his dead son’s shroud effectively caught fire. The smoke that he smelled while asleep was incorporated into the dream of the burning son to prolong his sleep. So, was it, as the standard reading of Freud claims, that father awoke when the external stimulus, smoke, became too strong to be contained within the dream scenario? But, I claim, I follow here Jacques Lacan, was it not rather the obverse? Father first constructed the dream in order to prolong his sleep, in order to avoid the unpleasant awakening. However, what he encountered in the dream, literally the burning question, the creepy specter of his son

making the reproach, this was much more unbearable than external reality. So father awakened, escaped into external reality, why? To continue to dream. That is to say, to avoid the unbearable trauma of his own guilt for the son's painful death.

In order to get the full weight of this paradox, one should compare this dream with the one about, the previous one, about Irma's injection. In both dreams, there is a traumatic encounter—the sight of the raw flesh of Irma's throat, the vision of the burning son. However, in the second dream, the dreamer awakens at this point, while in the first dream the horror is replaced by this stupid spectacle of professional excuses. And I'm so sad I don't have more time to go here into theological dimension, why Freud is deeply rooted in so-called Judeo-Christian—I hate this term, but whatever, I love to hate. **(laughter)**

Incidentally, this, I'm so sorry that I don't have time to improvise more, because I think when it was mentioned, this love/hate, this is I think the key to Freudian category of this ambiguity between love and hate. It's not some kind of a cosmic yin/yang shit, you know, "You never only love, love is always accompanied by hate." What Freud means is something very Hegelian, a self-reflexivity of our desires: You never simply desire something, you either desire to desire it or don't desire to desire it. The question is not "I want this," it is "Do I want to want this?" Now, you think I know, as your beloved unemployed philosopher/theorist of the known and the unknown Donald Rumsfeld would have put it, **(laughter)** that I'm talking about some old European stuff. No! Let me return to Hollywood, film noir, isn't it when the hero is in love with femme fatale, he loves her but he hates to love her? Or with the bad guy in Hollywood, we hate him, but we love to

hate him? I think this is much closer to this Freudian love/hate than any of this yin/yang cosmic ambiguities or whatever. No?

Okay, so let's go on. This parallel of the two dreams, sorry, back, I haven't yet finished the detour, we have this spectacle of three professions. We have the encounter of the trauma, here, the trauma of Irma's throat, and then the three professionals appear with their stupid theories. I claim that this—that there is a clear theological model for this. Job from Old Testament, the Bible. I think the Book of Job, I say this as a not only materialist, but a materialist with a certain adjective that you were kind enough to mention, no?—that I think Book of Job is one of the incredible, greatest ethical revolutions in history of humanity, why?

Remember what happened there. Job is one of those misunderstood figures, where if you ask a common person and they are not idiots, they nicely reproduce our common prejudices. “What is Job?” “Like, oh, God screwed him up in all possible positions but he persisted in his belief, he survived the test.” Again, read the Bible. Not at all! Job complains, protests all the time, but how? I think that's crucial. Okay! Something horrible happens to Job—all the things that happen—then exactly like the horrible thing is, let's say, the trauma, then exactly like these three idiots in the dream of Irma's injection, our three good friends theologians appear. You remember. And they have a precise function, of what? They try to provide meaning. No? That's the trauma. The trauma is that it just happens. And that's unacceptable. And this is—and, as you know, the first one is the simple ideology—the reasoning is “God is just. You suffer, so you must have done

something. If you don't know, look deeper into yourself, there must be something." The other two provide different meanings and so on, but I think Job does not so much protest against these readings. He wants to retain, as it were, the dignity of the meaninglessness. He rejects any meaning. It just stupidly happens. It doesn't have a meaning.

And that's for me the ultimate triumph. You remember when God comes, he says Job was right. Everything that Job—and the other three guys were—this is I think a big lesson for today when, from ecology to AIDS or what, we tend to project deeper meaning into it, even the film, and I'm—please believe me, far of making any fun from—my God, it happened here—on September 11th, but that's my problem with both films. By “both films” I mean *United 93* and *World Trade Center*. In both of them I discern—that's why they make to feel us well—a hidden theological—implicit theological—dimension, which I think turns around that famous immediate reaction of Jerry Falwell, our beloved Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson, you remember, when they said, “Ah, September 11th is a sign that God lifted up the protection of American people because of their sinful ways of life, hedonism and so on and so on.” To cut a long story short, they claimed exactly the same thing as the most hard-line Islamic fundamentalists, no?

Okay, but what do these films do? I claim the opposite but at the same level. Isn't it the implicit logic of these two films—first, do you notice how both films, although they were celebrated as shot in a terse, realistic way, no Hollywood spectacle effects—and two, each film cheats at one point and goes into more sublime, artistic, artistically pretentious form at the beginning. Remember how *United 93* begins. The terrorists praying in a hotel

room and then this very theological, almost kind of angels of death they are portrayed, shot from above, of New York. We get the view of New York streets accompanied by the prayers of the terrorists to come. It is as if they are some kind of angels of death, kind of waiting to attack. The same, you remember, in *World Trade Center*, how you don't see the attack, you see just a shadow passing over. We know from our retrospective knowledge, that was this. I claim that the theologic, implicit theological dimension is here the one which is explicated, explained clearly, even in a too-superficial way, at the end of *World Trade Center* that these catastrophes like September 11th brings the worst but also the best out in people. We have shown to the world what great people we are. How we can work in solidarity, help and so on and so on. But I tend to reject it. It's already some kind of a—reading hidden meaning into it. Okay, maybe we can go later into it.

So again, my point here is that the proper Freudian position is not this old hermeneutics—everything has meaning. The difficult thing to sustain is precisely the utter contingency, the meaninglessness. So, back to the two dreams, that of Irma's injection, that of the burning son appearing to his father. This parallel gives us, I claim, the ultimate key to Freud's theory of dreams. The awakening in the second dream—father awakens into reality in order to escape the horror of the dream—has the same function as the sudden change into comedy, into the exchange between three ridiculous doctors in the first dream. That is to say, our ordinary reality, our daily reality, has precisely the structure of such an inane, stupid exchange, which enables us to avoid the encounter of the true trauma.

It was already Adorno who said that the well-known Nazi motto, “Deutschland erwache,” “Germany, awaken,” actually meant its exact opposite, namely the promise that if you join this goal, you will be allowed to continue to sleep and dream, that is to say, to avoid the encounter with real social antagonisms. The trauma that we encounter in the dream is thus, in a way, more *real* than external social reality. There is a well-known poem by Primo Levi which recounts the fate of the traumatic remembrance from the concentration-camp life. In the first stanza, he is in the camp, concentration camp, asleep, dreaming intense dreams about returning home, eating, narrating to his relatives his experience, when, all of a sudden, he is awakened by a cruel shout of the Polish kapo, “Wstawac!” “Rise up! Get up!” In the second stanza, he is at home, after the war and liberation, sitting at the table, well-fed, he is telling his story—memories from the camp—to his family, when all of a sudden, the call violently emerges in his mind, “Wstawac!” “Get up!” Crucially here the reversal of the relationship between dream and reality in the two stanzas. Their content is formally the same, the pleasurable scene of sitting at home, eating, retelling one’s experience. This scene is interrupted by this brutal injunction, “Get up!” However, in the first stanza, the sweet dream is cruelly interrupted by the reality of the call to get up, while in the second stanza, the pleasant social reality—eating well, sitting at a table with one’s family—is interrupted by the hallucinated or imagined brutal call. This reversal, I think, renders the enigma of what Freud calls compulsion to repeat.

Why does the subject continue to be haunted by the obscene and brutal call “Get up”?
Why does this injunction insist and repeat itself? If, the first time, we had a simple

intrusion of external reality, which disturbs the dream, in the second case we have the intrusion of some traumatic real, which disturbs the smooth functioning of social reality itself. In a slightly changed scenario of Freud's second dream, we can easily imagine it as the Holocaust survivor's dream to whom his son, whom father was unable to save from crematorium, haunts him after his death, reproaching him with "Father, can't you see that I am burning?" Namely, in the oven of the camp. One does discover here a Freud who is far from the proverbial Victorian caught in his repressive vision of sexuality. A Freud whose moment is— we encounter a Freud whose moment is perhaps arriving only today in our so-called society of spectacle, when what we experience as everyday reality is more and more an incarnated lie.

Let me just recall the cyberspace interactive games, games in which, as is usually the case, in which a neurotic weakling imagines himself as or, as we put it, "adopts the screen persona of," an aggressive macho, beating up other men, violently enjoying women. Now it is all too easy to say that this weakling takes refuge in cyberspace, daydreaming in order to escape from his dull, impotent real life. **(laughter)** What if the games we are playing in cyberspace are more serious than we tend to assume? What if I articulate in them the aggressive perverse core of my personality which, due to ethical social constraints, I am not able to act out in my real-life exchange with others? Is it not that, in such a case, what I stage in my cyberspace daydreaming is in a way more real than reality, closer to the true core of my subjectivity than the role I assume in my contacts with real-life partners? It is precisely because I am aware that cyberspace is just a game that I can act out in it what I would never be able to admit in my *real* contacts. In

this sense, as Lacan put it, truth has the structure of a fiction. What appears in the guise of daydreaming is sometimes the hidden truth on whose repression social reality itself is founded. Therein resides the ultimate lesson of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. Reality is for those who cannot sustain dreams, that is to say, the traumatic real, which announces itself in dreams.

Now, let's become a little bit more dynamic and provocative. This was the initial **(inaudible)** of suffering. **(laughter)** The first conclusion from this, I think, is that we should, for me, if there is something that Freud would have been right to suspect when approaching United States, but he was some thirty years so early, it is I think the start of the Studio, the Actors Studio, you know, this idea that the authentic thing is to let the obstacles drop and fully enact, express, yourself. We think that is the moment of truth. No. That is the moment of lie. If there is a lesson of psychoanalysis it is that you may experience that you are playing a game, "Oh, I am just pretending that, deep in myself, I know where I stand, I have my inner true story." But as a rule it's the opposite. The story you tell to yourself is a lie. And truth is—here at least *X-Files* are right—truth is out there in external rituals.

I will return to this later but this is how ideology today functions. We are all cynics, we just obey the ritual. "Who cares?" We know how it is. But we believe much more than we appear. In my last book I quote a wonderful anecdote, which renders this point perfectly again about Niels Bohr, you know, the Copenhagen guy. Who, he was at some point, he was visited by a friend in his country house and the friend, also a scientist,

found above the entrance to the house a horseshoe, kind of superstitious item, you know, to prevent evil spirits entering, evil spirits entering the house, and so on. So the friend, surprised, asked Niels Bohr, “Wait a minute! I thought you were a scientist. Are you superstitious? Do you really believe in it?” You know what Niels Bohr—I hope you do—answered? He answered, “I’m not an idiot. Of course I don’t believe in it. But I have it there because I was told that it functions even if you don’t believe in it.” **(laughter)** That’s ideology today. We don’t have to believe in democracy—you can make fun of it all, it functions. The truth is out there, in the rituals, not in private jokes you tell yourself about Bush and so on.

Okay, so what the conclusion from this is that again, just one of the conclusions to provoke you a little bit, is at least against a certain strand of what I call decaffeinated multiculturalism, you know, like, “We just don’t understand each other. We just have to hear each others’ stories, to tell our side and then . . .” Or, as a beautiful multiculturalist proverb says it, “An enemy is someone whose story you have not heard.” You sound so deep, you know, you said something authentic if you say it. Is it? Let me make a simple mental experiment. Would you still agree with this if I just change it a little bit and say, “Hitler was our enemy because we haven’t really heard his story, and so on.” No. You see. This is an obscenity. This is a lie. Because Hitler had beautiful stories, I’m sure he had, telling to himself about himself. They all have them.

Like, don’t you remember, most of you are too young. I remember, unfortunately. When Svetlana Stalina, his daughter, in the mid-sixties, I think, or a little bit later. Escaped to

the West. She wrote her memoirs. It's absolutely clear. Stalin had a beautiful inner story, it was Beria, all those guys around who distorted Stalin's goodness. Unfortunately, fifteen years later, Beria's son wrote memories. "Beria good guy. Stalin forced him into evil." They all have good stories. But what if these stories are a lie? That's the first lesson.

The second lesson is that—let's go a step further—is that for psychoanalysis the truth of the subject, again, is not this inner life of a persona, it's a gap, a gap, a void, which the stories that we tell ourselves about ourselves precisely *mask* and this gap is real gap. That is to say, it's not—I'm not here playing spiritualist games. It's not: "Oh, there is some mystery which we cannot approach." There is a gap, a cut. What I mean by this? Let me return briefly to a film about concentration camps, *Schindler's List*. I don't like the film. Why not? Among other things, Spielberg unfortunately couldn't—this is, I think, the lowest point of the film—Spielberg couldn't resist the temptation to directly stage the moment of Schindler's ethical transformation from a cold manipulator with the Jewish misfortunate to a subject overwhelmed by the responsibility for the Jews. You remember, it's the scene when, on the small hill above the Krakow Ghetto, on a horse, on a morning ride, Schindler observes down there the S.S. units entering the ghetto, and the famous scene, the girl in the red dress, blah, blah, and you say, "Ah! Now he became human." I think this is a blasphemy, an obscenity.

The same obscenity as an even worse case. Did you see the movie with Ed Harris, *Pollock*? They also couldn't resist to depict the moment of the invention of this Action

Painting. Do you remember how? It was exactly—I had this nightmare when I heard about the film **(laughter)**—my God, will they do it? They did it. Totally drunk, you remember, Pollock spills over a bottle with colors. The bottle spill—oh my God, that's it. I invent that. **(laughter)** Action Painting. This exactly is what is prohibited to do.

Psychoanalytic causality—now my next thesis—this is a big lesson from Freud. It's not a kind of a complete causality. It's not that we thought we are free but psychoanalysis establishes the full line of causality. No. The proper psychoanalytic causality, I claim, is a much more paradoxical retroactive causality. Traumas determine us. But we retroactively establish them as traumas. The clearest case—you must all know it—what for many people is Freud's most beautiful case of analysis that he reported—Wolfman. We all know Wolfman—*coitus a tergo*, that was the trauma. But yes and no. Read Freud's report closely. When the small child, if he did, saw paternal *coitus a tergo*, this wasn't a trauma. He just registered it, not knowing what to do with it. It was later, around five, six years, when children develop—or four, five—when children develop their so-called theories about infant sexuality. It was later that this trauma was—not trauma—this *memory* was resuscitated, elevated at the level of *trauma*, because it allowed the poor child to conceptualize what is sexuality, the trauma of sexuality.

So again, there is a kind of *convoluted* causality—when there is a gap to fill in the gap you must also go backwards. In other words, the psychoanalytic causality, I claim, is best rendered by what Borges wrote about Kafka, a very nice thing, namely that with other, ordinary writers we can always establish who are their precursors. Okay, you were

influenced by this, that guy and so on. But, he claims, with Kafka, and of course other truly great writers. Truly great writers, they *create* their precursors. That is to say, of course we can say Kafka was influenced by—whatever you want, William Blake, Edgar Allan Poe, Dostoevsky. It is true but in order to see this, in order to perceive this proto-Kafkaesque dimension in Poe, Dostoevsky, and so on, Kafka already has to be here.

And I am not saying—I don't have time to go into, to involve me in a long debate with the interpretation of Walter Benjamin, why this doesn't simply mean that we project things backwards—it's more complex. What I'm saying is that we are dealing here with something similar with *Billy Bathgate*. My God, I hope Doctorow is not here he would kill me, what I will say now. **(laughter)** Why? I will tell you my experience. I first saw the film. You remember—Nicole Kidman, Dustin Hoffmann, and so on. I didn't like the film, **(laughter)** but I was able to detect, “My God, this must be a good novel.” You know, like the failure, obviously film fails with reference to some much better novel. You can see, you know like even when you see a very bad version of *Hamlet*, you can still feel how great it was. **(laughter)** So I thought this is true, so I went and read the novel. To cut a long story short, it's even worse. **(laughter)** So you see what happened—we have a bad novel, a bad film, but in the repetition, passage from one to the other, a third element emerges, this specter of the real novel, what it should have been. **(laughter)** And I think that this “X,” what it should have been, which exists nowhere, it's purely virtual, but it's the hard core because it's that impossible point around which they all circulate. This is what Lacan calls as the object cause of desire. It's not any kind of absolute totality. It's

what Lacan—it's the way Lacan reads the Freudian notion of partial object—what does it mean?

Let me give you another nice example, from a book that I didn't read—it's too long—with long books like this I read only the scientific editions—called “Cliff Notes,” I think in this country. It's Proust's *Recherche*, of course. **(laughter)** You remember how—I don't, so you should remember—how somewhere in the middle Marcel, the hero, stand-in for Proust, uses phone for the first time, speaking to his grandmother. Now comes the nice effect. Her voice, her alone, apart from her body, surprises him. It is the voice of a frail old woman. Not the voice of the grandmother he remembers, just a vulgar, petty old lady. Now, the nice point is that this experience colors Marcel's entire perception of the grandmother when, later, he visits her in person. This awareness, as it were, spoils her entire experience. She, all of a sudden, appears to him no longer the wonderful old charming lady she was, but just a petty, nasty, senile old woman. This is, I think, how, as Freudians, we should read personality. It's not all the whole person. No. You should isolate an object. This object then should throw the light on totality in order to see it the way it is. This object, again, is what is the object cause of desire.

Now, let's go further. It is not only this causality, which is retroactive. We should complicate things even further here. The first complication of these gaps and so on, is that for Lacan, symbolic order, and it's clear also with Freud, which is why we have all this complication, this, as it would nicely put, poetic dimension of the *Interpretation of Dreams*. It is precisely because of the inconsistency of the symbolic order. What does this

mean? A very simple observation. Every order—legal order or even order of explicit normativity—is never simply a flat order. Isn't it your basic experience that it has to rely on a complex network of informal rules, which tell us how are we to relate to explicit rules, how are we to apply them? To what extent are we to take them literally? How and when we are allowed, solicited even, to *disregard* them?

Isn't it that for example, we can approach it from both directions—(a) when you hear a prohibition, “You shouldn't do this.” Of course the first question to ask in real social life is how do you really mean it? Is it, as it is often with sexual prohibitions, a hidden solicitation to do it? So that the true message is, “Do it, but do it discreetly.” And sometimes it can be that if simply don't do it, then the very same agency of symbolic authority, father, teacher, laughs at you. “Oh, you idiot, didn't you get the point?” and so on? So this is one paradox. It's a prohibition but to be really in, you have to know the meta-rule, how the rule is to be taken. A much more interesting fact for me, especially politically—you will obviously immediately get why—is the opposite paradox. Not, it's prohibited but the meta-rule tells you do it, discreetly, but do it. It's where you are guaranteed, given, some freedom, freedom of choice, on condition that you don't use it. There is a common series of rights which, you are given them but don't do it, unconditionally. And you see my point. My point is that isn't it the problem of all those—okay, today nobody has manners, so we no longer do it—decades ago, there were, I think, there were all these schools for young lower-class girls, boys to teach you the high society manners. They usually miserably failed. Why? Because they taught you only the rules, they did not teach you the meta-rules, how to relate to these rules. And the

worst way to be an idiot is not to break the rules but just to stupidly follow the rules. You belong to a field, social, when you know how to violate its rules.

But our life is full of these paradoxes. For example, recently a friend from Japan told me that there, their workers have the right to a forty-days holiday every year. However, he told me, “You are not supposed to really use it. You use maximum twenty days.” Then I asked him, “Okay, why don’t you put it then twenty days?” He told me then I am a complete idiot, I don’t understand it. **(laughter)** And he was totally right, for are we not doing same things? For example—my old example that I use in some of my books. Let’s say when, I don’t know, in Europe, we have this ritual. I compete with my best friend for a job. He wins. It’s a ritual that then he tells me, “Listen, I know you deserved it more. I will step down and then you have the job.” But, he says this but, of course, it’s expected that I will say, “No thanks, you can have it.” **(laughter)** But you see the point. The point is that it may appear that nobody gained, it was meaningless conversation. It *was* gained: social link, friendship.

A more beautiful example which really happened to me, this summer, with my friend/enemy, theoretical enemy, personally good friend—it’s a miracle how we survive as friends, but we do—Judith Butler. We were in Switzerland and you know I have very bad taste. I am full of bad remarks, bad jokes, vulgar designations, and so on. So I couldn’t resist it, or to put it your beloved preacher, who is the one who is now, that Haggard or whatnot, “I have a dark side of myself and I am fighting it all the time,” and so on. **(laughter)** Okay. I couldn’t resist it, I used terms to her, “a degenerate freak,” and

so on, not very nice. Okay. I got it immediately afterwards. I was vulgar, I made a mistake. So, a little bit afterwards I called her on phone and said, sincerely, apology, “sorry, blah blah,” and then, very nice of her, she—what she told me was, “Thanks. I appreciate it. But really, I wasn’t offended. I knew you didn’t mean it. So you really owe me no apology.” It was very nice. She meant it. But my point here is you got the paradox of this exchange. She told me, absolutely sincerely, “You really owe me no apology,” but for this I had to offer her the apology. If I were not to say it, she would have full right to be mad at me. **(laughter)** This is the inconsistency of communication, and so on and so on.

This means that—let us step a level further, what Lacan calls the “order of the big other” is the order of appearances, and I think in contrast to the vulgar reading of Freud, “Appearances are just appearances, there is brutal reality of drives, we just want this and that.” No. Appearances absolutely matter. In a way we *are* our appearances. We may have some rituals which appear to us as just appearances, but you take them away from us, everything collapses. This is the mystery of psychoanalytic image of person. I think that what psychoanalysis is teaching us, it’s not this vulgar idea, “You know, on the cover we are human, but in the depth, we are barbarian, we want to, I don’t know, kill father, mother,” whatever you want. No. The lesson of psychoanalysis at its purest is for me the following one.

Of course I hope you saw Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and *Vertigo*. Do you remember that scene about forty-five minutes, I think, into *Vertigo* after Madeline’s fake suicide into the San

Francisco Golden Gate Bridge Bay he takes her home to his home, undresses her, puts her in his bed. Then you have a long panning shot. First him, at the table of his living room, and then the camera moves slowly across his kitchen sink, where we see her underwear drying, ah? And then the camera moves further to the doors of the room where she is. Everything seems absolutely clear. But—it's not. Put it on freeze on DVD, on your video, you will discover something quite nice and very shocking. There is no underwear there. All the pieces of cloth there are simple, towels and so on, definitely not underwear. Why? Check it up in a book. In a book on Hitchcock or on *Vertigo*. Hays Code guys—these were the last years of Hays Code in Hollywood—protested. They said if there is real underwear there this would have been an unambiguous proof that Scotty—James Stewart—saw her, Madeline, naked. We cannot allow it, so don't put it there. Now what's so mysterious about it? It is whom—ask yourself a stupid question—whom was the censorship trying to protect? Not us—all we, the viewers, automatically assume that we see underwear there. **(laughter)** So it's not us. It is as if we have to suppose—presuppose, although we know it doesn't exist, blah blah, some *innocent* view. Let's call it in Lacanian terms, the subject supposed not to know. Somebody's gaze, totally fictional, must be protected. We can do horrible things—there must be a gaze which doesn't know it.

Now let me give you from my beloved Stalinism a more crazy example. But of exactly—I love this one—of *exactly* the same logic, believe me or not. It is in '53, Stalin died. Then the first volume of *Soviet Encyclopedia*, big encyclopedia, I don't know which edition, was published. The second man behind Stalin was at that point Beria, the chief of

secret police, and so on. Then there were two pages, one leaf on Beria, in the encyclopedia, so that at the end, as in encyclopedia, there was a little bit of the previous entry, then Beria, Beria, and a little bit, okay. Then, as we all know from our beloved Stalinism, strange things happened. Like three months later, I think in June/July, Beria was discovered to be an English spy, was arrested, and shot, no? So what did then the authorities do? Something marvelous, I claim, it's so unbelievable you wouldn't believe it. It's—they, each subscriber to encyclopedia, got by post a new two pages, with a faked new entry. It fitted, and he was ordered to cut out the previous page and put this new page in, so that the perfect continuity was established. Instead of Beria, that's, you know what they put it in—Bering Pass, it fitted between, you know, Alaska and Siberia. Now, you see the madness. The same question as with regard to *Vertigo*. Whom were they trying to protect? Not the people. Everybody knew they had to do it. And this is for me one of the mysteries of Stalinism. The most brutal regime, but it's so terribly dependent of appearances. For this presupposed, imagined gaze, the appearances of seamless continuity had to be sustained.

(first notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony)

Okay, Comrade Stalin is giving me a warning. Don't mess with it. Okay. But then, I would be tempted to say, that as my contribution to the struggle against metaphysical, phallogocentric, linear notion of time, I should go on, but I will not. **(laughter)** Okay, no, what I wanted to finish with is to give you—is to go further into how this Freudian edifice relates to our most common experience, that is to say, how ideology functions

today. How we do not have to believe directly, how ideology today functions through all these wonderful mechanisms of transposed belief of how—

My point is the following one: Even if all those old-fashioned mechanisms of symptoms, neurotic repression, and so on, are no longer operative, it is today that we confront the fundamental deadlock that Freud was describing in an even more *radical* way, the deadlock of this as Paul Watzlawick put in his book, the pursuit of unhappiness. And there Dalai Lama doesn't work. As you probably know, Dalai Lama begins all his books with "all living beings strive for an end of suffering, for happiness." My God, humans don't strive, don't strive for that. So, my point is that the paradox of today is the *opposite* of the traditional scene described by Freud. There, you get oppressions but, secretly, you want to violate them. Today, you are on the surface, permissive, orgies, whatever, you can do whatever you want, but your superego sabotages you, and that's the true mystery. The true mystery that psychoanalysis confronts—it's not, "I want to enjoy but an authority prohibits it to me." No. It's, "I am ordered to enjoy, but I fail, it renders me even more vulnerable." Which is why, it is only today, with the deadlocks of so-called permissive society, that we confront what Freud was aiming at in his notion of drive. Now, I wait for that one but I hate it. I have only one comradely criticism for you. Why this stupid Fifth Symphony? Anything but not Fifth Symphony, my God. Anything.

(first notes of Fifth Symphony)

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: We have fifteen minutes of Q and A before the Fifth Symphony comes on again. We have mikes on each side. We ask you to stand and take the mike.

Q: I'm not an expert on this, but I believe that it's been argued that the Job poet did not actually write the text of Job's comforters, that that's a later insertion by priestly authorities, and that actually the original—normative Jewish authorities, you know, who included the book in the canon. And that the original Job poem is actually much starker. There actually is no—there is no comforters' speeches in Job. And I don't know if this is true or not and I don't say it in order to critique your interpretation, because obviously it doesn't matter whether the Job poet had those there or not, because since they're there, we have to interpret them, but I'm just wondering in light of that possible fact, how does that alter your view of the Job poem?

SLAVOJ ZIZEK: I will be accused of being this typical, slicky, you cannot never undermine him with facts, psychoanalyst but I would say it spontaneously—I hope it's like you said, it's even better. Why? Because the fundamental lesson of Freudian interpretation of dreams is dead. These later falsifications are usually more important than the original dream. Which is why Freud is always interested in retelling. For Freud if anything you learn, the least important is the original true version of the dream, whatever. On the other hand, I think that of course, probably this is true, but from what I know, it depends on where you put things, because, for example, what then to do with the

beginning of the Book of Job, that famous part, the scene you can imagine God and Devil after dinner, coffee's served, and they are bored, and say, "What about that sack of dust who believes in you?" this pact.

I think that that—okay, now my God, I will appear as a kind of conservative Judeo-Christian critic but that I think it's probably also part of some earlier tragedy, and I think if those Jewish bureaucrats and so on or whatever inserted these, well, all the better for them, because I think this often happens, that it's only the secondary falsification, if you want, which brings out some effect. As I described in my *Tripology* book, polemics with my beloved Judith Butler and my not-so-beloved Ernesto Laclau, there for example, take Derrida. I give that as a wry, funny example. It is absolutely clear that if you want to adopt a purely scholarly attitude, Jacques Derrida in his first reception in the United States was misread, it's a simplified version, blah, blah, but two things are nonetheless absolutely clear. (a) That at a certain point—no sorry. First, this misreading was extremely productive. Productive in the sense that all this late political, theological political turn, political engagement of Derrida, was generated as his response to this misreading, so that my second point, although it was a misreading, at a certain point it's clear that Derrida got caught into his own—into the misreading of his work. It's simply that it was a misreading, but the misreading was better than the original. **(laughter)** Why shouldn't it be? So you see, now, let me very clear, I'm not making this boring, how do you call it—let me be go a little bit more here, longer. You provoked me. You are like Jim Haggard, you are the dark side of myself, I cannot resist it. **(laughter)**

I don't buy this postmodern shit of "there is no big story, there are only," I am not saying this. I still cling to the notions of truth, and so on. All I am saying is that when you have a certain story, that this will be maybe the paradigm of Freudian storytelling, that you have a story, but then, in the gaps of the existing story, there is always another story, and that truth is where these two stories intercut. Let me give you what I found wonderful examples. And this is why—although everybody talks about Hitchcock, it's already boring—Hitchcock should be read.

Let's take again—I mentioned them before, two absolute masterpieces, *Vertigo*, *Psycho*. Are you aware that with both films you can make a wonderful experiment, and I made them in real, thorough digital manipulations you can do it. Namely, let's take *Vertigo*. Imagine the same film that we all know, just it ends up after apparent—we learned afterwards—Madeline's suicide, desperate Scotty in the mental institution. Hop, the end. It's a totally consistent, wonderful story about—it can even be given a feminist twist—the violence of male possessive love, which destroys, pushes to death, the very object of love, how male love is mortifying and so on and so on. It works. The genius of Hitchcock is to conclude this story and, as it were, when you think it's over, you get a totally different, different in the sense—not simply the repressed of this story, but totally eccentric. Even more in *Psycho*, where I made the experiment. Imagine exactly the same film, which ends after I think about fifty minutes, when the shower scene, just before the murder. You see Marion looking into the shower, the water falling on her. Stop. Credits. A totally consistent story, a kind of O. Henry morality play, of a young girl, pushed into a crime because she wants to be—because of her desperate situation, she wants to be with

her lover, and so on. Then she stumbles upon Norman and as it were sees in him her future. It's kind of a warning light. "If I go along this way, I will end like him," this sobers her up, she goes back to her room, writes the paper, \$40,000 minus, signaling the intention next day she will go back, and take a shower, which symbolic meaning now I want to be clear, the end.

I did this. Through some digital manipulation I constructed such a film. I found an idiot, it is difficult to find, who is relatively educated but didn't know *Psycho*, and he was totally convinced, what a nice film. **(laughter)** But you know what I mean. It's a little bit like Job. Then the genius of Hitchcock is that first you are told the story but then some totally heterogeneous dimension intervenes, and this is, I think, Freud's proper approach to dreams. So, again, for me, if something comes later as a secondary, no it's exactly like the way I pointed out to you that Freud interpreted dreams. Let us say the original version of Job would be the latent thought and these falsifications are like—but it is in these falsifications themselves that the truly subversive message inscribes itself. Sorry, I was too long, but you know why, so that not too many idiots will ask me questions. **(groans and laughter from audience)** Thank you. Ah, that's life, that's life, life is cruel, sorry.

Q: I was wondering about—I don't know if you work clinically, but I was wondering about clinical—

SLAVOJ ZIZEK: Isn't it obvious? You saw me here. If you were to have trouble, would you go to analysis with me? **(laughter)** That concludes the debate, sorry, I mean this one, sorry, please go on.

Q: I was wondering what the clinical application of your ideas would be. If it would be to enjoy misery, to enjoy unhappiness?

SLAVOJ ZIZEK: No, quite on the contrary. I think that the true message of psychoanalysis, you put it in very nice way. Why? Because the true paradox of psychoanalysis is not, "Oooh, we never get enjoyment and so on," but we get enjoyment even when we think that we are rid of it. I think that not only would I not preach, "Enjoy your misery," but the first lesson of a true psychoanalyst, when he sees somebody, he sees somebody suffering, is precisely to ask, "What profit do you get from that suffering?"

Which is why to make a wild jump, in contrast to all of my liberal friends, I think that *Fight Club* is a progressive film. You have first to beat yourself to get rid—for me, that self-beating in *Fight Club* is a way of—the message for me is get—the first, in order to fight the oppressive system, you first have to fight out of you that perverse, whatever, libidinal satisfaction by means of which the system has a hold on you, how should I put it?

No, so it's again on the contrary, for example approaching fascism, Nazism, it's not sacrifice, they are oppressive. No, isn't it clear if you look at Hitler, he's not oppression, he's full of perverse pleasures. Although Hitler's official message is, "Enough of the Weimar decadence, suffer, sacrifice yourself," but the message between the lines is a kind of obscene pleasure in this sacrifice. This—unfortunately, I cannot go into it, but this would bring me to a further topic, namely my deep distrust—if there is a lesson, another lesson of Freud for today, it is this one, I think. My big distrust of what unfortunately some leftists, even Tony Negri, like. This idea of carnival, you know, this liberating moment. Carnival, rules are suspended, those who were kings are now, are now, are now down, everything is permitted and so on and so on. Uh, uh, uh, it's much more complex. In the sense that isn't it that carnivals as a rule function, they are not only *tolerated* by power, they play a crucial structural role in it.

For example, we all know the theory of carnival was elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian fellow traveler or formalist in his book written in the thirties, the creativity of François Rabelais. A Russian friend, Boris Groys, told me that from recently discovered papers, notebooks, of Bakhtin it is clear, no, Bakhtin wasn't an idiot. What was his true topic, which was the big carnival he was really writing about? Stalinist purges—that was the true carnival. And that's another horrible message of psychoanalysis, if you want. That—how should I put it?—to be very brutal and radical.

I don't think it's a chance that all relatively good—there are no really good films about Holocaust—are comedies. What do I mean by this? I think that if we were to see a film

which would depict Holocaust as a, you know, heroic tragedy, the Jews humiliated, **(inaudible)**, this would be an obscenity, it would give the Nazis way too much credit. I claim that tragedy has—there are two problems with the notion of tragedy. (a) Tragedy's always the tragedy of the character. Somehow, the whole point of the tragedy is that—the tragic insight is that in the external catastrophe that falls on you, you have to heroically discover the unwanted result of your own inner flaw or whatever, tragic flaw. So that's the first point why the Holocaust is not a tragedy, to read Holocaust as a tragedy means that the Jew, in some kind of a tragic insight, would have to take into account how they are getting their own payment and so on and so on.

Second problem with tragedy is that to be a subject of tragedy, you have to retain a minimum of dignity. You know what I mean. When you are utterly humiliated, it's no longer a tragedy. It can only be—the ultimate horror has the form of comedy, I claim. Remember, again, Primo Levi, he describes wonderfully, okay, wonderfully in a terrifying way, that procedure of what in camps was called selektion, selection, every two months all the inmates were obliged to run for two three seconds, each of them, in front of an SS doctor, who put them, “You know, are you too ill? Here you go. You burn. Or are you allowed to stay a little bit more alive?” And the way he describes it, I claim, is an obscene comedy. It's, you know, how they were pinching their lips to be more red, they—the point was how to appear for two seconds there, healthy enough—it is a comedy. And I think this, if anything, makes it even more terrifying.

So again, back to you, so I don't get lost in this. No, no, I definitely, how should I put it? It's not precisely, the point is not precisely, not to—how do I put it? The greatest hermeneutic ability of psychoanalysis is precisely to detect what you indicated, that is to say, to detect the—this is even what Lacan calls “le plus de joie,” surplus enjoyment. It is basically enjoyment that you get in your misery itself.

And so I think, again, I think that that danger, that if anything—that danger of enjoying your misery, I claim, is much more present in the way the so-called New Age wisdom functions. For example, in my own miserable country, the president of the Republic, who now turned into a New Age madman, answers in some weekly journal to readers' questions, no? And one old woman asks him, “How can I survive? I have a small pension. I cannot eat meat. And I would so much like to travel, but I cannot travel.” No? And he answered her, “Be happy. You can be vegetarian. Oh, be glad that you are rid of meat,” and then he said, “My God, but be happy that you cannot travel. Don't travel outside. Make an inner journey. Everything you are looking for is in you.” That is ideology at its most vulgar, I claim. So, again, for that danger that you rightly located, to enjoy—how should I put it?—to enjoy your misery, I still maybe naively think, that if anyone, it's only psychoanalysts that can truly warn us about it.

There are two, you can make the decision—but I like it that left is winning. **(laughter)**

Q: That brings me to the question. We started earlier with Freud's view of America. What do you think Freud's view of the social, political life of Slovenia might be?

SLAVOJ ZIZEK: It's—okay, my God, I don't want to—I hate you all, why? Because you are asking a little bit too good questions and then I will have to go on for long time. Very briefly. I think, that, do you know that in my books I mention that Freud does have a couple of very interesting references to Slovenia. He traveled through it a couple of times because Slovenia is south of Austria, no? And they are all wonderful, like, one reference to a certain patient of his Italian colleague in Trieste, Eduardo Weiss, who had a Slovene patient. And there, in Slovenia, Freud met this perversity that he couldn't imagine. Eduardo Weiss reports to Freud of two patients, one noble Italian who was impotent, but a nobleman, and a Slovene guy who was impotent. But there was differences—the idea is that this Italian, noble guy, was simply too dignified, felt guilty for marrying again, so one just have to you know, his honest depth to the ex-wife prevented him from— but then, the Slovene guy, the problem for Freud is that he was *not* repressed, he was *totally* corrupted, so corrupted that he was still, even stealing from his own father in what way? Freud discovered through Eduardo Weiss that this guy was still being horrible, doing things, so that his father forced him to go into analysis, and then his son was telling his father higher sum than true, the true sum of how much he has to pay to the analyst, so he was even doing that, and then Freud says something wonderful, he says, I have a quote, “These Slovenes, they are so corrupted that even our psychoanalytic art doesn't yet have the proper means to analyze them,” and so on, no? **(laughter)** But I claim Lacan did it, so we just need the Lacanian turn, and then Freud can do it.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You know, one quotation that came to mind for me when you were talking about enjoying one's pain, I'm not sure you're familiar with this line from Lessing, where he says that, "All passions, even unpleasant, are as passions, pleasant."

SLAVOJ ZIZEK: No, yes, yes, I know the long history of this. I know what—my only problem here is to distinguish—how should I put it?—where I am a true Freudian is that one should distinguish this kind of pleasure in pain from what, I think, would have been a proper ethical attitude, which would be to insist on your choice, even if it is—even if it is very painful. How should I put it? One thing is to say, "I insist on mine. I insist on it even if it is painful." The other thing, and this is for me where perversion begins, is to say, "Because it is painful, I insist on it," as if, you know, pain is the necessary cost or how should I put it, *sign* of authenticity. That's the temptation to resist. As I put it in my book *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, this is what I don't quite get it—with all my respect to Cuban Revolution, blah, blah—in Cuba. I was there, I went there a couple of years ago as totally a private citizen and by mistake on the street, I met some people who obviously were pro-regime, and they were showing me without any shame, openly, I mean, without trying to cover it up, all the decaying buildings, and then I got it that they are pointing out this to me as a proof that they were ready to pay the price for authenticity. Like, far from covering it up, no "socialism, life is nice," they said, "You see, this proves that we are authentic. We are ready to suffer for it." I claim—I don't accept this, this is why, jokingly in my book, I claim that because this loss, this, we call it castration, no wonder the nation's leader is called Fidel Castro, fidelity to castration and so on.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What a day it has been. We started in this afternoon with “Gluttony” with Mario Batali and Dan Barber and others, and then we seamlessly moved to “Lust” with two wonderful writers, Laura Kipnis and Esther Perel, and then we tried to go beyond “Lust” to Freud, who might cure us of those two diseases, and we had George Prochnik and Wayne Koestenbaum, and now it is my great, great pleasure to thank you very much, Slavoj Zizek.

(applause)

SLAVOJ ZIZEK: The three of us are only at the end, but before us there are also, as you put it nicely, minor figures like Freud, no, but we come at the end, no? I like how you establish the teleology.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I left you for the end. Thank you very much.

(applause)